Metaphor as an Act of Seeing: The Examination of “Inward Light” in the Works of Philip Sidney, Robert Hooke, Margaret Cavendish, John Milton, and Anne Finch

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METAPHOR AS AN ACT OF SEEING: THE EXAMINATION OF “INWARD LIGHT” IN
THE WORKS OF PHILIP SIDNEY, ROBERT HOOKE, MARGARET CAVERNISH,
JOHN MILTON, AND ANNE FINCH

by

YOOON NAM

Under the Direction of Malinda Snow, PhD

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines works of Philip Sidney (1554-1586), Robert Hooke (1635-
1703), John Milton (1608-1674), Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), and Anne Finch (1661-1720)
through the lens of two competing world views that were well-known to all of the subjects of my
study. The dissertation will begin with a discussion of these two different ways of perceiving and
representing truth—one informed by the poetic imagination and the other influenced by the
emerging new science of the seventeenth century. In his The Defence of Poesy, Sir Philip Sidney
advocates a poetic vision that possesses a unique spiritual and creative power to produce truths,
making the material world subordinate to the spiritual vision of the poet. In contrast, Robert
Hooke’s Micrographia (1665) insists upon the value of actual physical seeing, through the
microscope, and constructing models of the world based upon accumulated details of the tiniest
observable physical minutia. Though he wasn’t directly responding to Sidney’s works, Hooke’s
microscopic seeing disputes the autonomy of Sidney’s “inward light each mind hath in itself,” a source of poetic sight that Sidney considered sacred to the poetic imagination. Because my chief interest involves the topos of light and the representation of “inward light” articulated by Sidney in *The Defence of Poesy*, Sidney’s metaphysics and conception of the poetic imagination remain a constant, semi-theoretical foundation throughout my work as I examine the poetic works of Cavendish, Milton, and Finch. Although Cavendish, Milton, and Finch had different poetic goals among them, they are united in my study by their insistence that accumulating larger piles of minute sensory data does not get one closer to “truth.” Because of the modern reader’s location in history—given the grand success of the scientific narrative—such a position appears to border on irrationality, but much is to be gained by reading these poets’ works through the less familiar framework Sidney’s poetics provides.

**INDEX WORDS:** Ego-ocular-verbocentrism, Magnification, Mechanical philosophy, *Micrographia*, Microscope, Mimesis, Natural philosophy, Poetic imagination, Sapientia, Scientia, Sensory perception, Spiritual illumination, St. Augustine, Subvisibilia, Topos of Light
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Yoon Nam

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy
in the college of arts and sciences
Georgia State University
2015
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, my husband, and our cat, Reginald.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my Committee Chair, Dr. Malinda Snow, who worked tirelessly with me, reading my efforts and meeting with me almost every week while I completed this project. I came to look forward to those meetings avidly, and even when I found myself incapable of creating more than the barest few scribbles, her kindness and faith in me and my project inspired me to keep working. Above all, her profound knowledge and subtle wit illuminated my thoughts and led me to insights I wasn’t able to see by myself as she patiently corrected my errors and attempted to steer me forward. Any errors ahead are all my own, but would have been far more plentiful were it not for her careful shepherding. I also owe special thanks to Dr. Wayne Erickson, who has been a friend and mentor for many years and has always been remarkably consistent in his encouragement. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Paul Voss, the final member of my committee, for his insights and especially thoughtful guidance.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ v

1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................... 1

2 CHAPTER 2: How a Metaphor Can Create a Good Man: Sidney’s “Inward Light” and Poetic Representation ........................................................................................................ 17

3 CHAPTER 3: Cavendish’s “Subtle Observations” and Hooke’s “Neer” Observations .............................................................................................................................. 64

4 CHAPTER 4: Milton, St. Augustine, and Illuminated Sight in Paradise Lost.. 109
   4.1 Milton, Matter, and Materialism .................................................................................. 110
   4.2 Augustine’s Visual Metaphor and Spiritual Seeing ..................................................... 130
   4.3 Milton, Poetry, and Vision .......................................................................................... 145

5 CHAPTER 5: Inward Vision in Milton’s Samson Agonistes and Paradise Regained ................................................................................................................................. 180
   5.1 Seeing as Expansion, Seeing as Examination ............................................................. 187
   5.2 Seeing as Anticipating, Seeing as Believing .............................................................. 205
   5.3 Seeing as Reflection, Seeing as Protection ................................................................. 221
   5.4 Seeing as Telling, Seeing as Foresignifying ............................................................... 234

6 CHAPTER 6: “No Fierce Light Disturbs, Whilst It Reveals”: Illuminating Darkness in the Poetry of Finch ........................................................................................................... 243
   6.1 Poetry’s Promise of Mutability and Finch’s Use of Mutability ............................... 250
   6.2 Female Subjectivity and the Lack of Light ............................................................... 268
1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The only way which now remains for us to recover some degree of those former perfections, seems to be, by rectifying the operations of the Sense, the Memory, and Reason, since upon the evidence, the Strength, the integrity, and the right correspondence of all these, all the light, by which our actions are to be guided, is to be renewed, and all our command over things is to be establisht.¹

Nay, truly, learned men have learnedly thought that where once reason hath so much over-mastered passion as that the mind hath a free desire to do well, the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher’s book.²

So much the rather thou celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.³

The use of the topos of light in these epigraphs suggests the pervasiveness of physical light in discussions of both human sensory perception and the intellectual processing of those sensory perceptions. In this dissertation I am going to discuss the works of John Milton (1608-1674), Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), and Anne Finch (1661-1720) through the lens of two competing ways of supplying meaning to the diverse array of physical experiences and impressions each human encounters on a daily basis, two competing world views, furthermore, that were widely discussed and well-known to all of the subjects of my study. The dissertation will begin with a discussion of these two different ways of perceiving and representing truth—one informed by the poetic imagination and the other influenced by the emerging new science of

¹ Robert Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses with Observations and Inquiries thereupon, sig. A1r. This edition is a facsimile reproduction of the first edition published by the Royal Society in 1665.
² Sir Philip Sidney, The Defence of Poesie, printed for William Ponsonby, 1595, sig. E4r. For this dissertation I am going to refer to the electronic version available online and regularizing to the modern spelling of “Poesy.”
³ John Milton, Book III, Paradise Lost, lines 51-55.
the time. I have chosen two figures upon which to base my analysis of these two opposing modes of seeing, and although not strictly contemporaneous, both were public figures whose works were widely discussed and who perfectly represent the contrasting poles of my study. Especially with his sophisticated metaphysics in his *The Defence of Poesy*, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) advocated a role for a poetic vision that possessed a unique spiritual and creative power to produce truths, making the mere material world subordinate to the spiritual vision of the poet. Robert Hooke (1635-1703), on the other hand, wrote beautifully about the value of actual physical seeing, through the microscope, and constructing models of the world based upon the tiniest observable physical minutia and building up. Thus, though he wasn’t directly responding to Sidney’s works, Hooke’s microscopic seeing seeks to undermine the autonomy of Sidney’s “inward light each mind hath in itself,” which Sidney—and, as I will show, the other authors in my study—considered sacred to the poetic imagination.⁴ Because my chief interest involves the representation of “inward light” in the poetic works of three poets, Cavendish, Milton, and Finch, Sidney’s metaphysics and conception of the poetic imagination will remain as a sort of foundation throughout my work. Although Cavendish, Milton, and Finch certainly had different poetic goals among them, they are clearly united in my study by their dogged insistence that accumulating larger and larger piles of minute sensory data does not get one closer to “truth.” Because of the modern reader’s location in history—given the grand success of the scientific narrative—such a position appears to more than border on irrationality, but I hope to show that much is to be gained by reading these poets’ works through the less familiar framework Sidney’s poetics provides.

The chapters will proceed in roughly chronological order. Sidney, as I describe above central to my study, will occupy chapter one, and it was my fascination with his belief in an “inward light” that inspired my examination of this idea in the poets in the next few generations that followed him. My second chapter, on Cavendish, will present an especially pivotal aspect of my analysis, for Cavendish was a natural philosopher who avidly read and responded to Hooke’s works. Therefore, she represents an important figure who fought against the materialist impetus of the new scientific method. The contrast between Cavendish and Hooke, as I will show, pits two ways of seeing and knowing the world against one another—one that believed the contemplative mind could uncover legitimate and large truths from very limited or even singular sensory impressions, and the other that sought truth through careful observation, hypotheses, and testing. Chapters three and four will examine Milton’s great works, which, I hope the reader will agree, proved particularly fertile ground for an examination of inward vision and spiritual sight. Finally, I will examine the works of Anne Finch, in which darkness—forcing the observer to rely on inward vision and intuition—plays a special role, thus making her a fitting subject for the conclusion of my project.

Since Aristotle’s conviction that the celestial region was more perfect than the terrestrial region, including any living things in it, the material distance between such conceptualized values as low and high or small and great represented both material and immaterial distance and hierarchy. The physical nearness to the greatness signified not only metaphorical relationship but also the metonymical relationship of significance and size. This hierarchy between the small and

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5 In the ancient poetic tradition the size and greatness are proportional, and this tradition remains true and influential; Aeneas, a legendary hero, appears in an epic—the bigger than life, longer poem containing poetic verse—written by the poet whose name embodies the metonymy of poetic genius. In contrast to epic poems, eclogues are indeed shorter and contain dialogues. Despite their depiction of pastoral idleness typical of bucolic lifestyle, especially to an urban audience, eclogues subtly assume greater complexity and philosophical insight prefiguring the bard’s—and the poet himself—potential to rise up the scale, moving away from his humble state to the lofty state of
great inevitably reinforced the inverse relationship between celestial greatness and corporeal proximity to it—the great must maintain its proportion of epic significance as well as the physical distance from the small and mundane. Yet such an inverse relationship merely reflects the perspective from the seat of celestial greatness.\(^6\) The descendant order from great to trivial must maintain the inverse relationship between the material distance and conceptual significance. For those living things in the terrestrial region, the hierarchy anticipated the necessity of the congruous relationship between proximity and greatness—the smaller the distance they have from the celestial world, the greater they might be. From the living things’ perspective, perfection diminishes as things are farther removed from God, and any significant conceptual or physical movement should project and aim for the greatness, should embody the ascending movement from the small to great. On the other hand, the farther the celestial body was distanced from the earth, the more perfect it was; especially under the influence of Neoplatonists, the degree of perfection was “directly proportional to its proximity to the first heaven.”\(^7\)

The topos of size and significance had a long tradition in poetic endeavors that sought to transform and elevate the material smallness of a text into literary greatness, as in the epic style and proportion accomplished in Virgil’s *Aeneid* or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.\(^8\) In these amplified representations of greatness, Lara Dodds points out, the world other than our own becomes visible and magnified. Published in 1665, Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia* reveals “a new visible

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\(^6\) There must be imaginable but intangible distance between the mundane, corporeal life of the everyday reader and the range of those great heroes and epic poets. This is indeed the anxiety of the Author speaking.


\(^8\) Lara Dodds, “‘Great Things to Small May Be Compared’: Rhetorical Microscopy in Paradise Lost,” *Milton Studies* 47 (2008), 96-117.
world discovered to the understanding” and magnifies the world previously too small to be visible to our natural eyes.⁹ Though these poetic and scientific endeavors both aim to signify greatness, the subject matter of Hooke’s *Micrographia* is mostly smaller than the printed letters in the book—the objects observed through his microscope are much smaller than the conventional small things of his time, and what the microscopic view revealed was invisible to the naked eye. Hooke’s magnification of minute, trifling things such as a mite or linen cloth signifies an “apparent reversal of [epic] topos,” argues Dodds; in Hooke’s text, small things are magnified to show God’s great design, and “this recalibration of the reader’s perception of size and significance” shows “the aim of directing attention from the artificial to the natural.”¹⁰ By zooming in onto the minute things of the terrestrial world, Hooke tries to remove our fixation on the sizeable world and direct our focus back to the “natural,” restoring “the material basis of a reformed natural philosophy.”¹¹ Visual images play a natural role in organizing and creating knowledge about the natural world, but the images anticipate the content and scope that need to be interpreted and defined according to the existing scale of size and significance. The “reversal of topos” might change the position or place of the values, but it doesn’t change the common values.

In addition, the reversal of the hierarchical values and “recalibration of the reader’s perception of size and significance” cannot occur without “a remarkable and unprecedented combination of text and illustration” in Hooke’s experiment. In fact, the combination of “the natural” and “the artificial”—the image of the thing from nature and the interpretation of the

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¹⁰ Dodds, “Great Things to Small May Be Compared,” 106.
¹¹ Dodds 106. The author references Catherine Wilson’s influential study on how the invention of microscope changed the philosophical and scientific understanding of the world. For more, see *The Invisible World: Early Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope* by Catherine Wilson.
image using the language of comparison—makes such reversal in his observation sensible to the readers. Simile is used as a rhetorical device to compare the size and define the significance; Milton tries to reconstruct the lost world of Paradise through the topos of greatness, comparing Paradise to things of celestial magnitude, while Hooke presents the hidden, invisible world inside the visible world through the mechanical device that accomplishes rhetorical magnification through visual magnification. Yet once discovered and seen, the small things also needed proper names, or even more specifically, names that magnified their constituent function and importance in the already conceptualized and materialized “shape” and size of our worldly realm.

The science of perspective and dimension had been established in both verbal and visual representation of the world; even the celestial world was somehow imagined and measured by the unit of small to great. As Wilson points out, “estimating size was still a problem, for the power of a lens could only be deduced from its magnification and could not be known independently.”¹² The microscopic discovery of a new, unseen world poses a linguistic urgency over describing what seems to be completely all shape but no size. Natural philosophy aimed to show how nature embodies its symbolic significance in God’s grand design by simply pointing back at nature and the picture of nature’s material exterior; Hooke attempts to magnify the complexity of small things by not only making them visible but also illuminating them with magnifying—epic—similes. In a less fragmented world, what nature shows is supposed to directly embody its significance. Nature’s symbolic interiority is obscured in a fragmented world, and it is materialized and articulated through the literary commonplace of size and significance. The microscope magnifies the material exterior of nature that is too small to see through natural

¹² Catherine Wilson, The Invisible World, 90-91.
eyes, but nature’s revealed interiority will remain all shape but no significance, if without a commonplace in the hierarchy of small and great. Without the symbolic interpretation, the image only does the appearing while it remains illegible and unintelligible. In other words, Hooke’s images had to be made into a text to be understood as the smallness that becomes the greatness. The dissonance between the visually magnified shape and the physically—and conceptually—insignificant size of a mite further affirmed the spatial and perceptual detachment of the microscopic view from the source of its new and exciting view of the new world. Hooke’s attempt to reverse the traditional ladder of size and greatness is compelling, but men now see the things that they cannot touch or feel. The advance in optical science undoubtedly induced the estrangement between the haptic and visual world.

Materializing the world of the minute reversed the traditional way of understanding the visible world. Often, the minute or invisible world too small to be perceived by human sight was articulated as felt—sensed or experienced, mostly through haptic sense—darkness or shapelessness. Yet with the microscope, what used to be unseen now becomes seen but untouchable. The microscopic world alienates the world of sight from touch as it disables one world by enabling the other. The enhanced sight became a prosthetic for the dissuaded touch. Microscopic observation yielded a spatial identity to the invisible world, yet this spatial understanding of the microscopic world began to subvert and complicate the conceptual understanding of the macroscopic world with new artificial measurements and units. Where or what is a context when the content is replaced by a shape or a form and becomes incoherent and alien to the observer? Fundamentally, units of measure have always been image-based as in hands, feet, and leagues—the discovery of the new visible world through microscope signified not only a readjustment of the set values of small and great from the images of the physical,
visible world, but it also challenged those whose definition of size and shape derived from the
platonic idea of immaterial significance; spiritual significance is both real and abstract,
influencing both the spatial and conceptual scale of comparison. The microscopic world
challenges the source of knowledge and complicates the Great Chain of Being. What becomes
macroscopic after the discovery of microscopic world? How would a religiously garrisoned and
upheld hierarchical structure like the Great chain of being adapt to or even calibrate the
microscopically small into its scale of being? One might argue that the microscope widened the
realm of human perception and inspired the far-reaching excavation into the borders of
subvisibilia; perhaps the discovery of more empirical derivations promised the prospect of
revealing empirical origins and visualizing the mechanics of physical world. One might also
argue that images of the microscopic world give beauty and significance to the world that used to
be understood as insignificant. However, it is the linguistic comparisons of the microscopic
image to the conceptual space that raises Hooke’s small things to the realm of the great. Without
the intensified state of human perception and spiritually inspired mental faculty participating, the
microscopic view of a mite is merely a shape or a form without content through a lens. If the
microscope evades the authenticity of a spiritually fortified mental perspicacity and the subtleties
observed and reproduced through such intensified faculties of human perception, the microscopic
world loses its coherence in the world outside of it, the world constructed and sustained by
human perception.

When the idea of seeing became instrumentalized and materialized by the introduction of
microscopic seeing, the new way of seeing began to polarize the theory of poetic space as both
abstract and material, reflecting nature but also mimicking and improving nature; microscopic
seeing antagonized the idea of immaterial space—nothing is too small or immaterial to see—and
eviscerated the purposeful abstraction and delay of turning observation into description. Poetic seeing, unlike microscopic seeing, doesn’t need artificial enhancement or manipulation of sensory perception to pair the material image with the immaterial meaning. Despite its consistent and material—linguistic—exterior, poetic representation changes its interior shape as it seeks the movement toward the realm of less corporeality, the realm of celestial perfection. Because it is not chained to one material shape, poetic imagination can imitate and enhance the original and do more than mere representation. Both poetry and science seek to represent the worldly to reveal the greater truth, yet the concept of “perfection” in poetry is fundamentally different from the one in the sciences; the concept of imitation in poetry collides with the concept of representation in sciences, the kind of representation that Hooke employs. The two representations are judged differently even though they equally anticipate similar epistemological and pedagogical goals of illuminating the truth. Representation in Hooke’s experiment reveals the particulars on sight that could either obfuscate the potential truth by focusing too much on the obvious matter revealed on sight or accurately reveal a physical articulation of truth that could lead the observer to a better understanding of the truth. The temporality of Hooke’s discovery matters so much to the scientific representation of truth that Hooke’s visual renderings of his objects show the exact stillness of the moment of observation that seems to be unaware of time. Poetic representation, as Sidney illuminates, promises nothing will remain the same and that there is no guarantee that imitation will generate mutation--in fact, he promises mutation more than anything else out of poetic imitation. Poetry is not about reproducing exact truth, but producing more truth by keeping its imagination alive—by keeping

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13 Sidney writes in The Defence of Poesy: “So then the best of the Historian, is subject to the Poet; for whatsoever action, or faction, whatsoever counsel, policy, or warre stratagem, the Historian is bound to recite, that may the Poet (if he lift) with his imitation make his own” (sig. E2v).
apart and far away from the domain of one, single Truth. Poetic imagination anticipates in heralding the distant truth put in abeyance; poetic imagination magnifies the oddities and disparities between the small and great, worldly and spiritual, or lowly to perfection, while scientific observation strives to reduce such distance. Through his microscopic view Hooke might seek to congeal the image of the minute and invisible world as a kind of topological evidence for and epistemological progression towards unreachable and immanent truth; meanwhile, poetic imagination always motions at the spiritual realm and moves further into the intangible and abstract by solidifying nothing—certainly, poetry promises uncertainty and change.

Imitation leads to magnification or reduction, and undoubtedly, mutation. The poet imitates both the experience being described but also a poetic genre that already exists. The properties of poetic imagination such as imitation, improvement, or mutation are both abstract and material, but its abstract quality always moves in ascending motion, affirming poetry’s affinity to spiritual significance and celestial perfection; poetic imagination is kinetic as it is able to develop and transform its worldly representation into spiritual significance. Magnification is impossible without mutating the worldly appearance of that specific magnified world. The small doesn’t and cannot immanently and immediately insist on its prospects and represent its greatness without the mediating intellectual measure that recognizes its spiritual significance; Sir Philip Sidney understands the necessity of that mediating intellectual measure when the knowledge is generated from any kind of physical representation, when the sensory perception leads to intellectual understanding:

The philosopher showeth you the way, he informeth you of the particularities, as well of the tediousness of the way, as of the pleasant lodging you shall have when
your journey is ended, as of the many by-turnings that may divert you from your way. But this is to no man but to him that will read him, and read him with attentive studious painfulness; which constant desire whosoever hath in him, hath already passed half the hardness of the way, and therefore is beholding to the philosopher but for the other half. Nay, truly, learned men have learnedly thought that where once reason hath so much over-mastered passion as that the mind hath a free desire to do well, the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher’s book.\textsuperscript{14}

Sidney’s argument for “the inward light,” which precedes before a motivation from “a philosopher’s book,” suggests that if one is trained in education and becomes cultured, he or she must be inspired by something inward, as they have shown “a free desire to do well.” No man but himself who would like to write poetry will be propelled to write his own book as “no man but to him that will read him, and read him with attentive studious painfulness”; the “constant desire whosoever hath in him” is indeed internal, an intimate and personal light that fuels its own desire and motivation to create. Magnification alone cannot ascend the small to the great. Hooke argues that if human sense perception cannot visualize the great extent to which divine truths are present in small and insignificant things, his optic device’s artificial resolution can assist our passive sensory vehicle and provide a more active and animate experience of accessing these truths that are hidden in nature. He claims that his book \textit{Micrographia} records such magnificent work of illuminating the great and spiritual in the worldly and low. As Dodds argues, such ascending movement implied in Hooke’s observation makes his experiment more than a mere physical magnification of the small world.

\textsuperscript{14} Sidney, \textit{The Defence of Poesy}, sig. E3v-E4r.
Perhaps then the ascending movement toward celestial perfection exemplifies the action of “learned men” who have trained themselves to look inwardly rather than outwardly to find the source of “inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher’s book.” One must be “learned” to look inwardly before projecting outwardly, to be able to transform small into great. Look inwardly, look beyond the spatial image of heart, look microscopically—the learned poet is supposed to be able to magnify the immaterial, invisible seed of passion and desire inside the body; in Sidney’s sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, the “inward light” helps Astrophil to magnify his “heart” that Stella provokes him to “look in.” The “inward light” reveals the shapeless world magnified by Cavendish in her poem “It is hard to believe, that there are other worlds in this world” where “not everything can shape” (line 8). The poet must locate and conceive an image or sight—whether material or abstract—to be imitated or magnified by his poetic imagination; and where do these images or sights come from? As Sidney explains above, it is the “learned men” who are able to imitate and magnify what is outside—tradition is external, like Astrophil measuring himself against Virgil, but Astrophil’s desire to ascend the poetic tradition and be as great as Virgil is internal and thus immeasurable. The “learned men” know the tradition before them and use the tradition as a measuring unit to give the spatial and spiritual significance to their own work. In his discussion of a Restoration physiology of reading, Adrian Jones points out the “fear of [reading’s] irreversible effects” in Restoration England (140). Jones explores the experience of reading and the emergence of an intimate involvement of reader with text and provides the writings of seventeenth-century scientists, philosophers, and moralists.

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16 Sidney writes in Sonnet 1 of *Astrophil and Stella*: “’Fool,’ said my muse to me, ‘look in thy heart and write’” (line 14).
17 Margaret Cavendish, “It is hard to believe, that there are other Worlds in this World,” *Poems, and fancies*, sig. G2r-G2v.
who predict the potential dangers of that intimate involvement. As with the increasing
development of natural philosophy and material science in the sixteenth and seventeenth century,
more things became microscopically and macroscopically visible; more things became sizeable
and comparable. More things became legible bodies. The discourse on the relationship between
the reader and the read became highly charged in late seventeenth-century England, as did a
variety of sciences relating to perception and the workings of mind. In this seventeenth-century
discourse, the cautionary tales of the moment when one confronts a false or erroneous body
warned about the “irreversible effects” of a bad impression of a bad text on human perception.
At the same time, the influence of a “great” literary tradition upon small individuals—whether
readers or writers—remained persistent. The learned poet knows the canonical work where he
finds the sizes and shapes to measure and compose his work, but “look[ing] in thy heart”
suggests an inward affair, a deliberate, intellectual movement towards a spiritual realm
antithetical to that of the learned. Sidney’s “inward light” in The Defence of Poesy suggests the
unmeasurable, immaterial fuel for greatness does neither exist nor come from the outside; the
passion and intelligence necessary for greatness resides in the learned men, and in Astrophil and
Stella Sidney urges himself--the learned man--should “look in [his] heart and write,” instead of
“Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain:/ Oft turning others’ leaves, to see if thence
would flow/ Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burn’d brain.”¹⁹

How does a form without context possess a coherent meaning? How does something all
shape but no size, comparison, or significance begin to convey any meaning otherwise seen and
articulated through self-animated human perception and mental acuity—“the inward light”—that
looks beyond the surface, as Hooke himself exhibited in his galvanizing effort to show what

¹⁹ Astrophil and Stella, Sonnet 1, line 14 and 6-8.
Micrographia can deliver beyond its pages? When Sidney suggests “look in thy heart” or argues for the power of “inward light,” Hooke might as well be proposing “look in thy microscope.” The “inward light” and the microscopic lens display a similar process of illumination; both give significance to the world they illuminate by making it sensible, making it available for others to experience, either through the lens of imagination or magnification. Yet the difference between Hooke’s microscopic observation and Sidney’s “inward light” lies in the origination of the light. Though immaterial and invisible, the inward light is the spiritual superlative that shines like the celestial light; there is not much shape or size similar or proximate enough to describe its significance. The microscope unveils the invisible world, providing more subtleties and complexities of our terrestrial world and even signifying the inconceivable greater design of god by human perception only, but the microscope still remains as an external source of illumination.

My dissertation aims to explore this commonplace of light consistently present and ubiquitous in literary representations of truth. Though there are various metaphoric representations of both the natural and artificial world to signify the spiritual authority of truth, which might both challenge and complement scientific endeavors in examining the world and understanding truth, light as a metaphor for truth champions in showing how poetic imagination most eloquently expresses the pervasive authority of truth that is being “true of its own accord.” Unlike the topos of size and significance, the topos of light remains unresponsive to the external institutions or recalibration of artificial values. One aspect of light that I will be examining in my dissertation will be its persistent association with “truth,” so much so that the

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20 Hans Blumenberg, “Light as a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation,” Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision, ed. David Michael Levin, 30-62. The article was originally published in 1957 in Studium General 10.7 and is a seminal read for the summary of philosophical ideas and discussions of representation of truth I am invested in and intend to develop further in the discussions of poetic representations of light as truth.
terms within my discussion might at times seem interchangeable. Yet I begin my observation exactly with that common and perhaps even banal familiarization of the ubiquitous and abstract authority of truth with one of the most present and insistent signs of physical life—light. The topos of light remains spatially and conceptually pervasive in the literary representation of truth. Most literary representations of light as truth materialize the spiritual authority and pervasiveness of truth in the form of illumination and transcendence or objects estranged and distant from the sun. Sidney’s remark on looking inside to find the “inward light” should also suggest that despite its omnipresent existence, truth requires a quality of inwardness—that truth is hard to see through the physical eye and too abstract to be measured in a dimension capable of enough going under the scrutiny of instruments like the microscope. Truth can be compared to the microscopic view of the world, but the microscopic view doesn’t show truth. Inward vision or “inward light,” then, suggests the spiritual authority preserved away from the corporeal reality, one that surpasses material temporality. Hooke’s goal is to turn the invisible, minute world into one sizeable and significant, and poetic seeing that perceives the illumination of truth as a more inward, personal, and spiritual process reverses the process of Hooke’s magnification. In Hooke’s experiment, light is the external source to reveal and magnify the small. This light, however, represents only the mechanical quality of human faculties. In poetry, light is the inward source to illuminate the small, the hidden, or the intangible. It is not the microscopic seeing that reveals truth but the poetic seeing that imagines and creates the shapes and dimensions of a world that conveys truth.

Cavendish chooses a form of blazing light as the self-fueled and self-sufficient flame that emblazes and gives birth to the new world. Cavendish acutely criticizes science’s endeavor to observe and define an intangible or “shapeless” realm of nature, and in “It is hard to believe, that
there are other Worlds in this World,” she puns on the name Hooke and his microscopic process of looking into what used to be unseen, shapeless, or even dark: “For many things our sense dull may scape./ For sense is grosse, not every thing can shape./ So in this World another world may bee./ That we do neither touch, tast, smell, heare, see./ What Eye so cleere is, yet did ever see/ Those little Hookes, that in the Load-stone bee,/ Which draw hard iron? or give Reasons, why/ The Needles point still in the north lye” (lines 7-14).21 Hooke’s microscopic view subordinates; one world becomes a property or subject to the other world, so a world just can’t be a world once under a microscopic lens. Any world visible must be defined and measured. Cavendish knows her sentiment that “sense is grosse, not every thing can shape” will find very little support, and she satirizes how the efficacy of optic devices intends on giving a “shape” to “this World another word may bee,/ That we do neither touch, tast, smell, heare, see” (lines 3-4). By this kind of invasive looking in, she argues, the dignity of the individual and intimate world is compromised; she argues the magnified world is brute and exposed as it lacks poetic intimacy and philosophical subtlety. Milton writes consistently about seeing both physically and spiritually, but his inability to see physically didn’t stop him from seeing poetically. In Book III of Paradise Lost Milton writes: “so much the rather thou celestial light/ Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers/ Irradate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence/ Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell/ Of things invisible to mortal sight” (III. 51-55). Poetic seeing for Milton is like the irradiating light; it enlightens him intellectually and spiritually while exposing him to a spiritual radiation that “purges and disperses” corporeal sights, but leaves him with the sight of “things invisible to mortal sight.” Though the poet is unable to see outward, he does not need to look elsewhere anymore because the “celestial light” will “shine inward,” illuminating and escalating

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21 Margaret Cavendish, “It is hard to believe, that there are other Worlds in this World,” Poems, and fancies, sig. G2r-G2v.
his “mind through all her powers” (III. 51-52). Anne Finch sees the lack of physical light as a gateway to access poetic dawn—darkness was as significant as light for her poetic imagination to become active. Her affinity to darkness is an esoteric and singular gesture breaking away from the homogenous Western poetic convention and even an unintentional subversive denial of the verbo-ocular-ego centric values of the hegemonic social and class structures that inspired her to look for the less visual and obvious.

All of these authors, then, are linked in my study not through necessary influence of one upon the next—though in many cases there were such direct historical connections—but because they all contemplated the role of human sight and imagination in exploring and constituting the material world surrounding them. As I will demonstrate ahead, simply overlaying a crude distinction between science and spirituality upon the works in question would be at least partly ahistorical and unwise; still, the championing of an “inner light” or “inward vision” by Sidney, Cavendish, Milton, and Finch definitely signals a mode of seeing and representation that does stand in stark contrast to the claims of objectivity forwarded by adherents to the emerging observational science. Sidney’s praise for the “poetic imagination” in his Defence of Poesy, I will argue in my initial chapter, provides a perfect foundation for examining the idea of “inner light” in the works of the remaining figures in my study.

2 CHAPTER 2: How a Metaphor Can Create a Good Man: Sidney’s “Inward Light” and Poetic Representation

Since our erected wit, maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will, keepeth us from reaching unto it. 22

22 Sidney, The Defence of Poesy, sig. C2r. Sidney explains the idea of “fore-conceite” as an act of substitution, or, being a stand-in for the idea, not the work itself: “And that the poet hath that Idea, is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellencie as hee hath imagined them.” The readers—and the poet—have their own “erected wit,” the spiritual sight that guides them and prevents them from “reaching” into “infected will” (sig. C2r). Neither the poetry nor the poet can be responsible for anyone’s “infected will,” or the lack of “erected wit.”
For any understanding knoweth the skill of the Artificer, standeth in that Idea or fore-conceite of the work, & not in the work itselfe.23

Sidney would have received encouragement for his vision of the poet’s “erected wit” materializing particulars from a more universal “fore-conceit” from multiple sources. Given the amount of critical attention that I pay to the work, it seems important to note an essential element of my view of Sidney’s *The Defence of Poesy*. As Robert E. Stillman points out in *Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism*, recent scholarship has often tended to emphasize an incoherence and lack of effective synthesis in the work, but I am obviously among those who view Sidney’s *Defence*, to borrow the words of A.C. Hamilton in his *Sir Philip Sidney: A Study of His Life and Works*, as “closely reasoned and logical in all its parts” (111).24 As part of his evidence, Stillman closely examines Sidney’s incorporation of Scaliger, insisting that “Sidney’s critical brilliance is enabled, in no small measure, by the methodical brilliance of his reading skills, and there is no better example of Sidney’s skill in ‘methodizing’ the eclectic matter of his *Defence* than his treatment at the very center of his golden world poetics of Julius Caesar Scaliger” (105). Much of Scaliger sounds close to Sidney, especially when Scaliger distinguishes (in his *Poetices*) the poet from the philosophers and historians because the former “represent things just as they are” whereas “the poet depicts quite another sort of nature” (qtd. in Stillman 106). Scaliger even considers the poet “almost” a “second deity” (qtd. in Stillman 106), but as Stillman points out, Scaliger’s suggestive description stops short of its purpose, leading the methodical Sidney “to devour Scaliger’s text and make it wholly his own” (107). As Stillman


shows, Sidney introduces the concept of “scope,” so that in comparison to the other arts such as astronomy and metaphysics that zoom in and focus on, as Sidney describes, “the works of Nature,” the poet, again in Sidney’s words, “lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature” (107).

Sidney was certainly well-read and possessed an intimate knowledge of his sources. Even before his Continental tour, he had, through his tutor and friend John Dee, undoubtedly come in contact with even extremely esoteric currents of European thought, as well as earned continual access to Dee’s library—by then, as Deborah Harkness explains in *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels*, “the largest private library in England” (61). Considering the astonishing breadth of his learning, Dee was certainly an effective conduit of Neoplatonism to Sidney, and to other intellectuals in England as well, given Dee’s prominence. After a comet appeared in 1577, Queen Elizabeth actually summoned Dee to explain the comet’s possible astrological significance to her courtiers (Harkness 68-69). Though Sidney begins the *Defence* on squarely Aristotelian territory—insisting that poetry involves “imitation”—he quickly changes the nature of such imitation to bring it, as Marvin Carlson insists in *Theories of the Theatre*, “closer to Neoplatonist than to Aristotelian thought” (82). Once the anti-Aristotelian impetus of the *Defence* is underscored, another important source for Sidney becomes clear—Peter Ramus. Although early scholarship tended to overstate Ramus’ influence on Sidney, many factors

25 Deborah E. Harkness, *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1999). In addition, Peter French, in *John Dee, The World of an Elizabethan Magus*, marvels at the sophistication of Sidney’s assertion, “So of the contrary side, if we will turn Ovid’s verse, _Ut lateat virtus proximate male_, that ‘good lie hid in nearness of the evil,’ Agrippa will be as merry in showing the vanity of science as Erasmus was in commending folly” (qtd. in French 144). Recognizing the obscurity of the source mentioned, French observes: “What a revealing comparison! Sidney makes it clear that he perceived Agrippa’s De incertitudine et vanitate Scientiarum declamatio invecta for what it was, a kind of satire. He had a complete understanding of Agrippa and his magical philosophy if he knew that this work, which was meant to fool the authorities, was a sham” (144).

suggest at least some level of influence—John Dee’s close friendship with Ramus, for example, and Ramus’ status as a genuine Protestant martyr after his slaughter in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, something that would have appealed greatly to Sidney’s own Protestant sensibility. Also, from the beginning of his career Ramus was staunchly anti-Aristotelian, to such a level that he was fired from post after post for lecturing against the canonical teachings of Aristotle that formed the basis for a university education in his day. To be clear, Ramistic logic would have seemed extremely simplistic to Dee and, in turn, Sidney, especially given the sophisticated turn of Dee’s alchemical and metaphysical thought. Still, it did function in a markedly universal-to-particular direction as it, in the words of Dewey D. Wallace from *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1160-1714*, “articulated the unity and diversity of all knowledge of things human and divine by breaking wholes into parts and defining parts through their bifurcation or by their opposites” (Wallace 16). In addition, as Richard Tuck argues in *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651*, for Ramus “there was no real distinction between philosophical science and practical reasoning—and no logical distinction, moreover, between science and merely probable ‘opinion’” (Tuck 25). Ramus’ suggestion that the mind possesses the power to discover large truths first before pursuing a structure of logical proof that works toward component parts fits Sidney’s Neoplatonic view of the imitative power of poetry, an imitation of universals over particulars that captures truths exceeding those possible in the mere mechanical arrangement of the world. Indeed, Jon S. Lawry convincingly argues in his *Sidney’s Two Arcadias* that both *Arcadias* proceed by dividing the universal “truths” Sidney is trying to present to the reader into component taxonomic pairs in order to move the reader to recognize the validity of his original propositions, suggesting both a methodological and philosophical link between Sidney and Ramus.
I remind the reader of Stillman’s description of Aristotelian methodology above, that of discovering forms or ideas through investigations of the material realm. This is, of course, very familiar to modern readers, for scientific progress has largely depended upon a sort of methodological reductionism that examines component parts to discover larger truths and patterns—a movement from observed or quantified details to explanations that are tested through further observations. Indeed, despite the more “systems”-oriented approaches seen in contemporary calls for a holistic revision of scientific methodology, both ontological and methodological reductionism appear to be completely embedded at the heart of the scientific project. Against this movement—from specific observations to general conclusions—stands Sidney’s call for an ontological and epistemological theory of knowledge that works in the opposite direction, moving from universals and “fore-conceits” to specific representations that are, in the process, more truthful than any mere copy or mimetic representation—a scientific model, for example—could be. This is, I think, a significant strand of thought in Sidney’s Defence, and certainly one of the most important for my comparison of Sidney to Cavendish ahead. Stillman correctly concludes that Sidney was synthesizing Platonic elements and abandoning the “Aristotelian project of locating forms (or ideas) embodied in the material realm” (109), and the interweaving of Aristotelian and Platonic elements creates many of the most striking features of the Defence and will be central to my analysis ahead.

Homer, according to Aristotle, mastered the art of figurative language by coming up with active and tangible metaphors and endowed life “to lifeless things in his well liked similes: Arched, foam-crested, some in front, but others upon others” (On Rhetoric). Though spoken,

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27 Aristotle, On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse, trans. George A. Kennedy, 248. In Book 3 Chapter 11 of Rhetoric Aristotle explains why vividness of figurative language implies movement, which he calls “energeia,” an “actualization”: “For example, to say that a good man is ‘foursquare’ is a metaphor, for both are complete; but it does not signify activity [energeia]. But the phrase ‘having his prime of life in full bloom’ is...
and later written, Homer’s poetic language was able to evoke senses outside the linguistic apparatus—“[Homer] makes everything move and live, and energeia is motion.”

The ocularcentric paradigm has dominated the major aesthetic theories in Western culture since the ancient Greeks. With Homer’s use of poetic language, poetry becomes more than words reflecting reality but instead interacts with and influences reality, and Sidney professed such as the goal of good poetry: “Poesie therefore is an arte of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in this word Mimesis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring foorth: to speake metaphorically a speaking picture, with this end: to teach and delight.”

The notion that words can generate pictures, or that pictorial properties can be converted into poetical ones, was popularized by the Horatian dictum, “ut pictura poesis (as is painting, so as poetry).”

energeia, as is ‘you, like an apheton’ and ‘now then the Greeks darting forward on their feet.’ Darting is actualization and metaphor; for he means ‘quickly.’ And [energeia is,] as Homer often uses it, making the lifeless living through the metaphor” (On Rhetoric 248). Aristotle examines Homer’s simile that compares battle to waves of the sea beating on the shore to emphasize the visual in Iliad 13. 799: “Arched, foam-crested, some in front, but others upon others.” In addition, Aristotle opens Book 3 Chapter 11 with the following lines: “But it is necessary to say what we mean by bringing-before-the-eyes and what makes this occur. I call those things ‘before the eyes’ that signify things engaged in an activity” (On Rhetoric 248). The phrase “Bringing-Before-the-Eyes” first shows up in Book 3 chapter 10 where Aristotle discusses the rhetorical stylistic urbanization or what he calls “asteia,” or “urbanities” (244). The sense of urbanity in “asteia” signifies the activity of towns, the sense of vigilance or movement associated with towns, and the element of alertness or vividness is critical for the cultivation of style: “[urbanity is achieved] by means of bringing-before-the-eyes [pro ommatōn poiein, or visualization]; for things should be seen as being done rather than as in the future. [To achieve urbanity in style] one should thus aim at three things: metaphor, antithesis, actualization [energeia]” (245). What “visualization” does is “bringing-before-the-eyes” for Aristotle, and the figurative language might be the only sophisticated linguistic tool that can deliver this “energeia.”

By listing examples from Homer’s Odyssey and Iliad in Book 3 chapter 11 of On Rhetoric, Aristotle further explains the element of “visualization” in figurative language: “In all [Homer’s] work he gains his fame by creating activity, for example, in the following: Then to the plain rolled the ruthless stone’ and ‘the arrow flew’ and [also of an arrow] ‘eager to fly’ and [of spears] ‘They stood in the ground longing to take their fill of flesh,’ and ‘The point sped eagerly through his breast.’ In all of these something seems living through being actualized, for being ‘ruthless’ and ‘longing’ and the other examples constitute energeia. [Homer] applied these by using metaphor by analogy; for as the stone is to Sisyphus, so is the ‘shameless’ one to the one ‘shamefully’ treated” (On Rhetoric 249). Analogy, as we know, is a comparison between two things, typically on the basis of their structure and for the purpose of clarification; the distance between two comparisons in metaphors is not only inevitable but encouraged.


Horace introduced the phrase “ut pictura poesis” in his Ars Poetica to compare the art of painting with that of poetry. However, this analogy that poetry and painting are alike has been popular since ancient Greece and wasn’t original to Horace, as expressed by Simonides of Keos, who was first paraphrased by Plutarch in De gloria Atheniensium, 3.347a: “Simonides, however, calls painting inarticulate poetry and poetry articulate painting: for the
Smith in *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture* points out that “Plutarch’s version of an observation originally made by Simonedes of Keos—‘poema picture loquens, picture poema silens’ (poetry a speaking picture, picture a silent poem)—commanded such a wide assent that Philip Sidney is exceptional in labeling it only a metaphor” (Smith 125). Unlike Horace’s analogy that conjoins the aesthetic function of painting and poetry, Sidney’s analogy of painting and poetry keeps the two distant; pictures and words share a similar mimetic act of representation and involve the sight as the mode of reception, but reading poetry requires understanding of verbal signs. Poetry, simply put, teaches its audience how to become a better reader of the world; it can teach the reader to recognize the mimetic relationship between two distant things—words that describe the world in poetry or a picture that portrays the world in painting—and imitate such associations between the representation and the original, which resembles the act of metaphor: “If poetry is like painting, it is because the reader of poetry, in act an act of judgment, makes it so” (Smith 125-26). Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Defence of Poesy* argues for poetry’s capacity to mimic and “improve” nature, but such improvement also implies the enhancement of the readership of poetry. Sidney’s “end” goal of poetry indicates the transformation of the readers of poetry into the actors of metaphors, who can perceive what “a

actions which painters portray as taking place at the moment literature narrates and records after they have taken place. Even though artists with colour and design, and writers with words and phrases, represent the same subjects, they differ in the material and the manner of their imitation; and yet the underlying end and aim of both is one and the same; the most effective historian is he who, by a vivid representation of emotions and characters, makes his narration like a painting.”

31 Bruce R. Smith, *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009). Smith opens the chapter titled “Green Spectacles” with the following: “Ut pictura poesis: no Renaissance commonplace was more common than the claim that poetry is like picture”(125). In relation with the concept of “picture” in poetry, Smith cites Lucy Gent who points out the word “picture” in early modern England was “an extraordinarily capricious word” that signified many things, as broadly as paintings, sculptures, tapestry, or embroidery, but even “things made out of words” (125). For further readings on Renaissance understanding of the word “picture,” see Gent’s *Picture and Poetry 1560-1620: Relation between literature and the visual arts in the English Renaissance* (Leamington Spa: James Hall, 1981).

32 In an end note to the text in page 125 Smith further explains: “Sidney, in *The Defence of Poesy*, is altogether typical in making Horace’s observation part of the very definition of poesy, but is quite unusual in realizing that the observation is, after all, a metaphor” (Smith 290).
speaking picture” articulates and, furthermore, “speak metaphorically a speaking picture, with this end: to teach and delight.”33

When poetry generates a “speaking picture,” it encourages the reader to connect two distant or unfamiliar things together to make sense. The new science provided different ways of seeing and representing the world, but as I will show in the next chapter, scientific observation centered heavily on pictorial representation. Natural scientists like Robert Hooke argue that the microscopic observation will cancel the distance between the visible world and the invisible by revealing the invisible world to our natural eye through the help of his optic device, eventually encroaching on the terrain of poetic distance necessary for metaphors to sustain their function. If the pictures become too detailed and informative, they might claim to overtake the superior capability of words that Sidney argues as unique in poetry. In this chapter, I will examine how Sidney’s defense for poetic representation and reception prefigures the concerns voiced by the subsequent generation of poets who believed the advent of scientific observation posed a threat to the unique purpose of poetry. Furthermore, my examination of Sidney’s poetic theory in The Defence of Poesy will help establish a framework for my examination of “inward light” in the works of Robert Hooke, Margaret Cavendish, John Milton and Anne Finch in the following chapters.

In “The Touch of the Blind Man: The Phenomenology of Vividness in Italian Renaissance Art,” Jodi Cranston examines how the sight receives the most attention among the various operations of the human senses in Italian Renaissance discourses on art. Leonard da Vinci, she asserts, considered the function of the eye “the primary means by which the sensus communis of the brain may most fully and magnificently contemplate the infinite works of

nature, and the ear is the second, acquiring nobility through the recounting of things which the eye has seen” (Cranston 225). Poetry cannot provide directly tactile and ocular experience, and Leonardo believed sight to be the most vital sensory operation for aesthetic experience and judgment. Cranston writes that Leonardo believed that a blind person’s sensory and aesthetic experience is necessarily marred by lack of sight, and therefore a blind person cannot fully enjoy and judge beauty and “lives as though dead” (226). For Leonardo, a blind man’s sensory experience is controlled by speech, which he believes is subsidiary to sight, and the lack of sight “limits expression through a fixed set of words and meaning” (226). To prove his point Leonardo employed a specific example of how the king of Hungary, Mathias Corvinus, upon receiving both a poem and painting on his birthday, found the painting more engaging and moving. The poet, who learned that the king preferred the painting over his poetry, accused the king of appreciating “the inferior mode of representation” (226). The king refuted the poet’s accusation by insisting that the painting not only appears more accessible and alive to the viewer but also offers something more than mere ocular experience: “Give me something I can see and touch, and not only hear, and do not criticize my decision to tuck your work under my arm, while I take up that of the painter in both hands to place it before my eyes” (qtd. in Cranston 226). In Leonardo’s story, poetry is thus hidden—the aesthetic value and experience poetry can offer to the king is insignificant, and, most of all, invisible, as his action of tucking the poetry under his arm suggests. Cranston expands Leonardo’s ocularcentric aesthetic theory and suggests that the agent of touch—the hand—can manipulate another sensory and aesthetic operation. This kind of touching art, or touching of art, is also crucial for the art work’s vivid effect. Although the operation of sight, especially in its role in judging beauty, “receives considerable attention in

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Renaissance discussions on the arts,” the King of Hungary’s remark on his preference of painting over poetry as well as the tucking of the poetry under his arm reveals the role that hands play in both creation and reception of art; hands possess the ability not only to “facilitate and assist sight,” but also “have the power to disable sight,” as the king’s arm can hide as well as reveal—while the poetry is tucked under his arm, he extends his hands to “take up that of the painter in both hands to place it before [his] eyes” (227). Hands serve as one of the essential parts of the creative process and production of meaning. As a literal sign, the hand might represent an individual body part rather than a whole body and coherent self, but as a symbolic sign—as a synecdoche—the hand embodies a coherent sign that is connected to the poet and his art work, extended out from the creator and pressed onto the creation at work. The trope of the hand functions in both metaphorical and metonymical ways; its creative labor is both literal and symbolic.

In poetry, holding the art work close is unnecessary because physical proximity to words doesn’t do anything to the abstract distance between the vehicle and the tenor. However, the figuration of the hand as an extension and connection between art and nature suggests the metaphorical association between hand and writing. Poetry, just as painting does, can “place [nature] before [one’s] eyes.” When reading poetry, poetry takes care of the hands’ work to “place it before [one’s] eyes” because poetry can push towards or pull away its subject from the reader through the manipulation of metaphors. Poetry can enhance and reconfigure our view of the world, just as paintings can, and anti-theatricalists during the sixteenth and seventeenth century were concerned for poetry’s capability to mimic or fabricate truth. In poetry, the signs—the words—become the substance for the images. Unlike painting, which still uses images to

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35 Touching and holding are two vital activities to bring something “before our eyes.” As Cranston points out, tropes that involve touching “serve as metaphors for accessibility, clarity, and visibility” (227).
deliver sight, words deliver sight in poetry.\(^{36}\) As I will discuss further, with Sidney in this chapter and Cavendish later, the poets argue that poetry does not deceive because it never promises to be the mere deliverer of truth, but rather insists on copying and altering—enhancing—truth. If the figurative language can bring nature before our eyes, then poetry can facilitate the function of hand that extends and contracts to bring nature as well as art closer to the viewer’s eye. Sidney professes the purpose of reading and writing metaphors as the moral education of “learned men” whose “mind hath a free desire to do well.”\(^ {37}\) A man who wants to learn how to decipher hidden or intricate metaphorical representations can learn to perceive the world more comprehensively, and it is that clarity and scope of his vision that makes “a learned man” a good reader.\(^ {38}\) Guided by “the inward light,” both poet and reader of poetry can create a figure that appears closer and more vivid, tangible and real as “[one] can see and touch.”\(^ {39}\) This suggestion then subverts Leonardo’s claim that only through the ocular experience of painting can a man experience and judge art. A moving—to stress the active metaphor there—work of art, whether it be painting or poetry, can create a tactile and visceral experience that manipulates the distance between nature and art, image and language, tenor and vehicle, or art and its audience.\(^ {40}\) Even with the obvious association between touch and figurative language, the idea that the human body has a direct

\(^{36}\) This change from one substance to another is far more severe—exaggerated—and inherent in poetry because the pictorial representation is less alienated from our sensory reception of the world while the verbal representation indeed uses verbal sign to observe and represent the world. After all, the verbal signs are abstract, not pictorial. The capacity of poetic imagination to mimic and improve the original is indeed redolent of the process of transubstantiation, as the verbal signs transform its original form and create visual scenes in the reader’s mind. I include a more in-depth discussion of this transformative aspect of poetic metaphors later in this chapter. Also, for further contemplation of how visual sight is the antecedent of verbal representation, read The Key of Green by Bruce R. Smith.

\(^{37}\) Defence of Poesy, sig. E4r.

\(^{38}\) Sidney argues that—and encourages—the poet should exercise a wider scope and envision the world beyond “the narrow warrant of” what nature provides; the poet should imagine and create things that are “either better then Nature bringeth forth, or quite a newe forms such as never were in Nature” (sig. C1v).

\(^{39}\) Poetic metaphors not only train and create a good reader, but they can also enhance and magnify the quality of a good reader to further suggest his moral superiority.

\(^{40}\) For instance, poetry’s capacity to create a “speaking picture” enables the poets to target more abstract and elusive subjects, as in Finch’s “The Spleen,” which I will discuss the later chapter.
impact on the creation of art could raise a problem, especially among the Neo-Platonists. A part of the human limb, a part of the corporeal body, partakes in the creative process of recording poetry to be read; hand and its capacity to manipulate the reality become an integral part of artistic creation. Poetic representation comes from the association of hand in writing—thus poetry is connected to the body in a metaphoric, metonymic way. Poetry’s long tradition of representation through metaphor and simile modulates the ocularcentric representation of painting to allow it to explore new terrain.

Sidney has long been thoroughly recognized as a major figure in the English Renaissance, and to say that much has been written about his work is an understatement. Because I am especially interested in the influence of philosophy and theology on his work, I sometimes find myself gravitating to earlier works of scholarship less likely to eliminate these fields of their meaning and view them, instead, as hollow expressions of power or mechanisms for social order. I will admit at the outset that I have struggled with a way to finesse my reading of Sidney into closer alignment with the more common contemporary handling of his works, one that tends to subordinate larger philosophical concerns to local negotiations of power through a New Historicist emphasis on expediency and “self-fashioning.” No doubt, such functionalist readings are compelling, even as they almost do away with the need to examine the epistemological and ontological complexities of Sidney’s poetics. Put simply, such a view sees Sidney’s invocation of the Horatian ideal of pleasurable and instructive poetry as a necessary and strategic instrument intended to bring into alignment his activist Protestant politics—more typically championed by middle-class intellectuals like Gosson—and his own high status at court.

41 With more poetry being printed and read, instead of being recited and heard in front of the audience, the transmission of poetry and its tactile impact on the audience became more personal and individualized; if educated enough to read, people could hold poetry in their hands and read and enjoy it alone.
and great skill as a courtier. In Gosson’s judgment, poetry did indeed produce pleasure, yet “pleasure” was a force that quickly transformed men from warriors “wrestling at armes” to courtiers “wallowyng in Ladies laps.” However, seeing the need to protect the leisure and pleasure that were part of the social currency distinguishing between classes, Sidney attempted a sort of reconciliation. Thus, even as he claims in *Defending Literature in Early Modern England* to challenge earlier New Historicist assumptions about the ability of texts to be genuinely constitutive of actual political power, Robert Matz is typical of current attitudes towards Sidney’s works when he straightforwardly insists that in the *Defence* “Sidney attempts to defend the courtly pleasure of poetry by claiming that such pleasure promotes warrior service” and that “Poetry’s profit and pleasure thus mediates between Sidney’s ambivalent position as courtly and Protestant aristocrat” (Matz 22).

Although I have much different aims in my discussion of Sidney, recent theoretical positions such as Matz’s do foreground many significant details of the *Defence*, and it might be useful to summarize a few of them here. A reading searching for pragmatism as compared to profundity, for example, readily accounts for the ambivalence sensed as the lofty claims to heroic valor earlier in the work give way to Sidney’s description of the work at the end as an “ink-wasting toy,” a conclusion, Matz insists, where writing “becomes instead excess, straying, and waste” (76). Likewise, a reading focusing on Sidney’s anxious desire to reconcile two competing value systems explains the frequent attempts on Sidney’s part to rescue poetry from Gosson’s characterization that it is somehow a feminizing force, turning readers away from martial valor, from “courage to cowardice,” and from “Dartes to Dishes” (qtd. in Matz 61). Although Sidney

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42 Matz points out that “for both Sidney and Gosson poetry should profit as well as delight, and, in particular, it should profit by moving men to deeds of military courage,” and he even concludes that “Gosson’s dedication to Sidney seems reasonable in light of their shared Protestant activism” (62).
does propose a rather feminine “sweet and charming force” for poetry, he quickly changes that to a useful purpose in service to the state, transforming pen to weapon by contrasting the embroidery needle that constituted a popular pastime of females at court with the soldier’s sword: “Truly, a needle cannot do much hurt, and as truly (with leave of the ladies be it spoken) it cannot do much good. With a sword though mayst kill thy father, & with a sword though mayst defend thy prince and country.”\footnote{Sidney, \textit{The Defence of Poesy}, sig. H2v.} The lack of opportunities to gain or solidify one’s status in the court through military achievement under Queen Elizabeth definitely necessitated the creation of alternate forms of status-seeking displays, and as Matz points out, the ritualized performances in the tiltyard had become so distant from actual battle and so close to courtly entertainment that they incorporated flowers and perfumed water (Matz 79); it is obvious, then, that Sidney would attempt to masculinize and recuperate courtly display in all its forms after Gosson’s attack. Because Sidney certainly was responding to local social pressures—often quite consciously—analysis borrowed from New Historicism appears at times in my discussion. It is striking, however, that in his lengthy study of Sidney, not once does Matz connect the actual content of Sidney’s arguments to larger philosophical concerns as they would have existed in Sidney’s day, and indeed as they still exist to this day. Instead, Sidney’s ideas are consistently reduced to mere strategic deployments intended to negotiate and protect his own social standing, a critical practice that misses much that interests me the most in Sidney’s great works.

In addition to New Historicism, reader-response and reception-oriented modes of analysis have proven particularly fruitful in Renaissance studies, starting with the pioneering work of such giants as Stanley Fish and Barbara Lewalski and continuing with a host of equally insightful scholars. The following chapter will be very indebted to reader-response theory, and I
would like to start with a general statement pointing out the affinity of Sidney’s work for studies that examine both the writer’s intended and the actual actions that occur in the mind of the reader as the text forces him or her to engage in an active transaction intended to convey truth far beyond the truths possible through mere imitation or verisimilitude. For a variety of reasons that I will discuss later, Sidney’s poetics presupposed a hermeneutic interpretive process that elevated poetry above all other forms of literature in conveying truth and revealing glimpses of Neo-Platonic Ideal forms to the reader. Sidney, as author, also describes the poet’s active process of interpretation in his poetry. His sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* begins by protesting that the poet wants to cease using obvious conceits and overused conventional sonnet form. He wishes to invent a new sonnet form, but the task isn’t easy. Already demonstrating how the poet is up against a daunting mission as Astrophil expresses his anxiety to keep up with “inventions fine,” the first sonnet of the sequence begins with Astrophil moaning that he can’t seem to write good poetry that will inspire his beloved—and move her—to love him back. As he tries to find a way to compose a poem that will impress his beloved, Astrophil is already composing fine poetry that reveals his poetic skill and understanding of poetic conventions:

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I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain:
Oft turning others’ leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burn’d brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention’s stay,
Invention, Nature’s child, fled step-dame Study’s blows. (lines 5-10)
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The unknown reaction of his audience—the fact that how his beloved, Stella, might react to his words determines the success of his poetry—makes Astrophil worry and causes him to lament.
At this point it is important that I explain why I am painstakingly describing the seemingly obvious lines from the first sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*. Although it seems plain that sonnet 1 focuses on the process and hardship of poetry writing, those lines are set up to show what really occurs in the mind of a poet before composing his verse and to point out that the virtue of writing may be tested not just in the act of writing but also in the reaction of its reader. The reader’s reaction is not only a metaphorical deliverance and achievement of the text but also a physical manifestation of virtues that the text tries to evoke. A good poem, a successful one, then, will indeed be read as a good poem but will do its job, which is to inspire and move the reader to action. Hence, a successful love sonnet is supposed to actually move the beloved’s heart and make him or her do something. In other words, if a love poem doesn’t create love, then it can’t be a good poem. This is more about turning words into a reality, and for Astrophil it is more complicated since he wants to use a new and different set of poetic devices to accomplish this alchemical task.

Here I want to describe the divine capability of a poet that Sidney argues for in *The Defence of Poesy*, for it is central to most of my discussion ahead. When, for example, Sidney argues that “Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite a newe forms such as never were in Nature,” he lauds the poet’s ability to expand nature’s gifts “as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.”  

The poet’s ability to make something better than nature is the invention that Astrophil desires, and this invention requires “study” and practice. The poets with the ability to examine the world and then

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create “things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite a newe formes” are not only great learned men who learned from inventions already existing but also accomplished makers who imitate and reinvent something better than the preexisting forms. The poet should not be limited to “the narrow warrant of [nature’s] gifts” but be freely creative with what nature provides using his or her wit; the poet shouldn’t merely copy nature but rather experiment with it—“lifted up with vigor”—while inventing a new form, a new nature.

Nor, to finish up a very preliminary appraisal of Sidney’s poetics, was it just a matter of a poet’s accomplishing more than mere imitation, for the manner of presentation was also vitally important. Sidney begins *The Defence of Poesy* with an anecdote about his visit to Edward Wotton in Italy. At the Holy Roman Emperor’s court, Sidney and Wotton “gave [themselves] to learn horsemanship of John Pietro Pugliano, one that with great commendation had the place of an esquire in his stable.” Sidney’s *The Defence of Poesy* displays much persuasive verbal and rhetorical skill, accompanied by learned references to the classical literary tradition, and the carefully modulated humorous, self-deprecating tone becomes apparent in the introduction, which discusses horsemanship. Pugliano, with his eager and diligent delivery of teaching,

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46 Sidney further explains that through imitation the poet can “make his own, beautifying it both for further teaching, and more delighting, as it pleaseth him” (sig. E2v). It is important to note that Sidney points out the creator (poet or the artist) also experiences the “end” of poetry; while making “his own” and “beautifying it,” the poet creates something that is not only instructive and didactic for the audience/reader, but receives joy in doing it. Without a doubt, the Platonic perception of poetry as the least instructive and persuasive means to teach virtue prevailed from ancient Greece and Rome through the sixteenth century, and in *The Defence of Poesy* Sidney confronts ancient attacks on poetry and drama that had been revived by Puritan moralists. Stephen Gosson, whose invective restated Plato’s criticism of poetry, argued that poetry is an art of imitation that is far removed from truth and thus appeals only to “the inferior part of soul,” causing moral corruption and political unrest. However, Sidney argues that imitation is the core of literary creation because poetic imagination doesn’t mindlessly copy but always reflects the individual mind who is doing the work of mimesis: “Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in this word mimesis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth—to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture—with this end, to teach and delight” (sig. C2v).

47 Sidney, sig. B1r. It was during the court of either Maximilian II or Rudolf II, the son of Maximilian II, but the date of Sidney’s visit is uncertain; and scholars have pointed various dates between 1574-75. Rudolf II took over his father’s reign in October of 1575.
appears to be an unsophisticated, one-dimensional character owing to Sidney’s subtle wit: “And he, according to the fertileness of the Italian wit, did not only afford us the demonstration of his practice but sought to enrich our minds with contemplations therein which he thought most precious.” Pugliano compares a horse to a courtier and suggests that horses are nobler than courtiers. Sidney recounts: “Then would he add certain praises, by telling what a peerless beast the horse was, the only serviceable courtier without flattery, the beast of most beauty, faithfulness, courage, and such more, that if I had not been a piece of a logician before I came to him I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse.” Sidney clearly thinks that Pugliano’s assertion is too obvious and too eager to be understood as anything but a type of self-love without self-control. Although Sidney says in his acerbic tone that “self-love is better than any gilding,” Pugliano’s hyperbolic speech on the art of horsemanship is not only overwrought but his “weake arguments” fail to satisfy an experienced courtier whose mastery of balancing “self-love” and “gilding” helped him establish the steadfastness of his political and social status. 

The seeming appearance of an easy, perhaps a bit reckless, thus self-effacing, and yet impeccably controlled rhetorical surface in Sidney’s The Defence of Poesy reflects the most conspicuous Renaissance aesthetical ideal, the supreme importance placed on grace and sprezzatura. Furthermore, note how in the beginning of The Defence of Poesy Sidney thoroughly lists numerous examples of ancient philosophers who used poetry to articulate their inner

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48 Sidney, sig. B1r.  
49 Sidney, sig. B1v.  
50 Sidney, sig. B1v. The word “gilding” could mean two things here—the typical metal gilding, but also a pun on “gelding,” which is the meaning I am referencing in my later point about the art of balancing self-advocacy (“self-love”) and self-effacement (“gelding”) to present oneself as an affable and sophisticated courtier who is also able to hide his political greed and ambition.
thoughts as they performed their profession “under the masks of poets.”\textsuperscript{51} Sidney’s description of poetry as a mask informs his interpretation of the function of mimesis in poetic creation: “Poesie therefore is an arte of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in this word Mimesis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth.”\textsuperscript{52} Poetry, as Sidney argues, is undeniably capable of not only representing but also masking, and therefore poetry is an incredibly useful form of communication and production of individual knowledge as well as national posterity:

Let learned Greece in any of her manifold Science, be able to shew me one booke, before Musaeus, Homer, & Hesiodus, all three nothing els but Poets. Nay, let any historie be brought, that can say any writers were there before them, if they were not men of the same skill, as Orpheus, Linus, and some other are named: who having been the first of that Country, that made pens deliverers of their knowledge to their posterity, may justify challenge to bee called their Fathers in learning. (sig. B2r)

Sidney defends poetry’s mimetic quality by expanding the scope of poetry’s—and the poet’s—capability. A poet is someone who holds the veil to unveil truth, the one who performs behind a mask; as Sidney writes, any writers who “made pens deliverers of their knowledge to their posterity” learned to embody and perform metaphor—because it stands in for something else while “representing,” it is “counterfeiting” and “figuring foorth” simultaneously. Note how Sidney begins \textit{The Defense of Poesy} by telling the story of Pugliano and his horse, whom Sidney

\textsuperscript{51} Sidney, sig. B2v. Sidney explains how the mask of poetry enabled the great thinkers to embody their ideas: “So as Amphion was sayde to move stones with his poetrie, to build Thebes. And Orpheus to be listened to by beastes, indeed, stony and beastly people. So among the Romans were Liuius, Andronicus, and Ennius. […] After whom, encouraged and delighte with theyr excellent fore-going, others have followed, to beautifie our mother tongue, as well in the same kinde as in other Arts. This did so notably shewe it selfe, that the Phylosophers of Greece, durst not a long time appeare to the worlde but under the masks of poets. So Thales, Empedocles, and Parmenides, sange their natural Phylosophie in verses” (sig. B2v).

\textsuperscript{52} Sig. C2v.
met through his friend and courtier Edward Wotton. This is a peculiar line up. Imagine—a poet, a courtier, a riding master, and a horse? What kind of performance is occurring around this significant, noble subject, a horse? Or, is Sidney pointing out that human beings can produce, perform, and embody meaning only through the unbreakable assembly of mimetic pretense? As David M. Posner points out in *The Performance of Nobility in Early Modern European Literature*, Count Baldassare Castiglione’s *The Book of Courtier* appropriates Cicero’s concept of “artful artlessness” in public performances when describing the effect of wonder and suspense in a courtier’s public performance when a courtier appears graceful in his behavior and rhetoric yet accomplishes the effect without appearing to try. Castiglione’s *The Book of Courtier* praises *sprezzatura*, compactly defined as “effortless grace,” as the most essential quality for a courtier to possess in order to achieve successful social and political nearness to the power.

The ideal of *sprezzatura*, then, extends to the ideal courtier’s aesthetic goal when employed in creating art. An ideal courtier who employs his rhetoric and physical attributes to be politically persuasive is equivalent to an ideal poet who artfully uses his words to be inspiring and moving. Yet the key to diplomacy and courtly dissimulation is subtlety—Pugliano fails because he is too eager, too obvious. In both Sidney’s and Castiglione’s discussions of artistic creation, literary creation is further removed from the classical tradition and its expectation of art representing or imitating nature—an ideal artist and his or her ideal literary creation will achieve more than a mere representation of nature, and an ideal artist will deliver such an accomplished and sophisticated piece of art without making the process of naturalizing art obvious. For example, in Robert Herrick’s “Delight in Disorder” (1648), in praising “a wild civility” created

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53 We should also remember how Sidney describes Pugliano as a gauche and loud type, who comes across as even less sophisticated than his own horse. Yet it is also Sidney who uses this story to allude to something else, hiding behind a horse (and the horseman). This should make one wonder, “who is counterfeiting or figuring forth?”
by feminine disarray, Herrick creates a site of *sprezzatura* through the poem’s metrical and rhyme structure, which also includes his satirical criticism of the Puritan preference for precision that eschewed the lush, languid, easy grace of courtly culture and its poetry.\(^5^4\) By idolizing the lack of order as the abundance of delight, Herrick transforms and expands the natural, expected, and common meaning of disorder into something unexpected and enhanced, so “golden” that it would teach us something new and delight us with enlightenment. The abundance in disorder, caught in “an erring lace,” “here and there,” and “ribbons to flow confusedly,” gives so much delight to the poet, and to reiterate Sidney’s argument that while nature’s world is “brazen,” art is able to “deliver a golden” world.\(^5^5\)

The idea of a “golden” world brings us past gesture and style to Sidney’s core claim about poetry, that it is able to transcend its material surroundings and participate in the ideal. Again, this alludes to the capability of poetry, being able to turn brazen into gold, to use—counterfeit and figure forth—an example of a horse to teach and inspire a man. Naturally, contemporary discussions of Neoplatonic philosophy must be handled delicately to avoid historical misrepresentations. For example, in *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature*, Elizabeth Spiller criticizes Harry Berger, the author of *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making*, for misreading the Platonic distinction between the physical and the ideal. According to Spiller, Berger identifies “model worlds” as a “historical novelty” in early modern thought: “The Renaissance was characterized by the rediscovery of a belief in the human imagination… [that] leads to the creation of a ‘second-world attitude,’ the desire to live in

\(^{5^4}\) Paradoxically, an ideal, successful artistic creation for the Renaissance humanists occurs when the artist artfully effaces his “too precise”—too obvious—representation of nature in order to create art that is more vivid to the audience than would otherwise be accomplished through careful, strict regularity and imitation so that it “makes everything live and move,” as Aristotle describes Homer’s vivid metaphors. Herrick’s “Delight in Disorder” contains near rhymes, accented initial syllables to break the iambic structure, and even one line a syllable short, yet it flows with an uncanny grace, making it the perfect illustration of *sprezzatura*.

\(^{5^5}\) Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, sig. C1v.
and therefore control a world made by human invention rather than in the ‘first world’ as God, nature, or the gods have contrived it” (qtd. in Spiller 29). For Berger, then, the “physical” corresponds to a kind of hard truth or objectivity while the “ideal” involves the creation of imaginary worlds, the province of art. Spiller emphasizes that this distinction emerges from imposing modern categories on sixteenth-century thought. The belief that description of the physical world produces “truth” emerges from an acceptance of Aristotelian mimesis—and corresponds closely with modern scientific methodologies—but Spiller insists that Renaissance Neoplatonism provided an alternate model, one in which imagination produced truth by actively creating new worlds and knowledge. This manner of discovering truth avoided what Sidney and others viewed as a misleading reliance on merely copying the physical world of nature through scientific description and modeling (as opposed to the Ideal forms that, in Platonic thought, the physical world merely copies). Spiller presents Nelson Goodman’s *Ways of Worldmaking* as offering a more accurate—though still flawed—account of Sidney’s theory of the imagination, for Goodman emphasizes the active role of “worldmaking” in the production of both scientific and artistic knowledge yet falls short, in Spiller’s judgment, by demoting the role of mind and imagination in his insistence that there is an unmistakable distinction between knowing and doing, or, as Goodman puts it, that “a broad mind is no substitute for hard work” (qtd. in Spiller 31).

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57 Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1978). Goodman further argues: “Moreover, while readiness to recognize alternative worlds may be liberating, and suggestive of new avenues of exploration, a willingness to welcome all worlds build none. Mere acknowledgement of the many available frames or reference provides us with no map of the motions of heavenly bodies; acceptance of the eligibility of alternative bases produces no scientific theory or philosophical system; awareness of varied ways of seeing paints no pictures” (21). Too much knowledge might take away from the liberty of imagination.
However, Sidney and Cavendish would argue that a broad mind *does* hard work. Spiller credits the Florentine Neoplatonist’s promotion of Plotinus as the source for Sidney’s view that art transcends the merely physical forms of nature. Given the astonishing breadth of Sidney’s reading there are additional probable sources that I will discuss later, but Spiller is correct that Plotinus is certainly chief among them. As Sidney argues in *The Defence of Poesy*, then, poetry does not misrepresent or deviate from nature, but create more nature to represent and to be represented. Or, as Spiller describes it, “art offers an alternative, competing image that may come closer to ideas themselves the further it departs from the physical reality of nature” (Spiller 32).

To accurately recover Sidney’s mindset requires hard work to escape the modern mentality that equates fidelity in representation with objectivity and rationality and a lack thereof with subjectivity and irrationality, but doing so encourages a profound meditation on representational fidelity and truth as well as the active role that mind and imagination play in all human perception—thus tainting all claims of objectivity. For Sidney, imagination is not the source, as Spiller describes it, of “irrational mysticism,” but instead, again in Spiller’s words, Sidney believes poetry produces truth because “its primary epistemological connection is with the ideal world rather than with a sensible world that is imperfect and contingent” (32). I would argue that the creative and subjective mind is the “broad mind” that does hard work. Indeed, I am aware that this kind of comparative argument or debate about the quality—or the merit—of the artistic mind versus scientific knowledge would easily sound misleading and unjust. “Hard work,” I

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58 The similarity between Sidney’s description of the divine power of “vates” in *The Defence of Poesy* and Cavendish’s description of augurers in *The Blazing World* is striking as they both represent the figure of a foreseer or prophet, someone who can manifest one world into the other by the power of a “broad” mind. Poets do this by writing while augurers do this by reading. I discuss Cavendish’s use of augurers in the next chapter.

59 According to Spiller, Plotinus declared in the *Enneads* that “the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects, for, to begin with, these natural objects are themselves imitations . . . but go back to the Ideas [logous] from which nature derives, and furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are moulders of beauty and where nature is lacking” (qtd. in Spiller 32).
should specify here, is a kind of intellectual work that involves actual creation or materialization of what had theretofore only existed in the abstract, as an idea—as distinguished from a more basic and one-for-one act of mimesis. This is a subtle point that needs more explanation: whereas science often only produces objective and rational knowledge through relatively static models, art relies on broad minds working hard to connect human reality—“the sensible world”—to “the ideal world” and transform one knowledge to the other, thus potentially accomplishing more “hard” work than the scientific mind. And to be specific, the transformation from “one knowledge to the other” I mentioned above takes place between the minds of artists and those of audience. The transformation is both epistemological and pedagogical, conceptual but practical, further developing a private practice of learning into a shared, social virtue. Needless to say, the popularization of book publishing and accessibility of literary creations bolstered the expansion of private artistic creativity, making the artist a social and public source of artistic creativity and establishing a novel dialog between the artist and the audience. The social and communicable aspect of poetry could not be found in the lone scientist’s lab during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—scientific discovery and knowledge remained private and never fully optimized even when they were publically announced and acknowledged.

Thus, as I will discuss in a later chapter, Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia* proves to be one of the novel scientific publications of his day, attempting to expand the private epistemological stage of science into a public, social place by incorporating pictorial images and poetic details into his study. And it is also significant to point out that both Sidney and Hooke describe the capability of their epistemological device—poetry and science, or more specifically, poetic verse and the microscopic lens—to be theology-inspired and theologically serviceable, arguing that their devices can be used to produce a broad and universal kind of epistemology espoused by
Renaissance humanists. Such wholesome and expandable knowledge is applicable to a wide array of social, educational, or political situations, offering a pedagogically operative epistemology encouraging its audience to be mobile in action as well as thoughts. Thus, the godly work is not just knowing what is morally good but doing what is morally good. For instance, if Astrophil’s love poetry in Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* is good enough to inspire Stella to fall in love with him, then Sidney’s poetry, by illustrating and materializing that change and making it available to the reader, succeeds in being mobile in both actions and thoughts. Sidney argues that poetry is on the side of religion, and poetic imagination offers nothing that is ominous towards imaginative methods of explaining theology. Hooke believes that microscopic details reveal a godly message of harmony and beauty in the design of organisms. Knowledge and learning exist emphatically to serve moral and teleological goals in Sidney’s *Defence* and even in his Sonnet sequence, for writing poetry is an epistemologically mutating and expanding—thus climbing and optimizing—experience. However, in Hooke’s *Micrographia*, as we shall see, the moralizing theological inspiration from microscopic details becomes the main act as well as the message of the scientist’s observation, leaving very little room for the readers to use their own imagination to expand the knowledge provided for them. In other words, the imagination needed to process a poetic representation as a divine representation involves much more intellectual expansion than the logic that defines the information provided through scientific discovery as a divine creation. Climbing up to “the ideal world” from “a sensible world” requires a broad mind and hard work, and scientific reductionism—of both an ontological and methodological sort—would not only object to the broadness but also suspect the distance between ideal and reality, viewing the former as unreal and imagined, thus irrational.
That a poet can get closer to the ideal world through his work also suggests Sidney is mindful of Plato’s hierarchically and holistically structured world. In a Platonic world, knowledge should serve a vehicle to carry an individual to the greater and higher end that is closer to the most moral and truthful. Everything physical and corporal in a Platonic world, then, aspires to be better and higher, closer to the idea of incorporeal, away from physical. The amorous love wants to be a better love, as it lacks the spiritual unity and truth that is beyond the physical beauty. Most Neoplatonic love sonnets in the sixteenth century thus demonstrate the ladder of love. With their knowledge gained from studies and practices, Sidney indicates, all the sciences and arts should aim for the one single end of well doing, which goes beyond knowing well:

all these are but serving sciences, which, as they have each a private end in themselves, so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistress-knowledge, by the Greeks called architectonike, which stands (as I think) in the knowledge of a man’s self, in the ethnic and politic consideration, with the end of well doing and not of well knowing only—even as the saddler’s next end is to make a good saddle, but his father’s end to serve a nobler faculty, which is horsemanship […] So that, the ending of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills, that most serve to bring forth that, have a most just title to be princes over all the rest.  

Most notably, Sidney insists here that the most moralistic and truthful end for an epistemological journey in all the sciences and arts should be “the end of well doing and not of well knowing only.” Therefore, horsemanship, as Sidney mentions in the beginning of Defence, should be

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60 Sidney, The Defence of Poesy, sig. D1r.
61 Ibid.
more than just an end in itself, for it should provide the knowledge that improves the soldier’s art, which serves the statesman’s art; the end goal is to achieve the most virtuous action. In sonnet 5 of *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney ponders the Neoplatonic doctrines opposed to romantic love: “True, that true beauty virtue is indeed,/ Whereof this beauty can be but a shade,/ Which elements with mortal mixture breed” (lines 9-11). I would argue that the action—ascension—is already part of the Neoplatonic course of knowing, and a great work of art conjoined with knowledge is supposed to help the mind to be moved and delivered upward, closer to “true beauty.” Astrophil does describe Stella’s physical beauty that arouses romantic love as a kind of particular love that is far from true beauty. Pay attention to how Sidney uses a singular demonstrative pronoun “this” to signify the physical proximity and particularity of what it refers to—“this beauty” that Astrophil is fallen in love with is the body, “a shade.” Stella’s physical beauty is merely a shadow—“shade”—of inner virtue that embodies a transcendent and immortal idea of beauty. Sensual love will only carry Astrophil near the shade of her virtue, not her inner virtue veiled and shaded by her physical beauty. Only through the hard labor of transcending physical love and reaching up to the state of spiritual love can Astrophil get closer to her inner virtue and true beauty. The poet writing love sonnets should convert his physical love into spiritual love, and this transformation should occur inside art as well as outside it as the art should create a better, ideal reality, rendering the poem able to transform the reader as well. Knowledge that doesn’t create movement has little significance in the Platonic world order because knowledge itself alone isn’t anywhere close to truth—however, the application of knowledge can create movement closer to ideal beauty and truth. One way to apply such knowledge and create truth that is more virtuous and ideal than reality, for Sidney, is through poetry. A poet’s recreation of nature surpasses its original, as it has been transformed into a
much more improved and specialized form of art, which “offers an alternative, competing image that may come closer to ideas themselves the further it departs from the physical reality of nature,” as Spiller describes it.62

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, Sidney’s persistent call that poetry should inspire action—specific, virtuous action—in the reader has served to make reader-response modes of analysis particularly valuable in discussions of his work, especially since Sidney differentiates poetry from history or philosophy based on this ability. In The Shape of Things Known: Sidney’s Apology in Its Philosophical Tradition, Forrest G. Robinson explains that “The assumption that knowledge should inform action gives rise to the central argument of the Apology—that poetry is the best teacher of that which is most important in action, namely virtue” (98). Robinson examines Sidney’s definition of poetry as a “speaking picture” and claims that poetic imitation reigns supreme precisely because of this ability to offer pictorial depictions of ideas to match the philosopher’s verbal definitions: “Sidney was convinced that moral abstractions have the greatest pedagogical efficacy when they are made visible to the mind’s eye, and not when set forth in verbal definitions” (98-99). Robinson’s argument is effective here, especially for the moral outcome of poetry that Sidney argues for in The Defence of Poesy. The picture and pictorial in verse, after all, strikes the mind visually—as it is visible—while the non-poetic word strikes the mind with ideas; a poet can turn words into ideas, but these are ideas not “visible,” but more like abstractions, words turning into non-concrete concepts only visible to the mind. And that conceptualization striking the mind with the enhanced power of pictorial representation—or literary and figural, that is—will inspire the reader to act upon the moral and virtuous concepts gained from reading poetry. Sidney’s “speaking picture” signifies an artistic

62 Spiller, 32.
expression accomplishing the pictorial representation of ideas, and Robinson’s model manages to reassert a relatively direct model role for mimesis: “poetry is a kind of representational painting in words, an art of language in which there is a premium on vivid descriptions of external nature” (99).

It is interesting to note that Sidney’s idea that words can both create virtuous action and paint an image through a process of abstraction modifies the Neoplatonic dualism that separates and places incorporeal over corporeal reality. Though based on Neoplatonic dualistic psychology, the Neoplatonic values are modified to support Sidney’s definition of poetry as “speaking picture.” Robinson points out Sidney depends “upon the traditions of visual epistemology for much of the theory of the Apology,” but the work contains innovations of his own: “That ideas could be seen was the standard assumption during the sixteenth century, but that they could be seen in a poem was something new” (100). Although Sidney claims that poets “imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God,” Sidney also argues that there should be “a firm distinction between philosophy and theology” (101). The distinction Sidney draws between the realm of nature and divine could have been a “lip service” to the religious misomousoi—as Sidney terms the poetry haters—but one must still wonder how Sidney makes his argument for poetry’s divine capability. What makes Sidney’s argument different from the Neoplatonic beliefs? Robinson describes:

This dichotomy of nature and grace, with the concomitant division between poetry (“popular” philosophy) and theology, stems from an epistemological distinction current among many Renaissance Neoplatonists. The doctrines of religious Hermeticism, received in Florence during the fifteenth century, had strong alliances with the dualistic psychology of Platonism and provided the
highly visualized theory of knowledge which underpins the emblem tradition. During the sixteenth century these doctrines were influential in a variety of different forms. Sidney probably encountered magical Hermeticism in John Dee, who considered himself a Christian *magnus*. [...] Sidney’s translation of Mornay is concrete evidence that he was familiar with visual epistemology in its explicitly philosophical form. (101)

Robinson sees the influence of the protestant theologian Philippe de Mornay on Sidney’s formation of the divine capability of poetry. Mornay’s religious tract—*De la Verite*—was saturated with the Platonic epistemology of “double vision,” which Robinson describes as “one eye looking toward the phenomenal world and the other toward God’s light within the soul” (102). Furthermore, in Mornay’s description, God’s grace is written to be read. Since God is “visibly reflected in nature and . . . the divine image is engraved on the human soul,” even though the essence of God might be impossible for the human mind to grasp, “the eye of the mind has the natural power to see God indirectly reflected in the external universe and within the intellect itself” (Robinson 102). Convinced by Mornay’s theology, Sidney’s belief that poetry provides a visual epistemology similar to the natural vision ensuing from the sight of God’s reflection is an important point that helps us understand why the epistemological visualization is such a unique property of poetry. The reason that engages and inspires the human mind to see the ideas in poetry is something divine, Robinson suggests. Even though such a connection might blur the distinction between the two different realms—the realm of grace and nature—still the human mind uses Reason, which is the gift of God, to understand both realms. Poetry, then, becomes the instrument of God, beyond a pedagogical tool of epistemology but more connected to theology in its way of inspiring the human mind not only to see but more importantly to
appreciate God’s creations and their beauty. Although in my discussion of Sidney, Cavendish, and Finch I will consider this connection of poetic creation and spiritual seeing in more broadly philosophical terms, my later discussion of Milton’s “spiritual sight” will explore the connection in more literal terms.

As I have intimated earlier, the idea that the object of human desire can produce knowledge, which further encourages the human will to love, is one of the main themes of Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*. And Sidney doesn’t stop there, as the sonnet sequence embodies the ladder of love, delivering the poet as well as the reader to the higher sense and understanding of love. This is the most unique and spiritual capability of poetry; poetry can deliver—as it “bringeth things forth”—the image of God. The subtle but crucial significance of this claim is that poetry can imitate the creative act associated with God. Poetry can take us to God through the image it creates, but it is not the image itself that makes poetry godly or close to God; rather, it is the transportive act that turns a verbally rendered image into a mentally apprehended—and theologically indicated—experience of something divine. What is more important is that poetry alone cannot accomplish this transport—it of course requires the participation of audience to fully catalyze and complete the act. The reader of poetry thus becomes a crucial part of poetry’s function of moral integrity and effect.

Providing an insightful reading of Sidney’s moral argument of poetry in *Sidney’s Poetics: Imitating Creation*, Michael Mack connects the poetic re-creative force with divine creative force as he examines Sidney’s claim in *Defence* that “with the force of divine breath” a poet “bringeth things forth.” Mack explains this famous passage by arguing that Sidney “follows the method of his humanist predecessors and begins not with the beginning but with the end of

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63 Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, Sig. C2r.
poetry” (Mack 111). Again, it is important to understand that to bring “things forth” with “the force of divine breath” alludes to the connection between divine creativity and poetic creativity. Sidney also argues in *Defence*: “But they that with quiet judgments will look a little deeper into it, shall find the end and working of it such as, being rightly applied, deserves not to be scourged out of the church of God.” Mack takes this even further, mindful of the religiously-inspired moral attacks Sidney was working against, insisting that it is not just the cause of this creative force that makes poetry moral, but the end of poetry that justifies “the poet not by what he receives but by what he delivers” (111). Therefore, Sidney’s argument is not about the cause of poetry but instead the outcome of poetry, buttressing the moral merit of poetry by transferring attention from its creation to its future outcome, which can be easily outside of poetry: “the mystery of creativity is seen most clearly in what the poem originates in the lives of readers” (Mack 110). The godly work of poetry is not merely contained in the poem itself, then, but is more accurately measured—as it is a transportive act—in the godly turn in the reader’s mind.

Before addressing the more specific concern of how the diverging Biblical hermeneutics of Catholics and Protestants shaped Sidney’s poetics, a few more general observations are in order. Sidney clearly participates in the Christian effort to justify the pagan elements of poetry. When poetry’s pagan origins became the target of religious criticism, the supporters of poetry found it necessary to establish a theological merit of poetry wrung out of an essential inner and inherited moral goodness that was naturally *of* poetry. As Mack points out, the idea that the impact of poetry can do something good to the morals of the reader instead of doing harm was a

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64 As I pointed out earlier, Sidney stresses upon the poet’s ability to “bring [something] forth,” which signifies an element of performance and representation, standing in/behind the idea, in mimetic quality of poetry.
65 Sig. B4v.
carefully constructed argument used not only in poetry’s defense but also in the defense of humanist theology:

   Endeavoring to justify poetry vis-à-vis theology, Boccacio and Petrarch argued that neither the subject matter nor the effect of poetry was opposed to theology. Accordingly, they did not emphasize the creative origin of the poem but rather its not ungodly effect. Poetry’s emulation of theology, deeply embedded in the humanist poetic tradition that Sidney inherited and advanced, emphasizes above all else the good moral effect of the poem. In arguing that poetry, just as with theology, can lead an audience to God, Sidney follows the method of his humanist predecessors and begins not with the beginning but with the end of poetry.  

As Mack further points out, both Boccaccio and Petrarch believed that poetry’s pagan origin or its “ungodly effect” had to be eclipsed by the moral effect of the poem. Thus, Boccaccio finds the teleological Christian moralistic message to be “hidden in pagan mythology” while Petrarch “structures his oration as a sermon, while filling it with quotations not from the Bible but from Virgil and other classical sources” (111). Comparing “poetry to theology” is a typical method humanists used to “provide that neither the subject matter nor the effect of poetry was immoral” (111).

   To this end, Sidney relentlessly pushes the faultless moral grounding of his poem’s subject. Falling in love is, according to Sidney’s love sonnets and in the Neoplatonist sense, a property of intelligence, action propelled by a most virtuous “learned” mind that sees true beauty and falls in love with the most virtuous; as Sidney explains in Sonnet 16 of Astrophil and Stella:

   66 Mack 111.
Mine eyes (shall I say curst or blest?) beheld
Stella; now she is nam’d, need more be said?
In her sight I a lesson new have spell’d,
I now have learn’d Love right, and learn’d even so,
As who by being poisoned doth poison know. (lines 10-14)

The kind of love that a learned Astrophil says that he has found is indeed visually oriented, though the sight of Stella that fills him with “the restless fire” is the opposite of what Astrophil describes as the physical, obvious beauty that attracts the physical eye first but doesn’t fully satisfy his desire. Astrophil confesses that he was “apt to like” obvious “beauties” that “were of many carats fine” (line 1-2). A learned man not only being taught and inspired by poetry but most importantly also being able to create his own poetry, Astrophil realizes that the love he used to feel is neither real nor good—Astrophil doesn’t have “those restless flames in [him]” though he used to think that he “was full of thee” (5). Willing to better himself and his poetic invention, Astrophil desires something more virtuous than a mere physical beauty, “which others said did make their souls to pine” (6). To be exact, Astrophil is in the state of wanting, unsatisfied with the accessible and obvious beauty—“many carats fine”—and the shallow inspirations it incites. Learning what true love is, simply put, is a challenging lesson because Astrophil must contemplate and “pine” in order to attain it. It is also equally important that “Love right” that Astrophil espouses is a kind of love that “others” have experienced—“which others said” that it made “their souls pine”—but Astrophil hasn’t until he meets and falls in love with Stella. The poet starts his artistic invention “in her sight,” which the poet “a lesson new have spell’d” (12). The right kind of love Astrophil desires is life changing, as its lessons can be fatal: “I now have learn’d Love right, and learn’d even so./ As who by being poisoned doth
poison know” (13-14). The Neoplatonic moral ground and convention of virtuous love teaches the poet how to be honorable and heroic through unrequited love.

One senses in Sidney the same philosophy that led Cavendish to criticize Robert Hooke’s “passive” method of recording scientific truth in Micrographia, the method that ignored the role of human imagination and ostensibly possessed the ability to observe and record—as in his drawing of the eye of a fly—an accurate and directly representational “copy” of material phenomena. Spiller emphasizes that Sidney viewed the poet as “maker,” a term that deflects attention from the artifact produced—the poem—and recenters it on poetry as an act producing knowledge. In this definition, Sidney reverses modern views of the “sciences,” putting poetry above the others because it produces truth where the others merely counterfeit it; the poet “doth grow in effect another nature,” whereas the scientist—as Hooke demonstrates—is limited by an allegiance to the project of supposed representational fidelity. Spiller sums up Sidney’s position nicely: “poetry makes while other sciences only copy” (38).

Although “theology” up till this point in my discussion has often been an unsatisfyingly undifferentiated term, in fact the specific currents of theological thought contesting for intellectual space in Sidney’s England—and Europe as a whole—play a fascinating role in Sidney’s poetics and open up very fertile comparisons with later subjects in my study. As Timothy Rosendale argues in the introduction to Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England, historiographical studies of the English Reformation have swung wildly between two competing poles, one which believes that “England was a fertile seedbed for reform, and that Protestant ideas took root quickly, deeply, and widely,” the other that “the late-medieval Church was vitally alive, foundational to English culture, and beloved by the vast majority of English people, who found its ritual, doctrine, and institutional presence to be
profoundly satisfying.” Much is at stake for literary studies in reconciling the two views, the former elevating the “word” to almost iconic status in its emphasis on a hermeneutics of literal representation and the latter retaining a more richly figural conception of language in which words combine to form images, which in turn lead the reader from the literal to the Ideal. Partly because contemporary culture celebrates the literal—especially in the triumphal and de-mystifying claims of technology and science—it is easy to mistake the path by which we got here as a steady progression, a view which, among other things, as Rosendale also points out, inscribes contemporary prejudices into literary studies and almost completely removes religion from the process. Also, however, such a view flattens “Protestantism” to a homogenous force bearing few distinguishing marks even between the Continent and England. For example, despite the undeniable insights Peter Harrison shares in his *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*—a work that has influenced me greatly in other areas of my study—Harrison tends to view, as he describes it, an “innovative. . .insistence on the priority of the literal sense” as the earliest central and distinguishing tenet of a seemingly undifferentiated Reformed and Anglican Protestantism. Certainly, all Protestants were united against the totalizing claims of Rome, but even in England neither side attained permanent ascendancy:

It is no surprise that the opposing parties in the Civil War defined themselves centrally in terms of textual affiliation. In fact, it might be useful to rethink the Civil War as less a matter of old dichotomies of Crown/ Parliament or court/country and more a conflict between the competing social, religious, and political visions of a Bible party and a Prayerbook party.

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67 Timothy Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England*, 2. Rosendale concludes from the persistence of this debate that “each side is in some important sense right” (2).
68 Harrison 109.
In the near-century span between the drafting of the Book of Common Prayer in 1549 and the start of the War, the theological debate surrounding its centralized authorizing of a more figural reading of scripture, as opposed to a radically individualistic and literal one, helps us understand a wide assortment of thinkers and writers who were not explicitly connected to religious writing. Chief among these is Sidney, who, in *The Defence of Poesy*, demonstrates a clear awareness of the competing hermeneutic claims established within competing methodologies of biblical exegesis in his day. The reader must avoid, however, a simple diagrammatic representation of figurality versus literality that ascribes one or the other as an emblem of a particular religious group and equates the increase of one as necessarily effecting the decrease of the other. In fact, both “Protestant” and “Catholic” theologies exhibited degrees of both, particularly in their conception of the Eucharist. Here, indeed, the two sides flip, which further complicates the conceptual model necessary to make sense of the interaction of figurality and Renaissance literary production. In order to insist on the doctrine of transubstantiation, where the bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Christ, the Catholic church forwarded a completely literal reading of the ceremony and the scriptural event behind it. Protestants, however, replaced the literal transformation with a symbolic act where the bread and wine *represented* the body and blood of Christ, either retaining a “real presence” as in Calvin or becoming entirely symbolic as in Zwingli. One thing that is certain is that the consistent discourse surrounding the need to distinguish between competing modes of representation in the Eucharist fostered valuable conversations about signifiers and how they signified both in the Renaissance and in contemporary literary study.

To be perfectly clear about the basis for my argument, I do believe that the rise of Protestantism led to a changed relationship between reader and text--and observer and object—
that stressed increasing levels of literalness. According to Harrison, the emerging Protestant hermeneutics involved a “collapse of the allegorical interpretation of texts, for a denial of the legitimacy of allegory is in essence a denial of the capacity of things to act as signs.”

In one sense, the *Book of Common Prayer* (hereafter, BCP) was incredibly literal, for the “Black Rubric,” added to 1552 Prayer Book during printing, omitted in 1559, then restored in 1662, advises that despite kneeling during communion, “that is not meant thereby, that any adoration is done, or ought to be done, either unto the Sacramental bread or wine there bodily received, or unto any real or essential presence there being of Christ’s natural flesh and blood. For as concerning the sacramental bread and wine, they remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored, for that were Idolatry to be abhorred of all faithful Christians. And as concerning the natural body and blood of our Saviour Christ, they are in heaven and not here.”

The peculiar publication history of this passage—briefly appearing, then disappearing, then reappearing (with changes) 100 years later—demonstrates an important aspect of the Anglican communion; the lack of a really specific conception of the Eucharist, outside of the brief appearance of the Black Rubric, intentionally left the representational nature of the sacramental bread and wine open for interpretation for each participant.

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70 Harrison 4.
72 Rosendale explains that Sidney tried to “rebut conservative and skeptical criticism of representation itself” by “level[ing] a charge of interpretive naïveté (or stupidity) by invoking the child topos”—to Sidney, Rosendale argues, such criticism collapses “signifier and signified in a regressive refusal of figurality” (143-44). This cynical approach to the charge put against literary deceit actually “played an important role in the earlier theological debates” (144). Rosendale provides an example of martyr John Frith, who “had adopted a similar strategy to refute those who supported the Catholic reading of the sacrament as the literal body and blood of Christ” (144). This is something that Rosendale finds significant to the study of Sidney’s poetry, which, to repeat my earlier point, completely contrasts with the rigidly literal culmination of the ceremony in the Catholic mass, about which martyr John Frith had complained fifty years before Sidney: “there is no man so childlike, but that he knoweth that the figure of the thing is not the thing itself” (144).
Just as the symbolic representation of Christ’s body and blood celebrated during each service accomplished a physical lifting up of the participant to heaven through the hermeneutic negotiation between representation and the reality of Christ’s power and presence in heaven, so too did poetry possess the same power to lead the reader to a greater awareness of his erected wit. Rosendale describes: “the English Reformation (and especially the BCP) had replaced a belief in the immanent sacramental presence of God himself with a newly stressed faith in the power of representations and their faithful interpretation to define, express, and transform our relation to the divine.”\(^73\) Once the special interpretive challenges of the Protestant Communion—especially as presented in the BCP—are considered, Sidney’s poetics correctly emerge as less of a “middle ground” between Catholic and Protestant hermeneutics and more the result of a very astute awareness of the philosophical and theological ramifications of an efficacious Eucharist that involved, in some fashion or other, merely a representation of Christ. I argued earlier that Sidney found history and philosophy less useful than poetry because they are tied to “what is,” largely describing things as they actually are, whereas the poet has access to truths far greater than mere recapitulations of past events or universal principles. That is only part of the story, however; Sidney’s theological vision permeated all aspects of his writing, so that learning had but one goal: “This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clay lodgings, can be capable of.”\(^74\)

\(^{73}\) Rosendale 135. Rosendale specifically describes the figural representative act required of each Eucharistic participant as a model leading Sidney to his belief that poetry possesses the power to physically change its reader. Furthermore, Rosendale insists, “for Sidney, correctly interpreted poetic representations have the decidedly theological power to elevate and transform the individual” (136).

Learning is a spiritual, transformative experience for both the poet and the reader, and Sidney believes poetry offers the most apt “learning” experience, better than history or philosophy, through its “purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit.”

Rosendale’s analysis leads us to a more sensitive and nuanced awareness of how words and representation function in Sidney’s creative process. Lamenting “O absent presence, Stella is not here,” the poet opens the Sonnet 106 from *Astrophil and Stella*. Though briefly suspended by the instant release of the long diphthong sound of “O,” the deliverance of Stella’s name brings the poem back to the pronounced “absent” subject again, thus subverting the poet’s description of “absent” Stella by making the description obsolete. Although the poet says she is “not here” and is an “absent presence” on top of his emphatic, echoing “O” that opens the line, this sonnet immediately brings itself to the reason why the poet must write, and most importantly, what the poet is writing about (Sonnet 106, line 1). As soon as the poet says that Stella is not here, Stella shows back up, in our—the readers’—mind as well as in the line even though the poet exclaims out loud that she is missing. The poet cannot seem to match what he says with what happens with his words—what he says about his creation doesn’t reflect what he ends up creating.

Perhaps it is too obvious to suggest that writing poetry is what is on the poet’s mind in Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, but the more significant point I am trying to make here that frequently gets ignored is that the poet cannot trust the means of his own art because she—the object of his attention—constantly flees away from him; her “figured forth” representation through poetry is restlessly transforming and moving, as long as she is being discussed through poetic language. And I might add here that if Stella were the subject of a scientist’s examination with a magnifying glass or microscope, she would be examined and discussed in parts, shapes,
functions, etc., as if she were a material. I would suggest that Sidney instructs us that that kind of looking in and projecting—piercing and magnifying—is indeed a limited way of representing or articulating any subject because all it does is make it easy for us to see additional matter, which will still have to be studied through the human imagination and intelligence. Furthermore, the subject of writing poetry is undoubtedly in question from the very beginning of the sonnet sequence, whereas the voice of a scientist describing scientific inquiry, such as examining a fruit fly or looking at stars, would proceed in the opposite direction, always towards certainty and authority. Writing—more specifically, writing good poetry—is compared to a figure of imperviousness, inaccessibility, and distance. She is both literally and figuratively opaque as the poet describes how she is often slipping away and hence absent in words and on the page. She appears to be associated with an abundance of ideas—but these ideas keep reminding the poet of her absence, further affirming her inaccessibility as the beloved. Unfortunately, for the poet, Stella signifies the uncertainty and inevitable hardship of writing poetry. The image of the poet’s struggle with writing good poetry mirrors the image of an unobtainable Stella, as she can be present only as a verbal referent, “O absent presence, Stella.” When Stella is figured forth through comparisons, she becomes the uttered, written, and read figure, but still not the real Stella. The mind begins to negotiate with her physical absence by uttering her name or writing her name or erasing it, as the poet does in the beginning of the sonnet sequence.

Stella must remain absent and distant from the poet so that he can figure her absence out and articulate her absence forth. The presence of his words takes the place of her absence, as is

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75 Of course, no microscope or magnifying glasses were big enough to capture her entire body or pin her down like an insect, which is why Margaret Cavendish ridicules the limited use of the microscope in *The Blazing World.*

76 I deliberately cut off the last three words in the line 1 of Sonnet 106 to show the reader how the entire line can be read as various figurative articulations of Stella—the ever hollowing and echoing “O,” the absent presence, or “not here.”
plainly shown in Sonnet 106. To say that the distance between the signified and the signifier is inevitable is an understatement—this distance is paramount for the art to be kinetic and embody transformation. This word-to-action transformation is the inspiration for the kind of Neoplatonic instructive and transformative learning that Rosendale describes in his book; if teaching the pupils how to read the Bible will train the entire nation to become God’s chosen blessed kingdom, then it does prove “England’s fundamental sense of identity as a nation at worship”:

Both the Prayerbook Eucharist and the Sidneian poetic insist on the absolutely critical centrality of figural understanding as a means of spanning the gap between real and ideal, earth and heaven. Both of these forms of truth must be accessed and understood in terms of signification, not absolute identity; in other words, both insist on a conscious engagement with systems of signs that are not (and cannot be) identical to their referents. And both view this mode of interpretation as one with profound transformative potential, which offers the possibility (in differing degrees, of course) of negating the nasty effects of sin itself.

The reformist church hoped to re-design and re-birth the nation as it trained its faithful Christians to plough through the veiled metaphors and symbols to find the signified, God. Sidney’s example suggests that the signified referent should remain veiled and distanced away from the signifying signs. As Rosendale asserts above, “the gap between real and ideal, earth and heaven” must remain and more importantly be kept far enough away for a more transformative experience of “spanning” to take place. This is why “absolute identity” won’t do--God’s true meanings were to be earned through diligent, hard work, through “a conscious engagement with systems of signs that are not (and cannot be) identical to their referents.” This antithetical, paradoxical distance

77 Rosendale 114 and 145.
that Rosendale calls “the gap between real and ideal, earth and heaven” is, however, paramount in creating the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the word and the message, and this construction also resonates with the antithetical relationship between the poet and his art.  

Is it impossible for the poet to create poetry and make his poetry love him back simultaneously? This is a familiar dilemma—a familiar synopsis of those popular parables between the subject and the subjected, the thesis and the antithesis, the lover and the loved, the parent and the child, and the creators and the creatures, or finally, the God and His men. God’s true message has to be earned—through ploughing, working through bad seasons, sorting good from bad seeds, recognizing patterns and significance transcending the fidelity of accurate physical description or narrative:

Much of Christ’s teaching, Sidney observes, is in the form of self-consciously fictional parables, which should not be mistaken for historical accounts (this would cripple their moral significance by limiting them to the amoral realm of mere events); these poetic teachings carry truth by representing and embodying moral ideas, which are both created and received through the “imaginative and judging power.” Sidney implies that Christ, in his role as teacher, deliberately chose the role of poet over those of historian and philosopher. The “self-consciously fictional” qualities of parables resemble the often incredibly self-conscious and self-antagonizing characteristics portrayed in Sidney’s Astrophil and Stella. Without working through “other’s leaves” and studying “Inventions,” the poet will never gain Stella’s affection: “I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,/ Studying inventions fine, her

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78 Rosendale 145.
79 Rosendale 139.
wits to entertain,/ Oft turning others’ leaves, to see if thence would flow/ Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain” (lines 5-8). Most parables and biblical allegorical narratives do appear constructed specifically to present layered meanings, with realism or accurate mimesis always a secondary concern—if at all—and present guides that must be intuitively interpreted and figured forth if they are to serve their intended purpose. For example, the children in a narrative might despise and blame their creators for bringing them to the imperfect, sinful, or painful conditions they are in, feeling as if these conditions are interminable; unlike their creators, the children are still too mercurial and malleable to see that time is constant and fleeting as promised, that they are already anticipating in the course of their universe’s existing and changing, that this fall—both literally and figuratively of course—is necessary for their growth, and that at some point during this fall they are transported to a more ontologically stable ground.

Stella then embodies the fissure in the poet’s wounded heart, or “the gap between real and ideal, earth and heaven.” But let us not forget, the figurative language describing her absence—the very sign, the very word that embodies her absence, “Stella”—is inaugurated and uttered out loud because of the emotional rupture induced by Stella’s inaccessibility. No “figured forth” or “ideal” signs of Stella exist unless the signified, the subjected, the longed after “real” object is “not here.” Stella, the signified, should not be here/there together with the signifiers that describe her—“O absent presence, Stella is not here.” Yet Rosendale argues, just as the diligent and faithful followers will read and study the Book of Common Prayer and search for the true meaning of God, a great poet will not give up his process of “figuring forth” his beloved, his quest to articulate truth in poetic representations that offer many more truths.

It is “the transforming power of the figurative,” upon which Sidney anchors and builds his argument that poetry functions just as effectively in its instructive mission as parables, and,
furthermore, “Sidney adduces no less a fellow poet and moral instructor than Christ himself.”

Indeed, Sidney observes God’s word as the inspired word of poetry, and even more, the divine inspiration for building a nation’s identity in *The Defence of Poesy*:

> Since then poetrie is of all humane learning the most ancient, & of most fatherly antiquitie, as from whence other learnings have taken their beginnings, since it is so universal that no learned nation doth despise it, nor barbarous nation is without it: since both Roman and Greek gave divine names unto it: the one of “prophesying,” the other of “making.” And that indeed, that name of “making” is fit for him, considering that whereas other arts retain themselves within their subject, and receive as it were, their beeing from it, the poet onely brings his own stuffe, and doeth not learne a conceite out of a matter, but makes matter for a conceite.

If Christ has “vouchsafed to use the flowers of [poetry],” poetic language using metaphors and symbols may generate many more “figured forth” images that are “out of a matter,” far away from “uncleanness.” Sidney of course has to defend poetry’s language from the sinful, fallen human reality, hence the argument that poetry is “vouchsafed” by Christ—since Christ used it, and because the parables use poetic metaphors and symbols, poetry is expiated and excused from being the fruit of man’s fallen will and instinct, instead becoming one of the means for the fallen to find God’s truth. Furthermore, as Sidney argues for poetry’s virtuous educational merit, above and in contrast to history and philosophy, he points out poetry’s kinetic and malleable quality that makes poetry more adaptable to the change of time and space and thus able to deliver the

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80 Rosendale 139. Also, Sidney indeed wrote in *The Defence of Poesy*: “since the Holy Scripture, wherein there is no uncleanness, has whole parts in it poetical, and that even our Savior Christ vouchsafed to use the flowers of it.”

knowledge that is more fit to teach what is more timelessly virtuous. Poetry is the means not only to teach virtuous actions but also inspire the reader to act virtuously by providing the physical place—or site—for the readers to plough through the veiled metaphors by persistent and intelligent reading.

Poetry is begotten and constituted under a paradox demanding that, to exist, it must keep the distance between the Ideal and real. For a poet, “figuring forth” is an obstinately lonesome process, but it is this self-doubting and effacing process that enables the poet to keep striving for the poetic greatness that might also help him win Stella’s love. That returning love is, after all, the end goal for Astrophil; the creator wants his audience to appreciate his creation at the end of his or her generative course. That generative course cannot exist without the heartbreaking fissure between Astrophil and Stella, or the signifier and signified in the representation begotten by the figurative language. The writer always watches his creations departing, already moving into the distance, waving backwards. Sidney writes in Sonnet 106: “O absent presence, Stella is not here:/ False flattering hope, that with so fair a face/ Bare me in hand, that in this orphan place/ Stella, I say my Stella, should appear.” All the poet can do is keep calling, keep writing, with “False flattering Hope” that Stella will return, but this hope is already conditioned with a qualifier—“false”—that reminds the poet about the figurative assurance that Stella “is not here,” the proof of Stella’s “absent presence” on the paper, “this orphan place.” In other words, poetry, if truly good, can make Stella appear. Is Astrophil comparing poetry to alchemy?

82 I reserved the following lines from the block quotation above to persuade the point about the interchangeability and malleability of poetry’s figurative language. Sidney also writes in Defense: “since neither his description nor his end contains any evil, the thing described cannot be evil; since his effects be so good as to teach goodness, and delight the learners of it; since therein—namely in moral doctrine, the chief of all knowledges—he doth not only far pass the historian, but for instructing is well nigh comparable to the philosopher, and for moving leaves him behind him” (sig. G2r).
83 Sidney, Astrophil and Stella, Sonnet 106, lines 1-4.
84 Sonnet 106, lines 1-2.
If the absence of Stella is what the poet is constantly left with—“with so fair a face/ Bare me in hand, that in this orphan place”—and that “absence” embodies the proof of the poet’s heartbreaking experience of writing/begetting, then it is her absence that resolutely lead us to a poetic “figuring forth.” As Rosendale also writes: “Given poetry’s moral goals, this ‘figuring forth’ carries an important double (one might even say sacramental) sense in Sidney’s argument: morality and virtue are figured forth not only in the fictional text but in turn, in the attentive reader as well.”85 This is the giving, transformative power, and even more specifically, the moral practicality of poetry that is capable of mutability; good metaphors can make something appear and reappear, turn words into a moving picture as they endow life “to lifeless things in his well liked similes,” move someone’s mind so they will fall in love, or inspire someone to learn how to decipher metaphors and become better readers of the world and its representations.86 Sidney’s “purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning” cannot occur without the antithetical antagonizing course of self-reflection and effacement, which makes the poetry writing and poetry reading into a transformative experience, “a discourse of imagination and self-improvement, capable of mitigating to some degree our sinful condition and leading us on toward the good.”87 Such metamorphosis comes from a kind of self-reflective learning initiated by looking inwardly and fueled by self-purification, -annihilation, and -reformation, which, according to Sidney, cannot occur without “the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher’s book.”

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85 Rosendale 139.
86 Aristotle, On Rhetoric, 248. Also, as I explained in the Introduction to the dissertation, metaphors begin with comparison and contrast of two things, and without the difference and the scale to measure these differences, we would have a very limited way of representing the world.
87 Sidney, The Defence of Poesy, sig.C4v; Rosendale 137.
The reductionism at the heart of scientific observation undermines the kind of poetic observation that moves from universals and “fore-conceits” to specific representations wrought by “the inward light” and, furthermore, leads to a virtually complete dismissal of the creative and transformative power of metaphor andfigural representation. The remainder of my study will examine the conflict between the two opposing modes of observation—inward versus outward sight—and representation—figural versus literal. As I discussed earlier, the next chapter on Cavendish and Hooke will deal with these contrasts explicitly within the context of an emerging consensus that scientific observation involved close observation and literal representation. The debate swirling around the new science, as I will show, ensured that the concerns voiced by Sidney retained their power and cultural currency long after his death.

3 CHAPTER 3: Cavendish’s “Subtle Observations” and Hooke’s “Neer” Observations

By the means of telescopes, there is nothing so far distant but maybe represented to our view; and by the help of Microscopes, there is nothing so small, as to escape our inquiry; hence there is a new visible World discovered to the understanding. By this means the Heavens are open’d, and a vast number of new Stars, and new Motions, and new Productions appear in them, to which all the antient Astromers were utterly Strangers. By this the Earth it self, which lyes so neer us, under our feet, shews quite a new thing to us, and in every little particle of its matter, we now behold almost as great a variety of Creatures, as we were able before to reckon up in the whole Universe it self.  

And though they had no knowledge of the Load-stone, or Needle, or pendulous Watches, yet (which was as serviceable to them) they had subtile observations, and great practice;  

In this chapter I will examine Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia* and Margaret Cavendish’s strenuous objections to Hooke’s work as expressed in her *The Description of A New World, Called The Blazing World* and *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. I will argue that

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89 Margaret Cavendish, *The Description of A New World, Called The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley, 128.
Cavendish, in a manner much like that of Sidney that I discussed in the preceding chapter, espouses the power of imagination as a tool for spiritual seeing. Furthermore, Cavendish believed the poetic imagination and faculties such as “Fancy” and “Fiction” able to negate the threat of modern science, with what she viewed as its false claims of accuracy and proximity to truth. Cavendish’s claim for “subtile observations” explicitly collides with Hooke’s praise of “neer” observation; in her poem “It Is Hard to Believe, that there are worlds in this world,” which I will examine later in this chapter, Cavendish rejects Hooke’s claim for the subtlety of the microscopic view. In this poem she points out that Hooke’s microscopic view hinges on the certainty and security of the object under the microscope, but since “Nothing [is] so hard in Nature,” as Cavendish argues in the poem, Hooke’s microscopic observation cannot grasp the mutability and uncertainty in Nature.90

For many things our sense dull may scape,
For sense is grosse, not every thing can shape.
So in this World another world may bee,
That we do neither touch, tast, smell, heare, see.
What Eye so cleere is, yet did ever see
Those little Hookes, that in the Load-stone bee,
Which draw hard iron?

As I will show later, Cavendish debunks Hooke’s claim for “subtlety” in microscopic viewing by arguing what a true subtle observation entails. Hooke’s advocacy for proximity in scientific observation merely offers, in the passage above, a magnified “shape” but fails to work with the

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90 Cavendish, Poems, and fancies, “It is hard to believe, that there are Worlds in this World.” sig. G2r-G2v. In the poem, Cavendish writes: “Nothing so hard in Nature, as Faith is./ For to believe Impossibilities” (lines 1-2).
observer’s senses to deliver “subtile observations” that could lead the observers to a greater truth and conceptual clarity.  

Cavendish (1623-1673) lived in a time of great change, none so much as in the field of science. Cavendish wrote and published thirteen books during her lifetime, and in most of her works, whether fiction, plays, poetry, or prose, she continually provides her philosophical discourse on the advent of early modern science. New technologies were redefining the role of the “scientist” and would soon send the grand tradition of the “natural philosopher” to the brink of extinction. Cavendish’s *The Description of A New World, Called The Blazing World* was first published in 1666 and then in 1668 as a companion text to her *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, and in both *The Blazing World* and *Observations*, Cavendish is not at all timid to express her judgment against early modern science. In *Observations*, she subverts the efficacy of magnifying glasses as articulated by Robert Hooke in *Micrographia* (1665). She acknowledges Hooke’s work as “the art of Micrography,” rather than calling it the science of micrography, to express her unequivocal doubt for the efficacy of micrography: “I am confident, that this same art, with all its instruments, is not able to discover the interior natural motions of any part or creature of nature.”  

Significantly, Cavendish willfully defines micrography as art. By identifying micrography as art, not science, she subtly draws attention to the contrasting definition and use of the two words. According to OED, the word “art” was then defined as more of a practical skill with less of the denotation of creativity that is more commonly used today: “a practical application of knowledge” and “something which can be achieved or understood by the employment of skill and knowledge” (OED, art, n., 3.a). Especially in its early use, the word

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“art” also meant “a body or system of rules serving to facilitate the carrying out of certain principles” (art, n., 3.a). Meanwhile, “science” signifies “the state or fact of knowing; knowledge or cognizance of something; knowledge as a personal attribute” (science, n., 1.a). In her discussion of Hooke’s microscopy, Cavendish clearly points out the discrepancy between the skill of looking in closely—microscopically—and what can be defined as science or knowledge.

In fact, the two terms are often juxtaposed against each other to suggest the differences between art as the vehicle of knowledge and science as the knowledge itself. When “science” is “paired and contrasted with art,” explains OED, it signifies “a discipline, field of study, or activity concerned with theory rather than method, or requiring the knowledge and systematic application of principles, rather than relying on traditional rules, acquired skill, or intuition” (science, n., 4.a). On the other hand, “art” signifies “a practical application of knowledge; (hence) something which can be achieved or understood by the employment of skill and knowledge” (art, n., 3.a). The etymological background of the two words further reveals the history of the contrasting definitions behind them: “ultimately, this distinction [between science and art] is informed by that in ancient Greek between ἐπιστήμη (episteme n.) and τέχνη (techne n.)” and also “reflected by a similar distinction in classical Latin between scientia and ars [art n.1]” (OED, science, n., etymology). The word “episteme” comes from “the ancient Greek ἐπιστήμη, knowledge, understanding, skill, scientific knowledge (ἐπιστάναι to know, understand; probably, ἐπι- epi- prefix + ἰστάναι to stand and -μη, suffix forming nouns)” (episteme, n., etymology). In addition, “techne” comes from the ancient Greek τέχνη, meaning art, thus referring to “an art, skill, or craft; a technique, principle, or method by which something is

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93 The word “science” in Cavendish’s time differs from the way most people use the word now as a subject of study or examination—such as natural science—to mean “the intellectual and practical activity encompassing those branches of study that relate to the phenomena of the physical universe and their laws, sometimes with implied exclusion of pure mathematics” (science, n., OED 5.b).
achieved or created” as well as “a product of [art], a work of art” (techne, n., etymology).

Cavendish claims that, as a science, Hooke’s microscopic experiment fails to fully reveal the intrinsic motions and designs of nature. Hooke identifies his experiment with microscopy as “philosophy” more than art, and he proudly announces the benefits of his optic device:

And I do not only propose this kind of Experimental philosophy as a matter of high rapture and delight of the mind, but even as a material and sensible pleasure. So vast is the variety of objects which will come under their inspections, so many different ways there are of handling them, so great is the satisfaction of finding out new things, that I dare compare the contentment which they will enjoy, not only to that of contemplation, but even to that which most men prefer of the very senses themselves.\(^9^4\)

Hooke associates his experiment with “experimental philosophy” to present microscopy as an instrument of knowledge, a science.\(^9^5\) However, Cavendish not only believes Hooke’s experiment fails to provide “a matter of high rapture and delight of the mind” as Hooke claims above, but she also points out that Hooke’s *Micrographia* also misleads the public, which therefore makes his method not just crafty skill but “art” that is immoral: “[T]his art has intoxicated so many men’s brains, and wholly employed their thoughts and bodily actions about phænomena, or the exterior figures of objects, as all better arts and studies are laid aside; nay, those are not as earnest and active in such employments as they are; by many of them, accounted unprofitable subjects to the commonwealth of learning.”\(^9^6\) It is hard to ignore the underlying

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\(^9^5\) By “philosophy” Hooke means the following OED definition: “knowledge, learning, scholarship; a body of knowledge; spec. advanced knowledge or learning, to which the study of the seven liberal arts was regarded as preliminary in medieval universities” (OED, philosophy, n., 1).

similarity between the poetry haters’ moral attack on poetry, as described in the previous chapter, and Cavendish’s criticism against Hooke’s “art.” However, note that she distinguishes art as skill from fancy and poetic imagination. Furthermore, Cavendish targets Hooke’s claim of the microscope as being able to deliver truth about nature. She believes that the outcome of Hooke’s experiment rather obstructs obtaining truth, because Hooke fails to establish a single unitary view of his microscopic subject; as Cavendish asserts: “[A]rtists [she would mean Hooke here] do confess themselves, that flies, and the like, will appear of several figures or shapes, according to the several reflexions, refractions, mediums and positions of several lights.”

Moreover, the extrinsic and artificial component of Hooke’s method and technology “doth more easily alter [nature] than inform” the observer about nature, and even misinforms or misrepresents: “that natural figure may be presented in as monstrous a shape, as it may appear misshapen rather than neutral.” Cavendish’s mordant criticism against Hooke’s experiment in Observations echoes Stephen Gosson’s accusation against poetry; Hooke’s art is nothing more than sensationalism to Cavendish, and she believes Hooke and his publication prove to be morally dissolute and academically incompetent: micrography “intoxicate[s]” its audience with “thoughts and bodily actions about phenomena,” but yields no tangible facts about the interior figures or functions of the object of observation so that it fails to profit “the commonwealth of learning.” Furthermore, we can also see how her criticism against the moral letdown of Hooke’s study aligns with

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97 Cavendish, Observations, 51. Cavendish further comments on Hooke’s argument that microscopy can be useful in uncovering the world unseen and lead us to more truth about the world as she argues his claim tenuous and inflated. According to Cavendish, Hooke even confesses in the Preface in Micrographia that “there is much more difficulty to discover the true shape, than of those visible to the naked eye, the same object seeming quite differing, in one position to the light, from what it really is, and maybe discovered in another” (sig.F2v).

98 Cavendish, Observations, 50. Both in Observations and her poem “It is hard to believe” Cavendish makes an effort to repeat the word “shape” to point out that the microscopic view of nature would merely generate a meaningless “shape” of magnified and mutated—not “neutral”—figures from nature; alienated from the established values of size and scale, these figures appear mis-shaped and monstrous “shapes.”

99 Cavendish, Observations, 51.
Sidney’s defense of poetry. Poetry must defend its unique purpose and advantage against the other ways of seeing and comprehending the world. Though she confronts modern science, as opposed the fervent moral and religious believer Stephen Gosson’s attack on poetry confronted by Sidney, both Cavendish and Sidney deal with the antithetical claims made against one of the oldest and most established methods of representing and understanding the world—poetry—and the power of poetic imagination that it entails. Most importantly, both Cavendish and Sidney discuss the moral benefit—or the lack thereof—and the social delight that poetic imagination brings into the “commonwealth of learning.”

In contrast, Hooke is confident that his optic device can enable the observer to get “neer” to the object of his or her observation, “the earth itself, which lyes so neer us.” Hooke claims that a microscopic view can provide a new, enhanced view of nature that is proximate enough to nature that it can even deliver greater truth than other methods of observation can accomplish, and he also suggests that looking at the smallest details of nature might help us grasp a vast insight into God’s grandeur. Hooke sees nature as a text waiting to be unveiled and read more closely without “all the uncertainty, and mistakes of humane actions, [that] proceed either from the narrowness and wandering of our senses, from the slipperiness or delusion of our memory” so that it can reveal more profound intentions and designs of God’s creativity. Yet for Cavendish an advanced view of nature requires more than mechanically enhanced sight. In her introduction to The Blazing World, she states that even philosophers “may err in searching and requiring after the Causes of Natural Effects, and many times embrace falsehoods for Truths.”

100 “Learning” is paramount in Renaissance discussion of knowledge and art. Representation of the world must contribute something valid and valuable to our comprehension about the world, so that this learning not only improves our corporeal state but also helps us ascend closer to celestial perfection. As I discussed in the previous chapter on Sidney, learning is a spiritually transformative and kinetic experience—“purifying wit, the enriching of memory, enabling judgment, and enlarging of conceit”—for both the poet and the reader.


102 Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia, sig. A2r.
and that sometimes human beings are so eager to find the truth that they may still pursue “the error [that] proceeds from the different motions of Reason.”\textsuperscript{103} Modern science claims that it can capture and control nature by “the real, the mechanical, the experimental philosophy, which has this advantage over the philosophy of discourse and disputation,” and Hooke defines such science as “the remedies” for “the dangers in the process of humane reason” in his preface to Micrographia.\textsuperscript{104} For Hooke, “science” involved minute scrutiny and much repetition, so that larger systems of knowledge were constructed from the ground up, each step based upon quantifiable and replicable observations. However, Hooke’s claim of modern science’s certainty, especially as opposed to “the philosophy of discourse and disputation,” alarms Cavendish:

“[S]ince there is but one Truth in Nature, all those that hit not this Truth, do err, some more, some less; for though some may come nearer the mark then others, which makes their Opinions seem more probable and rational then others; yet as long as they swerve from this onely Truth, they are in the wrong.”\textsuperscript{105} On the other hand, “Fictions,” Cavendish explains, “are an issue of mans Fancy, framed in his own mind, according as he pleases, without regard, whether the thing, he fancies, be really existent without his mind or not.”\textsuperscript{106} In other words, since “Fictions” don’t claim to deliver the truth, only duplicating or manipulating the truth, the poetic devices or faculties such as Fancy, Fictions, or poetic imagination do not deceive.

It might help to trace out the general outlines of both sides of the debate. Hooke was born at Freshwater in 1635 and was educated at Westminster School, followed by Christ Church, Oxford, from which he received his degree of M.A. in 1663. During his time at Oxford he

\textsuperscript{103} Margaret Cavendish, To the Reader, The Description of a New World, called The Blazing World, ed. Kate Lilley, 123.
\textsuperscript{104} Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia, sig. A2r.
\textsuperscript{105} Cavendish, To the Reader, The Blazing World, 123.
\textsuperscript{106} Cavendish, To the Reader, The Blazing World, 123.
became involved with modern science while also making contacts with John Wilkins and Robert Boyle at Wadham College.\textsuperscript{107} The Royal Society decided to fill one of the positions for Curators of Experiments with a full-time professional scientist, and Hooke was offered the position in 1662. The Royal Society needed sponsorship since it was, as John Enderby points out in “Hooke and the Royal Society,” “not a rich organization, and it was important to attract, as members, well-heeled financiers, landowners, merchants and the aristocracy”(68). Hooke was encouraged to curate his experiments to “entertain the wealthy dignitaries and so extract from them sufficient cash to keep the Society afloat and meet the various expenses incurred by [himself] and others”(68). According to Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), a Cambridge graduate who was steadfastly interested in new science and later became an important figure of the early days of the Royal Society, Hooke was a fascinating and prolific scientist. During the last days of the Commonwealth, Pepys was appointed as Clerk to the Exchequer; he was Clerk of the Acts to the Navy Board during the Restoration. Pepys’ famous diary, written during 1660 through 1669, provides significant insights into the Royal Society and Pepys’ fascination with Hooke’s experiments. Hooke designed experiments virtually every week and discussed them with educated—and not necessarily learned, but rich—gentlemen. However, his service to the Royal Society, again as Enderby asserts, “showed how science was of direct concern to government, commerce, defence and civic policy, and not merely a branch of the entertainment industry” (74). The form of observation in \textit{Micrographia} contrasted starkly with the philosophical science practiced by many of his peers, including his most notable superior, Robert Boyle, and other

natural philosophers like Newton and Cavendish. A modern scientist might be inclined greatly to admire Hooke’s meticulous delineation of the properties of a vacuum, but in first postulating its possibility, Boyle got, and kept, the fame. Experiments, soon to become the general currency of science, still relegated the experimenter to a level of technician, something akin to the modern-day appellation of “blue-collar.” In contrast, the older science tended to be the province of philosophers, those whose thought moved from limited observations—one might immediately think of a fortuitous apple fallen to the head—to the construction of grand systems of knowledge like the law of gravity.

Given Cavendish’s social status, one could easily see a sort of classist distinction and prejudice in Cavendish’s privileging of intuition and dismissal of Hooke’s observational paradigm, as well as a self-protective gesture arising from Cavendish’s frank acknowledgement that she lacked access to the sorts of new machinery increasingly being used by men like Hooke. Still, as I will show below, Cavendish’s objections to Hooke’s work reveal aspects of her philosophy that are central to her literary output, tracing a now familiar trajectory; on one side was the new science, cold and calculating, and on the other—hers—was the older “science,” where human reason and imagination both stood as allies of truth.

Hooke’s Micrographia opens with a trope that compares a corporeal body to a written text, suggesting that the constituency of small and simple parts will explain the end goal of the bigger and more complex system: “As in Geometry, the most natural way of beginning is from a Mathematical point; so is the same method in Observations and Natural history the most genuine, simple, and instructive. We must first endeavour to make letters, and draw single strokes

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108 Cavendish’s social status has been central to much criticism examining Cavendish’s life and works. For more reading, see: Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader, edited by Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson; Speaking for Nature: Women and Ecologies of Early Modern England by Sylvia Bowerbank; also, A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, edited by Stephen Clucas.
true, before we venture to write whole sentences, or to draw large pictures” (1). To legitimize the moral purpose of the microscope, Hooke tries to bolster its technological advantage beyond the typical merit of scientific observation. He shows perception in claiming that the beginning of any meaningful text is simultaneously pictorial and verbal, as his book contains both texts and images; but the teleocentric moral emphasis on the “true” beginning of a text, the belief that a small component of a large sentence determines the text’s significance in the world, suggests the author’s overemphasis on the portent of machinery. The microscope can catch errors that are hidden to our physical eyes:

What may not be expected from the rational or deductive Faculty that is furnish with such Materials, and those so readily adapted, and rang’d for use, that in a moment, as ‘twere, thousands of instances, serving for the illustration, determination, or invention, of almost any inquiry, may be represented even to the sight? How neer the nature of Axioms must all those proportions be which are examin’d before so many witnesses? And how difficult will it be for any, though never so subtil an error in Philosophy, to scape from being discover’d, after it has indur’d the touch, and so many other tryals?”

That the microscope can catch “never so subtil an error in philosophy” if the subject of examination “indur’d the touch” and “many other trials” presents the experimental scientist’s

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109 For instance, here is a delightful example in Micrographia, showing how Hooke delineates the function and beauty of the world governed by the mechanical philosophy: “Suppose a curious piece of Clock-work, that had had several motions and contrivances in it, which, when in order, would all have mov’d in their design’d methods and Periods. We will further suppose, by some means, that this Clock comes to be broken, bruised, or otherwise disordered, so that several parts of it being dislocated [...] And thus may it be perhaps in the business of Moss and Mould, and Mushrooms, and several other spontaneous kinds of vegetations, which may be caused by a vegetative principle, which as coadjuitor to the life and growth of the greater Vegetable, and was by the destroying of the life of it stopt and impeded in performing its office; [...] (when a part of that greater machine the pristine vegetable) is mov’d after quite a differing manner, and produces effects very differing from those it did before” (Hooke 133-134).

110 Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia, sig. D1r.
compelling argument—it will catch the wrongs of philosophical observations and conclusions because nothing is “so subtil” under the modern science’s microscopic view.\textsuperscript{111} The staple of experimental science’s method is acting and doing—physically interacting with the material world, described as “touch” or “trials” by Hooke above. He believes the microscopic seeing is close to touching—it gets “neer” enough to “an error in philosophy” that the errors can’t escape from the microscopic “trials” and observations. Instead of merely thinking and arguing, an experimental scientist “touch[es]” the object of his experiment, so he is less likely to miss “so subtil an error,” whereas pondering philosophers are more likely to do so; here Hooke expounds on the experimental science’s actual practice as a concrete experience. His experiments are established on the tangible experience of concrete object rather than abstract thought as he suggests that “the philosophy of discourse and disputation” has less “regard to the first ground-work, which ought to be well laid on the sense and memory” as opposed to experimental science that “chiefly aims at the subtilty of its deductions and conclusions.”\textsuperscript{112} So many errors are made by “the philosophy of discourse and disputation” because it forgets to pay most attention to “the first ground-work, which ought to be well laid on the sense and memory” while focusing on abstract concepts and passive disputations.\textsuperscript{113} Since the human senses are unreliable after all, Hooke argues: “The first thing to be undertaken in this weighty work, is a watchfulness over the failings and an inlargement of the dominion, of the senses.”\textsuperscript{114} For Hooke the microscope symbolizes “this weighty work” that accomplishes a triumphant achievement of experimental science that acts and does the expansion of how far our sight can reach. Therefore, he argues that

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{112} Hooke, sig.A2r.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{114} Hooke, sig.A2r. Also, in the later chapter on Milton’s Paradise Lost as well as Samson Agonistes and Paradise Regained, I discuss how Milton expresses his opinions on human sense perception and the balance between the reason and sense perception can lead us to truth.}
\end{footnotes}
the philosophers who would rather think than act are unlikely to do “[the] weighty work,” to carefully and painstakingly look at the material existence of the world; in contrast, the experimental science would offer “a watchfulness over the failings and an enlargement of the dominion, of the senses” and try to magnify the errors as well as prevent further errors in “the first ground-work.”

A careful reading of Hooke’s argument for his optic device will further reveal that even though a microscope can provide knowledge that is real and practical, the efficacy of his device as well as the competence of experimental science cannot be explained without some poetic imagination. Hooke’s instrument offers the illusion of tangible experience while revealing something intangible, which makes his instrument practical and relevant—one might see the eye of a fly through a microscope, enlarged and proximate, but in truth it is the seen light that touches the magnified object under the glass, not the observer’s body. As the light “touch[es]” the glass and the subject is lit and magnified, this “touch” begins to excavate and penetrate the boroughs, films, and cells inside an organism. Hooke argues that the act of looking in through the microscope leads the observer to a greater intellectual proximity to truth, turning a tangible action into an intangible knowledge. To further support his argument that microscopic looking can help the observer decipher the dense and obscure content and take the observer closer to truth, he looks at religious texts, believing that his new way of observation could be used to unveil the existence of the spiritual realm through deciphering the material body of a religious script, thus further establishing the pertinence and proficiency of his optic device. One of the first

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115 Hooke’s skepticism towards human senses as expressed above further prompts my reading of Milton’s view on physical and, most importantly, spiritual blindness. The mechanically enhanced sight cannot provide the “celestial light” that “shine inward,” the spiritual light that Milton discusses in Book III of Paradise Lost; only this spiritual light that “shine[s] inward” can guide us to see the “things invisible to mortal sight” and to “purge and disperse” falsehood from truth (III. 51-52, 55).
microscopic examples Hooke chose to describe in *Micrographia* is none other than the printed letters—types—of religious texts with “lines … so small and near together,” made by a copper plate and roll-press:

> [H]aving view’d certain pieces of exceeding curious writing of the kind (one of which in the bredth of a *two-pence* compris’d the Lords prayer, the Apostles Creed, the ten commandments, and about half a dozen verses besides of the Bible, whose lines were so small and near together, that I was unable to number them with my naked eye, a very ordinary Microscope, I had then about me, inabled me to see that what the writer of it had asserted was true, but withal discover’d of what pitifull bungling scribbles and scrawls it was compos’d, Arabian and China characters being almost as well shap’d; [...] If this manner of small writing were made easie and practicable (and I think I know such a one, but have never yet made trial of it, whereby one might be inabled to write a great deale with much ease, and accurately enough in a very little roome) it might be of very good use to convey secret Intelligence without any danger of Discovery or mistrusting.\(^{116}\)

It is Hooke’s intention to choose the subject that is not only sacred and secretive, but also obscure to read, so that by using his microscope he can find more “roome” between small types. He believes that material reality participates in and manipulates immaterial reality—a point missing to our naked eye, unfortunately, would be nothing but a point missing. And that missed point, whether intended by the author or not, would alter or produce resultant meaning of the text. Thus Hooke argues that the microscope can offer a kind of nearness that enables our naked eye to reach in and see the hidden context that was previously illegible and unseen. As if peeling

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\(^{116}\) Hooke, *Micrographia*, 3.
the layers of a vegetable’s skin, the looking through the microscope that Hooke describes lets people infiltrate the exterior layers that keep “secret intelligence” distant from the naked eye, which obscures the hidden meaning of the text; the naked eye, which he calls “a very ordinary microscope,” cannot obtain the “secret intelligence” because its vision cannot travel through the exterior layers. The microscope can connect the point $a$—let us assume this is a beginning point, perhaps from a person’s eye ball or some physiological point where the image of the subject at the end of the microscope is captured—to the end point $aa$, where the eye longingly looks, but more importantly, what Hooke wants to highlight is that the microscope can also eliminate the distance between $a$ and $aa$.

Yet there is something about keeping the distance, sensing the distance between two things, when trying to build a thought or a sentence. Hooke says “[W]e must first endeavour to make letters, and draw single strokes true, before we venture to write whole sentences, or to draw large pictures” and insists his optic device will help us to see “single strokes true” so that we can improve each stroke, thus improve the quality—the truthfulness—of our larger picture; yet we can’t even tell if the picture or sentence is good—“true”—until comparing each stroke while seeing each of them next to each other in a larger picture or sentence, a pattern.\footnote{Hooke, “Observ. I. Of the Point of a Sharp Small Needle,” \textit{Micrographia}, I.} We don’t always draw a large picture—nor, needless to say, a good one—by “draw[ing] single strokes true.” In fact, if we focus on the tiny details of each stroke too much, we might forget to think about the bigger picture entirely. Even if we know how a perfect single stroke looks and learn how to draw one, we can still produce a bad larger picture at the end if we ignore other variables that complete the bigger pattern, such as the “room” between letters in a sentence.\footnote{For instance, as Hooke explains above, when there is only “a very little roome” between letters, it is hard to read what the text says.}
We know something went wrong with minute details when the bigger pattern is out of balance. It is not just the preciseness of each stroke or letter or word that makes a good sentence, but the compatibility and flexibility—the room—between the words, and the sharpness of the words also determine the life of a good sentence.\textsuperscript{119} This also reveals why Hooke continually uses metaphors to explain the function and need of his device, though he criticizes the uncertainty and errors of human reason and senses, which are the crucial instigators of poetic imagination. Furthermore, the microscope doesn’t just magnify, but it makes things appear bigger than they really are, more alien, more \textit{other}; the microscope offers minute details of already small objects by altering their familiar, regular appearance under the manipulated gaze of the observer. The altering capability of “fictions” or poetry as suggested by Cavendish helps us comprehend reality without completely alienating or changing the appearance of the reality. There is a hint of violence and willfulness as well as a looming sense of termination and eradication in Hooke’s dedication to “the weighty work,” what Hooke describes as “a watchfulness over the failings and an inlargement of the dominion, of the senses.”\textsuperscript{120} The machine will enlarge not only the image of the object but also the territory of our senses. The power of the microscope Hooke describes in \textit{Micrographia} encompasses more than the expansion of sensory domain; it anticipates the machine’s efficacy in expanding the domain of imperialist power. Note carefully how Hooke chooses the secretive and obscure text to read under his microscope, and he needs to magnify “a very little roome” between small types so he can actually see the bigger picture and comprehend this sacred text. Contrary to Hooke’s claim that his device can eliminate the distance, his device instead magnifies the “little roome” between types not only in a metaphorical way that the

\textsuperscript{119} Just ahead I will be discussing Cavendish’s argument for “subtile observations,” which appears in \textit{The Blazing World}. Cavendish espouses the value of “subtile[ness]” over the value of proximity, which is the microscope’s ability to be “neer” the object, to be proximate, as described by Hooke.

\textsuperscript{120} Hooke, The Preface, \textit{Micrographia}, sig. A2r.
meaning is not readily accessible, but also in a physical way. Therefore, the distance is necessary for seeing and knowing to occur, but it is also necessary for meaning to exist—the distance must be there to produce more significance, comparison, metaphor, and finally, the need to communicate. The text Hooke chooses to observe under his microscope is designed to obfuscate easy reading—it is a sacred text after all. Perhaps even Hooke realizes that what is too obvious to be understood isn’t worthy of his discussion in his book.¹²¹ Without realizing, Hooke exemplifies the kind of invasive and ambitious scientist who usurps and alters the nature of things.

Furthermore, the center of Hooke’s determined argument hinges more on the device’s virtual potential than its actual performance. Hooke establishes the impending possibility of the magnified image to become more than a mere physical sight: “It seems not improbable, but that by these helps the subtlety of the composition of Bodies, the structure of their parts, the various texture of their matter, the instruments and manner of their inward motions, and all the other possible appearances of things, may come to be more fully discovered.”¹²² The “more fully discovered” things must reveal something more than their physical state, such as their atomic structures or their mechanics and designs, in order for Hooke to present his microscopic discoveries as unveiling something “secretive” and “sacred,” like the decoding of the content of religious text with “little roome” between types. Yet when reading Hooke’s claim above more closely, one must realize his machine actually sees—at least the way he describes it—“parts,” “texture,” “inward motions,” or “appearances,” which, as he stresses, “may come to be more fully discovered.” Unless an observer with his imagination turns these material things into something meaningful or something that “may come to be more fully discovered,” the

¹²¹ After all, Hooke’s Micrographia is too poetic—and indeed graphic—to be framed as a collection of scientific reports on his microscopic observations. What makes his writing inspiring and engaging to read is not quite the book’s subject, but rather his allusive writing.
microscope reveals to an observer what remains to be mechanical and physical—parts, texture, motions, or appearances, and nothing more, as Cavendish suggests. The small bodies being read in *Micrographia* are microscopic texts; after all, Hooke draws them in his book. They are being observed mechanically—through the microscope—but described metaphorically. The microscopic seeing encourages Hooke to be more poetic, although that amount of abundant detail could have made his writing undoubtedly dull. Seeing more—seeing what one couldn’t see before the microscope—doesn’t result in clarity but more opacity, which is essential to poetic imagination. Opacity in poetry here functions more like the distances between things that are necessary for the pursuit of truth, which I discuss above. Not all seeing leads to telling, needless to say, a story that is *telling*.123

Mechanically enhanced seeing might yield abundant images, but these images would mean nothing more than what Cavendish calls “the picture presented in and by the glass,” and these “pictures” merely represent the images that “the glass only figures or patterns out.”124 It is, however, the mental faculty that turns the external “figures” and “patterns” into something more than “pictures,” a body of text that needs to be deciphered and understood. Thus for Cavendish, not only does the microscopic “glass” alter the information of nature by presenting pictures of “figure[d]” and “pattern[ed]” nature, but human senses and intelligence also need to accompany the observation through “the glass” to convey significance that matters in terms of human values. In fact, even though in his preface Hooke criticizes human sense and reason as unreliable, he knows an appeal to certain values is necessary for his argument. He asserts the political and moral timing of his work and other modern scientists’ endeavors as the establishing foundation.
for a nascent, adventurous, and “inquisitive” nation blossoming with new methods of seeing and knowing:

The good success of all these great men, and many others, and the now seemingly great obviousness of most of their and divers other inventions, which from the beginning of the world have been, as ‘twere, trod on, and yet not minded till these last inquisitive ages (an argument that there may be yet behind multitudes of the like) puts me in mind to recommend such studies, and the prosecution of them by such methods, to the Gentlemen of our Nation, whose leisure makes them fit to undertake, and the plenty of their fortunes to accomplish, extraordinary things in this way. And I do not only propose this kind of Experimental philosophy as a matter of high rapture and delight of the mind, but even as a material and sensible pleasure. 125

Here Hooke identifies his experiment as a “matter of high rapture and delight of the mind” as well as “a material and sensible pleasure.” According to his statement above, Hooke intends his device to be both instructive and entertaining. Hooke’s *Micrographia* proves to be an entertaining work of literature that introduces and describes a new method of seeing rather than a scientific study that examines or proves a theory about microscopic seeing. In other words, Hooke’s book provides an exhibition, not an explanation. Gerard L’E. Turner explains in “The Impact of Hooke’s *Micrographia* and its influence on Microscopy” that even though the publishing of his book in 1665 gave him the title of the “father of microscopy,” Hooke was rather a sage than “a serious microscopist in the sense that the Dutchman, Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, or the Italian, Marcello Malpighi, deserve the title”—instead, Hooke was “a true

natural philosopher, attracted by the novelty and possibilities of an unfamiliar instrument, and ready to demonstrate and then to write about what it could achieve” (124). Micrographia was an instant success, and the book’s popularity, Turner asserts, helped in establishing “the popularity of the microscope with generations of observers, and this in turn supported the serious, scientific use of the instrument and ensured that it was manufactured in quantity and steadily improved in design” (124).

In addition, in the block quote above, Hooke suggests that “the Gentlemen of [his] Nation” can use the microscope as a social as well as political instrument, appointing these “gentlemen” responsible for refining and enriching the political and cultural landscape of the English nation. What Hooke calls “the inlargement of dominion” suggests various kinds of expansion of how far one can see, which also translates into how far one can know and control, especially for the learned audience of “the Gentlemen of our Nation, whose leisure makes them fit to undertake, and the plenty of their fortunes to accomplish, extraordinary things in this way.”

It is doubtful that Cavendish missed the patriarchal overtone of Hooke’s prophecy for his device—Hooke’s device is not only deceiving and immoral to Cavendish, but its dominant male politics usurp the possibility of non-male readership and authorship in constructing new methods of perceiving and building the world. Therefore, Cavendish sets out to build her own world, a new world, called “A Blazing World,” where the old political system and gender structure are absent. Despite Hooke’s claim, Cavendish insists she doesn’t need a microscope or a microscopic view to look at, understand, and describe her new world; her “first ground-work”

127 Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia, sig. A2r and sig. D2r. I briefly touched upon the suggestive meaning of the “inlargement of dominion” earlier in this chapter.
doesn’t have to “be well laid on the sense and memory” because she uses “sense and memory”—and her imagination—as “the first ground work.”

Poetry, I argue, requires and uses an insight akin to spiritual sight so that it can compose the talk that is not just speaking stuff, but communicating something meaningful. And this is why, again, the poetic tone in Hooke’s writing is striking to the modern reader, even though Hooke’s work signified little more than the stock motif of modern science to Cavendish. In “Books Written of the Wonders of These Glasses” from *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature*, Elizabeth Spiller points out that the opening paragraph of *Micrographia* establishes symbolic representation of the microscope as “a tool that will make it possible to read what he sees as the most secret texts of the world, the true book of nature”; furthermore, the opening paragraph tries to prove how the new science has fashioned a new way of reading: “[I]magining all of creation as being engraven with its own ‘small writing,’ Hooke represents interest in reading out the ‘small writing,’ the periods and full stops of the world that is his text.” On the other hand, Spiller suggests that Cavendish’s writing reveals a “sense of herself primarily as a reader”—but, if so, it is clearly an entirely different sort of reader. Cavendish appears to pay less attention to such minute details as “the sharpness of a point the most superlatively, we say, as sharp as a needle.” As a matter of fact, observation for Cavendish is scarcely about looking at something from one fixed point as is paramount to observational science; imagination, she insisted, could fruitfully fashion multiple divergent yet equally useful perspectives. For Hooke, the established, stationed point at the top of a magnifying glass must serve as a beginning point.

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128 As I have pointed out earlier, Hooke argues in *Micrographia* that “the philosophy of discourse and disputation” has less “regard to the first ground-work, which ought to be well laid on the sense and memory” as opposed to experimental science that “chiefly aims at the subtilty of its deductions and conclusions.”


130 Spiller 142.

to an observing eye, but to Cavendish such a stationary point of view is unnatural and fixed to artificially alter the appearance of nature or the course of truth. While Hooke becomes more focused on looking and looking closely in with his experiment, Cavendish loses interest in much of the looking because she finds the outcome of Hooke’s observation static, expected, and not particularly illuminating. Rather, Cavendish has her imagination to help her illuminate and find the truth. Most importantly, the comparison between Hooke’s looking and Cavendish’s reading helps us understand the difference between Cavendish’s “subtile observations” and Hooke’s “neer” observations. Cavendish’s perspective as a reader provides her with an open-ended position to zoom in and out of the text she observes, but when Hooke’s microscope lets the observer “neer” the object, perhaps too near, the text becomes a static image, without communicative meaning, as the observer becomes static and detached from the thing he sees through the device.

We must also pay attention that while experimental science preaches the practicality and efficacy of its method, the outcome of such practice often signifies rather abstract conclusions, despite its persistent lionizing of its epistemological advantage in regards to our seeing and understanding of the world. Once again, without the aid of imagination, or the spiritual mind, Hooke’s promise that his observation will result in “something more fully discovered” remains as a mere virtual promise and collides with the actuality of his experiment. Hooke argues that “by these helps the subtlety of the composition of bodies, the structure of their parts, the various texture of their matter, the instruments and manner of their inward motions, and all the other possible appearances of things, may come to be more fully discovered” (The Preface, sig. A2v), but without the aid of the creative and spiritual eye, the mechanical or mechanically-enhanced
eye might physically get “neer” enough to the object, yet not be “subtle” enough to generate “something more fully discovered,” despite Hooke’s belief.

That Cavendish espouses the idea that human creativity can not only predict but even fashion the future through the keen intuitive grasp of inner reality is a less than subtle argument in *The Blazing World*. For Cavendish, magnifying glasses merely provide a process of crude atomic reduction that fails to accomplish what imagination or fantasy can—expanding time and space, stretching the span of present reality beyond the imagination’s bent that tests our perception and observation, to foresee and to prove by predicting the existence of the bigger system. Hooke believes that his experiment will provide an observation that could reduce the distance from the truth while breaking things into constituent parts, but Cavendish points out that the physical nearness to something doesn’t signify the acute grasp of it. She gives a specific name to this intuition-and-creativity driven observation in order to identify and distinguish it from the mechanistic experimental science when she describes the navigating method of augurers as “subtile observations and great practice” in *The Blazing World*:

> And though they had no knowledge of the Load-stone, or Needle, or pendulous Watches, yet (which was as serviceable to them) they had subtile observations, and great practice; in so much that they could not onely tell the depth of the sea in every place, but where there were shelves of Sand, Rocks, and other obstructions to be avoided by skilfull and experienced Sea-men: Besides, they were excellent Augurer, which skill they counted more necessary and beneficial then the use of Compasses, Cards, Watches, and the like.¹³²

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Here Cavendish conveys doubts about the aid of machinery and technology—compass, cards, watches—by emphasizing the capability of “skillful and experienced Sea-men” who are able to read the “depth of sea” and foresee any obstructions coming before them without any help of technology. Unlike the experimental scientists with their scopes and compass, augurers, as she points out, have the skill to practice “subtile observations” without the help of machinery. What is exactly that “skill”? Is it to observe subtly, or to observe subtle things? Or both? To answer this question I must ask another—what is a subtle object to be observed subtly, and what determines something as subtle? When experimental science tries to explain things by resorting to increasingly greater detail, always dissecting functioning systems into smaller and smaller constituent parts in an effort to define and understand them, she would argue that the details themselves do not create any comprehensive significance. The “skill” referenced above is the sensibility and experience that allow someone to be able to observe and interpret a subject seamlessly, gracefully, without negotiating its personal space, and thus preserving boundaries between different worlds. Functionality and aesthetics should complement each other in harmony; machines, to Cavendish, are too obvious and too intentional to be subtle and effortless.

In other words, she believes experimental science cannot accomplish the sophistication and skill established by countless years of ancient practice of reading and interpreting natural signs. It is interesting that she uses nautical navigation as an example to demonstrate that the proximity and accuracy of the machine do not determine the success of navigation. Minute details are indeed important, but patterns are paramount in accumulating meanings. More importantly, to recount the Empress’ criticism against the microscope in *The Blazing World*, proximity can actually lead one to inaccuracy and thus more confusion: “Whereupon they took one of their best and largest microscopes, and endeavoured to view a Whale thorow it: but alas! the shape of the Whale was
so big, that its circumference went beyond the magnifying quality of the Glass; whether the error proceeded from the Glass, or from a wrong position of the Whale against the reflection of light, I cannot certainly tell.”133 The Empress is unsatisfied when the microscope fails to magnify a whale, as “the shape of the Whale was so big, that its circumference went beyond the magnifying quality of the Glass.”134 This scene might seem too obvious or foolish to some, and they might even wonder why anyone would even think about putting a whale under a microscope. Yet Cavendish’s idiosyncratic argument against the microscope does deliver a good point; she chooses an object that is obviously too big to be under the point “as sharp as a needle” to reveal the extremely partial and small pieces of the world the microscope can magnify.135 What Hooke believes as sharp and subtle as “the point of a sharp small needle” indeed can only deliver information too small, too localized to effectively and justly represent the whole.136

Furthermore, Cavendish even dismisses the merit of reading such observations written by an experimental scientist: “To relate all their optic observations through the several sorts of their Glasses, would be a tedious work, and tire even the most patient Reader.”137 In the historical context of Cavendish’s observations about experimental philosophy, her admiration of augurers and derogation of the use of mechanical practice indicate her distrust of Hooke’s method and practice. Neither his observation nor his rhetoric is able to obvert the shallow impression of experimental science on Cavendish. An augurer interprets what he observes after watching the flight patterns of the birds in the sky. One might ask how the practice of augurers differs from that of experimental scientists such as Hooke. The ancient practice of augury not only needs an

133 Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, 144.
134 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
auspice with a skill to conduct careful observation and produce keen interpretation of patterns in nature, but it also requires a bird that manifests the signs delivering the omens. An augurer is a governor of metonymy; the message is the bird itself, the instrument moving and signaling the sign, embodying the sign. Here we discern that there is an instrument involved, after all, with the practice of augury, but the perception of this instrument requires insight and patience, an observational passivity little resembling the forceful invasion of space marking the technologically-enhanced gaze of the emerging science. Thus, Cavendish, unlike Hooke, who believes microscopic observation can provide not only acute but also prophetic experience revealing “secret texts,” identifies the practice of experimental science with the opposite—confusion and crudity. Furthermore, Cavendish acknowledges that human perception and sensory experience can lead the human observer to “err in searching and requiring after the Causes of Natural Effects, and many times embrace falsehoods for Truths” (“To the Reader,” The Blazing World). Unlike Cavendish, Hooke doesn’t see the chance of such “falsehoods” in his microscopic seeing; yet an augurer would more likely be aware of the possibility of human error in reading the pattern, thus focusing more on comprehensive poetic significance than minute material details of the patterns.

I’d like to return and pay more attention to Hooke’s use of the word “point” to disclose the significance of subtlety for both Cavendish and Hooke, this is a key concept in understanding Cavendish’s argument against experimental science. It is not just a small point that the microscope magnifies; in Hooke’s imagination, a point embodies both a material and immaterial sense of a significant mark that could change the outcome of a sentence because even such a small material entity has a significance and function in a bigger text. Through the aid of a magnifying glass, one can see a point not only microscopically but also metaphorically—optical
magnification can somehow mediate a symbolic touch that connects one point to the other. This is indeed an extremely poetic way of looking at the world; the idea of being able to see one thing and delineate it in a way that it manifests and transforms into another thing evokes the capability of metaphor. Experimental scientists such as Hooke use the divinatory rhetoric of prediction to establish a moral merit of their scientific experiments, and they argue that through the aid of machines one might be able to see everything in his or her surroundings and possibly predict the future, which used to be poetry’s tone and its claim of purpose. As Elizabeth Spiller points out, Hooke’s text literally embodies the body to be read that contains the bodies being read microscopically. The bodies being read in Micrographia are being observed mechanically—through the microscope—but described metaphorically. Therefore, a point indeed becomes a significant point of beginning and ending for an organism being read and observed. Spiller suggests that Cavendish’s own writing reveals a “sense of herself primarily as a reader”—in works like The Blazing World and Observations, Cavendish is not only the author but a reader of scientific writing. However, Cavendish appears to pay less attention to such minute details as “the sharpness of a point the most superlatively, we say, as sharp as a needle.” As I discussed earlier, Cavendish’s observation is scarcely about looking—looking at something from one fixed point is paramount to observational science. The established, unmoving point of a magnifying glass must serve as a beginning point to an observing eye. The human eyes are not only

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138 This resonates with Sidney’s mimetic theory of poetry.
139 In “Books Written of the Wonders of These Glasses” from Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature, Elizabeth Spiller argues that the opening paragraph of Micrographia not only provides a symbolic representation of the microscope as “a tool that will make it possible to read what he sees as the most secret texts of the world, the true book of nature” but also shows us how the new science fashioned a new way of reading: “imagining all of creation as being engraved with its own ‘small writing,’ Hooke represents interest in reading out the ‘small writing,’ the periods and full stops of the world that is his text” (Spiller 139).
140 Hooke, Micrographia, 1-2. Hooke writes: “Now though this point be commonly accounted the sharpest (whence when we experts the sharpness of a point superlatively, we say, as sharp as a needle) yet the microscope can afford us hundreds of instances of points many thousand times sharper.”
constantly moving but also controlled by human senses, and Cavendish believes that what one sees through the magnifying glasses does not reveal or present nature in a shape or form that is closer to truth. And as I also mentioned earlier, if Cavendish does believe in the specific power of poetry to reflect nature and present multiple differing versions of it, then magnifying glasses do offer something that fundamentally alters the outcome of poetic imagination and metaphorical formation. Hence Cavendish calls it “the art of micrographia” and expounds upon its artificiality that “doth more easily alter than inform.”

If the nature a poet observes and writes about in his or her poetry is not observed through the naked eye but moved away from the naked eye, manipulating what the poet sees by observing his subject of poetry through a magnifying glass, then the poet begins his poetic thinking with inaccurate information and, as Cavendish puts it, “deformed” material upon which to build a poetic creation. The most accurate way to observe and understand the world is in the manner through which it appears and comes to our naked eye without any mechanical improvement or manipulation: “Wherefore the best optic is a perfect natural eye, and a regular sensitive perception; and the best judge, is reason; and the best study, is rational contemplation joined with the observations of regular sense, but not deluding arts.”

Hooke’s attempt to magnify the capability of the microscope by turning a textual mark into an organism to be observed and then into a symbolic point to be made should have appeared poetic and been effective for most readers of his time. After all, his point about the machine’s ability to turn a point into the point demonstrates the profit of scientific observation conducive to observing divine knowledge; however, this does not persuade Cavendish. She writes in *Observations*: “the several dioptrical instruments belonging thereto, by reason I have neither studied nor practiced that art; yet of this I am confident, that this same art, with all its

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141 Cavendish, *Observations*, 50.
142 *Observations*, 53.
instruments, is not able to discover the interior natural motions of any part or creature of nature.” She is clearly doubtful of not only its informative accuracy but also its supposed ability to reveal messages beyond the obvious materiality of the material world. Even when our senses can perceive things crookedly or incorrectly, information gathered through our own naked eye and sensory system remains closer to God’s intention for Cavendish: “[T]here is something more powerful than nature, all the parts of nature (which are infinite) certainly have: And so God, being an infinite and eternal God, hath an infinite and eternal worship; for every part conceiving something about itself, and above its nature, worships that supreme, either through fear, or love, or both; yet knows not what the supreme being is.” This is clearly a radically different attitude in acquiring knowledge than Hooke’s argument for the spiritual merit of his machine; even though human perception and sensory experience might not be able to give precise answers to our critical inquiry about the world, nature, and the divine, Cavendish cannot condone any unnatural aid or thing that does not respect the way God intended us to perceive the world, which is through the naked eye, without any aid of machines. Looking at God’s creatures through the magnifying glass would only mean seeing the copy of a copy, not even a copy of the original: “though the perception may be true, when the object is truly presented, yet when the presentation is false, the information must be false also. And it is to be observed, that art, for the most part, makes hermaphroditical, that is, mixt figures, partly artificial, and partly natural.”

“Besides, there are so many alterations made by several lights, their shadows, refractions, reflexions,” she writes, and the mechanical presentation of this sort will also, she continues, be affected by “several lines, points, mediums, interposing and intermixing parts, forms and

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143 Cavendish, *Observations*, 50.
positions, as the truth of an object will hardly be known.\textsuperscript{146} Whether it is the poet looking at the sky to write a poem, an augurer looking at the sky and the bird to predict the weather, or any person looking at the sky to describe the weather, he or she must look at the presentation that God intended us to see, not the ones magnified—or, misrepresented—by a machine. Cavendish argues:

\begin{quote}
The glass only figures or patterns out the picture presented in and by the glass, and there mistakes may easily be committed in taking copies from copies. Nay, artists do confess themselves, that flies, and the like, will appear of several figures or shapes, according to the several reflexions, refractions, mediums and positions of several light; which if so, how can they tell or judge which is the truest light, position, or medium, that doth present the object naturally as it is?\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

And should one not find the right light, we are misled by a wrong version, a misrepresentation of God’s creatures, as if the poet is holding a broken mirror or a horse master is riding on a deformed or sick horse that cannot perform its duty of reflecting nature as well as it can.

Not only does Cavendish argue that mechanical and atomic representation demote the nature of things that God intended us to see, but she also points out the fact that if there is no point to anchor the subject being observed, scientific observation can never succeed. Here we can recount Cavendish’s description of the augurer’s “subtle observation” that does not require the subject to be pointed down or marked—literally—in order to be observed. Instead of looking \textit{in} to observe smaller details, augurers look \textit{at} the bigger picture or larger collection of events. Subtlety in this case almost functions opposite to sharpness of the microscopic view that Hooke praises, suggesting a broader, open-ended act of looking at the bigger patterns of nature that

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Observations, 51.
signifies Cavendish’s vitalist materialism. The problem with microscopic looking in, for
Cavendish, begins with a limited scopic situation that takes the subject out of its own context to
the point where the observers cannot tell what exactly they are looking at. When looking through
a microscope, everything else other than the very subject under the point of the glass is
unseen. Even though Hooke argues that microscopic observation can magnify the mark at the
beginning and end of a sentence, the sentence disappears while the end point of a microscopic
viewzooms in and whitens out everything around it, obliterating how the end mark of a sentence
functions in the sentence or arrives at the end.

In “Of Many Worlds in This World,” it is clear that Cavendish espouses sensory
observations over atomic observations, as she describes the multitudinous world through her
imagination and metaphoric comparisons that abstain from scientific observation. Cavendish
sees an open-ended and expanding world: “Just like unto a Nest of Boxes round,/ Degrees of
sizes within each Boxe are found./ So in this World, may many Worlds more be,/ Thinner, and
lesse, and lesse still by degree” (lines 1-4). However, perhaps with “subtile observation, great
practice” we can remember how to use our senses to read ever mutating patterns and decipher
“Thinner, and lesse” signs as augurers do. The microscope, in an attempt to show greater details,
ends up showing less because the observer sees only what the machine reveals. Furthermore, as
Cavendish points out, the left-out margins invisible to the microscopic view change not only the
way one understands the subject but also the way one reads and perceives the world:
“[M]agnifying glasses are like a high heel to a short leg, which if it be made too high, it is apt to

148 Being cut out from its contextual landscape, the subject makes no sense, creating more confusion and
less comprehension. As Cavendish describes in The Blazing World: “[W]ether the error proceeded from the Glass,
or from a wrong position of the Whale against the reflection of light, I cannot certainly tell” (144).
make the wearer fall, and at the best, can do no more than represent exterior figures in a bigger, and so in a more deformed shape and posture than naturally they are.”¹⁵⁰ For Cavendish, the microscope is dangerous because it manipulates the way texts are presented to be observed and read, as if Hooke plays with and defiles God’s text by magnifying one textual detail or minimizing another. Cavendish believes such manipulation with the original text is far different from poetic mimesis; in fact, it is immoral to represent the text in a way that encourages a reading practice that forgets about the bigger picture while focusing on small details and leaving out bigger patterns. Mechanical misinforming and misrepresenting occur as the machines fail to conduct “subtle observations.”

In various works by Cavendish, the conceptual expansion of physical space occurs through imagining what was unseen, instead of seeing everything. Hooke’s *Micrographia* presents an argument that the merit of the microscope, ironically, is that it signifies the presence of something immaterial by showing as much detail as it can. But unlike an augurer’s observation, microscopic observation leaves very small room for the observers to use their imagination to combine the missing—unmagnified—pieces. I would suggest that any hints of conceptual expansion involving observing material growth and change in *Micrographia* should evoke the precedence of poetic imagination already working—Hooke’s rhetoric demonstrates the process of looking in through the tropes of revelation, reflection, and simulation, as if the act is already part of looking under and throughout, which signifies the act of “looking in” as a symbolic act of comprehension and prediction. Furthermore, poetry’s capability to enable a point mark on a page to signify an end of sentence, a point to start or stop a thought, should be unique and original to the world of metaphoric comprehensions and observations, not a microscopic or

¹⁵⁰ Cavendish, *Observations*, 52.
atomic understanding of the world. What is unique to poetry’s realm should only be used to preserve poetry’s capability. However, Hooke’s poetic delineation of the microscopic appearance subverts the Empress’ amiable description of sea men’s “subtle observation” in *The Blazing World.* While Hooke claims that the microscopic looking in can enlighten us with a macroscopic observation and appreciation of God’s inventions that is broader than a mere material comprehension of the material world, Cavendish argues that it is precisely that act of looking in aided by a machine that depreciates and devalues the sublime beauty of God’s work. That successful and sufficient navigation in the sea can be made through “subtle observation” without an aid of machines signifies not only the Empress’ distrust of mechanical science but also Cavendish’s faith in ancient traditions and tools of navigation.

I would also suggest that Cavendish may be using a nautical trope to invite us to ponder something more than the efficiency of ancient ways of navigation. It is not a coincidence that Cavendish frames her criticism on mechanical tools of navigation inside a story of the Empress’ sea adventure. Presenting a prose narrative for the Empress’ heroic and mysterious adventure in a remote, imaginary place in time with imaginary characters, *The Blazing World* becomes a fantastic romance for the poet herself, and the unpredictable adventure demands a dependable set of skills and inventions to help the poet navigate through the storm. What forms of poetic navigation can the poet rely on to navigate through the vast sea of signification other than a well-established poetic tradition such as Petrarchan conceit? I would argue that Cavendish espouses the practice of augurer over the mechanical machines because the augurer’s subtle observation is close to the practice of poetry writing. If, as Cavendish and Sidney assert, poetry is supposed to deliver a variety of representations of the world through “subtle observations” and “studying inventions,” then poetic representation should almost desert the idea of nearness and preciseness;
then instead of getting rid of the distance between the word and the thing itself, collapsing the space between vehicle and tenor, poetic representation that comes from “subtle observation” uses the distance to achieve the impact of nostalgia. Thus the practice of looking in and looking through the layers of concealment and external appearance fundamentally breaks the system of poetic representation from the basis of observation. While Hooke diligently looks in and through the microscope to find God’s secret message, Cavendish looks out to the sky to see God’s secret message using her own senses. Since looking in is radically different form of observation compared to looking at and watching from a distance, as the latter seems to involve more intuition and trained human senses, it will require a different type and class of metaphors to describe what one observes by looking in or looking at.\footnote{The intricate metaphor of subtle design serves no purpose under a microscope other than providing a detailed picture—the observation itself, the experience of such subtle beauty, is robbed while the machine does the work of looking in and seeing the beauty as it appears. It is as if Cavendish suggests the beauty and meaning captured through a machine is more than natural—not more natural but beyond natural. The moral judgment and merit of such judgment is something we should examine and discuss more. Scientific instruments might provide closer and closer depictions of the objects they are trained upon by those who wield them, yet such increasingly detailed observations fail to supplant the observer’s original intuitive grasp of an observational subject or the organic processes within which it is entangled. If Hooke’s method and vision lead to greater and greater particularization, Cavendish’s points out the danger, to cite the old saw, in mistaking trees for the forest.}

Interestingly, when comparing Hooke’s cautious rhetorical use of nearness and subtleness in approaching his subjects to Cavendish’s blunt criticism about mechanical inventions in The Blazing World, one might hastily conclude that oddly, even though she valorizes subtlety, there isn’t much subtlety when it comes to Cavendish’s rhetoric, especially in her caustic complaints against the practicality of mechanical devices such as the microscope and telescope. When Cavendish uses of the term “subtile” to describe a kind of observation, as in the previous passage I introduced, the term is used to deliver a discerning judgment against the technology that some might argue advanced a close observation as well as a wide navigation of the world. As subtle as
it might sound, I would like to argue that for Cavendish what proximity offers to scientific
observation represents the abomination of what nature conceives as beauty—subtlety. And here I
am using the word to describe the beauty found in the material world, both physical or abstract,
that is both so sharp and so distant that its metamorphosis is often unrecognized by or
untraceable to our naked eye. The subtlety is not without its dangers. The kind of double
meaning that the word “subtle” embodies in Cavendish I am trying to point out might be
explained more clearly through the example of Bacon’s use of the word to explain the
paradoxical doubled nature of mechanical inventions as he writes in *The Wisedome of the
Ancients*: “mechanicall arts are of ambiguous use, serving as well for hurt as for remedy, and
they have in a manner power both to loose and bind themselves.”\(^{152}\) In *Humanism, Machinery,
and Renaissance Literature*, Jessica Wolfe writes in her introduction that “Bacon’s conflicted
attitude towards mechanical subtlety emerges most clearly in his interpretation of Daedalus in his
1609 *De Sapientia Veterum*”\(^{(\text{Wolfe 12})}\).\(^{153}\) Wolfe explains that Bacon sees Daedalus’
invention as “simultaneously obfuscatory and enlightening,” and his analysis of the “Daedalian duplicity of
mechanics” in the *De Sapientia Veterum* helps to explain “his ambivalent depiction of the
discipline in *The New Atlantis*, where mechanical devices alternate between elucidation and
deception.”\(^{154}\) As Wolfe also points out, Bacon’s scientific method also reveals how Bacon
“oscillates between two contradictory definitions of subtlety,” and the scientific method and the

\(^{152}\) In *The Wisedome of the Ancients*, Bacon further expresses his discomfort toward the idea that scientific
inventions can offer a commercial exchange value that is perhaps far more real than the promise of future, more
immediate and practical than escaping the labyrinth: “hee which invented the intricate nooks of the Labyrinth, did
also shew the commodity of the clue” (sig. D11v).

interprets the Cretan engineer as an allegorical embodiment of mechanical artifice” in the fable entitled ‘Daedalus,
or Mechanique’ in *The Wisedome of the Ancients*. Wolfe points out that Bacon’s description of Daedalus’ intricate
and subtle design “represents machinery as simultaneously obfuscatory and enlightening” (12). Wolfe refers to
Bacon’s work with its Latin title.

\(^{154}\) Wolfe 12-13.
machines that enabled and could “denote an empirical, highly particularized mode of scientific investigation” can also “signify an intellectual pitfall” and manipulate or veil truth.\textsuperscript{155}

To assert his moral conviction for his mechanical device, Hooke writes an ambiguously humble tract about a man-made mechanical device full of irregularities while still capable of magnifying the divine work of God: “[S]o unaccurate is it, in all its productions, even those which seem most neat, that if examin’d with an organ more acute than that by which they were made, the more we see of their shape, the less appearance will there be of their beauty: whereas in the works of nature, the deepest discoveries shew us the greatest Excellencies.”\textsuperscript{156} Even though Hooke seems to underscore the obvious downfalls of the man-made machine, one must still recognize some truth in Hooke’s claim that the microscope is a “superlative” medium, more acute than the human eye itself, to watch as much details of nature’s beauty as we can and appelle God’s omnipotence by transcribing what we see through a microscope as in the drawings and prints Hooke offers in \textit{Micrographia}:

\begin{quote}
An evident argument, that he that was the Author of all these things, was no other then omnipotent; being able to include as great a variety of parts and contrivances in the yet smallest Discernable Point, as in those vaster bodies (which comparatively are also called Points) such as the Earth, Sun, or Planets. Nor need it seem strange that the Earth it self may be by an analogie call’d a Physical Point: For as its body, though now so near us to fill our eyes and fancies with a sense of the vastness of it, may by a little distance, and some convenient Diminishing
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{155} Wolfe also writes: “Directed one way subtlety reveals truth; directed another way, it obfuscates that truth. Bacon is ultimately unable either to oppose or wholly to embrace the use of machinery in his scientific method precisely because machines embody both kinds of subtlety at once” (12). For Cavendish, this polarizing quality of subtlety signifies a both eye-opening and blinding force leading to truth.

\textsuperscript{156} Hooke 2.
Glasses, be made vanish into a scarce visible Speak, or Point (as I have often try’d on the Moon, and (when not too bright) on the sun it self.) So, could a Mechanical contrivance successfully answer our theory, we might see the least spot as big as the Earth it self; and Discover, as Des Cartes also conjectures, as great a variety of bodies in the Moon, or Planets, as in the Earth. ¹⁵⁷

Nevertheless, in *Micrographia* visual representations take away from metaphoric representation by presenting both too little of bigger patterns and too much of small details. As I discussed earlier regarding Hooke’s magnification of a “point,” the nearness negates subtleness—the fact that one sharp point can get near the other sharp point eradicates the possibility of subtlety. It is important that Hooke associates physical sharpness with nearness, and even further, with subtleness. From a small, sharp point, Hooke writes, begins a world; the fact that an experimental scientist writes in metaphors to explain the world cannot overcome, Cavendish would argue, the decontextualized nature of the microscopic observations he is preceding from: “Truly, my reason can hardly be persuaded to believe, that this artificial informer (I mean the microscope) should be so true as it is generally thought; for, in my opinion it, more deludes, than informs. It is well known, that if a figure be longer, broader, and bigger than its nature requires, it is not its natural figure” (Hooke 60). Again, for Cavendish, the physical nearness rather deforms, not informs; there is only mental subtlety, conceptual sharpness. The distance between things that create proportions, patterns, and depths makes it possible for augurers to perform their augury and poets to create better metaphors and use poetic imaginations. Rather than using a mechanical or external aid that merely offers physical nearness, Cavendish advocates using our

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¹⁵⁷ Hooke 2-3.
own innate ability to compare and contrast to comprehend the truth more subtly, and it is the ability to compare and contrast that inaugurates the artfulness of poetic imagination.

As with the term “subtile” being used in Hooke, the magnitude or extremity of material subtlety becomes a fascination in Hooke’s microscopic observation. Hooke is fascinated by sharpness and irregularity of a surface that is part of a bigger, more blunt landscape so that he can define how sharp one thing is to the other. He wants to replace the practice of “discourse and disputation” that relies on variables and comparisons with his microscopic studies; he argues that the “productions of ruler and compasses” fail to deliver the kind of accuracy his microscope can show: “The Points of Pins are yet more blunt, and the Points of the most curious Mathematical Instruments do very seldom arrive at so great a sharpness; how much therefore can be built upon demonstrations made only by the productions of the Ruler and Compasses, he will be better able to consider that shall but view those points and lines with a Microscope.” It is interesting that both Cavendish and Hooke use the similar analogy of comparison and contrast that only something equally or more sharp will get through another subtle surface, as the actual tip of the microscope is sharp and acute. However, while Hooke uses subtlety as a physical periphery between two things, Cavendish’s delineation of “subtile observation” in The Blazing World suggests something less material. Redolent of the sophisticated mastery of sprezzatura I discussed in relation to Sidney earlier, her concept of “subtile observation” is laden with laborious practice veiled under the “great practice” of keen intuitive knowledge, the kind of sharp reasoning and swift wit essential for a courtly navigation. The knowledge gained from her “subtile observation” seems to come from within, never quite seems to be external; it appears rather simple outside while intricate inside; it is neither noisy nor obvious. Scientists appear

158 Hooke 2.
clunky and loud in *The Blazing World* because Cavendish believes the “great work” of the “subtile observation” should remain so subtle that the laborious work underneath and before the outcome of one’s endeavor leaves enough distance for the audience to do their own “great work” to appreciate and learn from it. Consider the similarities between political navigating in the court and poetic “gilding” in artistic creation to achieve subtlety that hides “self love,” a quality that is essential to these poets whose political and courtly career often determined their poetic career; it becomes unequivocal that she uses nautical metaphors to express her concerns about the advent of new science.\(^\text{159}\) As her description of “subtle observation” and “great practice” highlights the machine’s affiliation with mechanical rudeness and lack of complexity, Cavendish believes that mechanical science is not the answer to finding the truth, but rather the source of confusion and deformation, and that such confusion and deformation of truth will result in the inevitable changes in social, philosophical, and political views that will threaten the subtle and great way people used to perceive the world to find truth.

Cavendish is consistent in the presentation of her beliefs. In “It is hard to believe, that there are worlds in this world,” she argues that the microscopic world threatens the idea of a fluid and soft world perceived through our sensory system. The title signals the underlying metaphysical crisis triggered by the discovery of a microscopic world—the institutionalized representation and knowledge of the fluid and mutable world becomes compartmentalized and organized by the smaller worlds inside.

Nothing so hard in Nature, as Faith is,

For to believe Impossibilities:

\(^\text{159}\) I discussed how courtly conduct and poetic imagination go hand in hand in the previous chapter about Sidney. I am using the Word “Gilding” from the opening of Sidney’s *The Defence of Poesy* where Sidney discusses tactlessness of Pugliano’s hyperbole about mastery of horsemanship. The word could possess double meaning, both writing poetry and performing one’s political significance at the court.
As doth impossible to us appeare,
Not ‘Cause ‘tis not, but to our sense not cleere;
But that we cannot in our Reason finde,
As being against Natures course, and kinde.
For many things our sense dull may scape,
For sense is grosse, not every thing can shape.
So in this World another world may bee,
That we do neither touch, tast, smell, heare, see.
What Eye so cleere is, yet did ever see
Those little Hookes, that in the Load-stone bee,
Which draw hard iron? or give Reasons, why
The Needles point still in the north lye.
As for Example, Atomes in the Aire,
We nere perceive, although the Light be faire.\(^\text{160}\)

Our sense may be “dull” and “many things” could “escape” from our senses, and the microscope might provide a sharper, clearer vision of things invisible to our “dull” naked eye; however, the poet also suggests “sense is grosse” and “not everything can shape.” The microscope aims to enhance the “grosse” human sense and give a shape to “this world” with the shapes of the “other worlds in this world.” Although the shape under the microscope is still impossible to touch, taste, smell, or hear, the inner “other worlds” define the outer—“this world”—as they give a “shape” to “this world.” The world of subvisibilia, only visible through the microscope, gives new additional content to the already visible and sensible world; as Christiane Frey points out, the

\(^{160}\) Cavendish, “It is hard to believe, that there are worlds in this world,” *Poems, and fancies* (1653), lines 1-16.
microscopic worlds “become an arena for a new kind of science of the invisible just starting to gain contour” (377). By using the word “contour,” Frey alludes to the ideology of shape and form; without outlining one world from the other, neither world can be defined in terms of its size or shape. Microscopic observation provides a visible knowledge that outlines the world of the invisible, which gives significance—“contour”—to both the visible and invisible world.

Hooke writes in Micrographia that “the science of Nature has been already too long made only a work of the brain and of Fancy: It is now high time that it should return to the plainness and soundness of Observations on material and obvious things.” Even though we cannot fully trust or rely solely on human senses, Hooke continues, accuracy is possible if we use “a sincere hand, and a faithful eye, to examine, and to record, the things themselves as they appear.” Indeed, these are the values of microscopic examination: remaining faithful to the pure examining method of natural science while suppressing and policing human imagination and sense perception. As Frey points out, Hooke believes that the “plainness and soundness of observation” alone should “supersede” and control the imagination and sensory reflection. Only through an “artificial instrument,” as Hooke describes his instrument, are we able to see the “plainness and soundness” of the invisible world without being misguided or misinformed by reflection or imagination.

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162 I would also like to further point out that the word “contour” echoes with the idea of shade being not only the antithesis but also the defining element of light, the idea that I explore in the later chapters where I discuss the topos of light and shade in the works of John Milton and Anne Finch.
163 Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia, sig. B1r.
164 Hooke, sig. A2v.
165 Frey 377. Frey also points out how Hooke inserts the rhetoric of humilitas to suggest the new empirical method used in his scientific observation focuses on a small, humble world that becomes visible under the microscope.
Cavendish, however, believes that the microscopic observation provides the “hard”
definition and circumscription of “this world,” which poses a threat to an ever-changing and
developing power of imagination and human sense perception. In addition, the idea of
subvisibilia signifies the infinite existence of “other worlds” inside “this world.” Frey points out
that although “both the microscope and the telescope occasion new theories and techniques of
*pure* observation,” Hooke believed “microscopic observations in particular lead to far-reaching
meditations on the nature of matter, the infinite smallness of the microcosm, and that which, in
spite of the microscope’s powers of magnification, is not able to be observed. Hooke’s ideal of
limiting observation entirely to what is visible is exceeded precisely with regard to the new,
microscopically delimited world.” Borrowing Cavendish’s words, “it is hard to believe” that
inside “this world” there are “other worlds,” which might contain more “other words” that yet
again contain more “other worlds” inside them, so on and so forth; the microscopic view not
only reveals what cannot be seen through the naked eye but also suggests the possibility of what
hasn’t been seen even through the microscopic view. The poet, in “It is hard to believe,”
carefully reiterates the signifiers that draw attention to the obvious differences between “gross”
physical reality and the “hard” abstract realm. To believe in something, human beings always try
to “shape” something invisible or impossible into visible or probable, thus believable. Once
something takes on a shape and form, it becomes the “hard” certainty.166 Nature does not stay in
a permanent “shape,” she argues, but “faith” does—“Nothing so hard in Nature, as Faith is./ For
to believe in Impossibilities.” Soft things are hard to shape, and the poet believes that Nature—
“this world”—should remain soft, “gross” without “shape.” Notice the juxtaposition of concepts
such as “hard” and “believe” or “Impossibilities” and “believe”; the word “hard” in the title

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166 Imagine the religious icons or iconic images that become more solid than the mutable, uncertain reality of our physical realm.
suggests difficulty while the one in the first line of the poem signifies density. Here she also plays with the word “believe” as in believable knowledge as well as believing in faith. Natural scientists would argue that things without density are more difficult to know, thus impossible to even believe in their existence. She would argue that things with definitive shape or density do not support the very principle of mutability that keeps “nothing so hard in Nature.”

Moreover, as if to accentuate the contrasting images of “hard” things in mutable Nature, Cavendish includes the image of loadstone pulling hard iron: “Those little Hookes, that in the Load-stone bee./ Which draw hard iron.”167 Hooke in Micrographia describes Cavendish’s “little Hooks” as “attractive virtue”: “Thus have I gently raised a Steel pendulum by a Loadstone to a great angle, till by the shaking of my hand I have chanced to make a separation between them, which is no sooner made, but as if the loadstone had retained no attractive virtue, the pendulum moves freely from it towards the other side.”168 When Hooke strives to endow the magnetism or the properties of a magnet with abstract values, Cavendish calls it as it would appear through the microscope—“those little Hookes” pulling the “hard iron.” Hooke prophesies the “plainness and soundness” of “the things themselves as they appear.”169 Yet Cavendish’s “those little Hookes” seems far more plain and descriptive than Hooke’s “attractive virtue.”170 Furthermore, here is Cavendish punning on the name “Hooke” to illustrate the image of a scientist laboring to “hook” and pull one world to the other so that they are near each other; the nearness between two things generate subtext for comparison, rather than objective scientific facts. The subtleness of the

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167 Cavendish, “It is hard to believe, that there are other worlds in this world,” lines 12-13.  
168 Hooke 32.  
169 Hooke writes in The Preface: “It is high time that [the science of nature] should return to the plainness and soundness of Observations on material and obvious things” (sig. B1r).  
170 In her poem “It is hard to believe,” Cavendish describes how a magnet works using a plain language: “Those little Hookes, that in the Load-Stone bee./ Which draw hard Iron?” (lines 12-13). On the other hand, Hooke’s description of a magnet in Micrographia is more conceptual and allusive: “So vast a difference is there between the attractive virtues of congruity upon a contiguous and disjoined body” (32). I will leave it to the readers to decide which description delivers a more vivid and persuasive image.
subject, she would argue, rather becomes more comprehensible and vivid through the power of imagination, rather than the aid of a microscope, which would only take us near the subject we observe.

Cavendish contemplates—what should one believe, when even though the science has now revealed the “other worlds” smaller than “this world” or greater than “this world,” there are possibilities of more “other worlds” that haven’t been uncovered, which again might completely rearrange or subvert the accepted, “hard” knowledge of the world? How does the microscopic view, as it reveals such a confined, small world, avoid the partial, capricious, and artificial values that establish the institutional values such as sizes and shapes that are co-dependent on other artificial values? Is there truth that overrides these worldly conditions and holds its ubiquitous, permanent “shape”? The “hard” evidence that the new science offers should come from the “plainness and soundness” of the natural science, as Hooke argues, but even Hooke cannot avoid using hyperbolic poetic language to emphasize the potential connection between the plain, physical phenomenon and the inevitable authority of a non-physical realm, or what Cavendish calls “Impossibilities.” In the fourth line of the poem it becomes clear—the poet points out that things are invisible “not ‘cause ‘tis not, but to our sense not cleere.” The poet argues that “hard” evidence is man-made, as there is “nothing so hard in Nature.” Sometimes what we cannot see or feel embodies the aura of “Impossibilities” that engages our imagination, and without imagination, there is no chance for “Impossibilities”: “As for Example, Atomes in the Aire,/ We never perceive, although the Light be faire.” And if there are no “Impossibilities,” there is even less chance for faith. Seeing as a sensory perception, whether through the naked eye or enhanced by “the sincere hand” or optic devices, cannot completely avoid the possibility of mutability and uncertainty; there might be another world inside the “other words in this world.” There are still
things unknown and unseen, and the infinite possibility of subvisibilia makes the unseen and undiscovered region much more significant. What has been touched, explored, or observed, doesn’t leave much room for imagination and desire; knowledge and faith are two different things, and here in her poem Cavendish suggests that hard things might offer knowledge but they offer so little room for faith—hard things are perhaps too real, too “hard to believe” because they eradicate our need to believe something beyond or invisible to us. Though the poet in “It is hard to believe” acknowledges the tenuousness of sensory perception, she finds solace in innate knowledge and faith without seeing microscopically or completely. Hooke’s microscopic looking into what used to be unseen, shapeless, or unknown subordinates the world under the microscope as one world gets “shape[d]” by the others that become visible through the mechanically-aided vision. Cavendish rebukes the natural science’s endeavor to present the ever-changing, shapeless—“grosse”—realm of nature as something “hard” with “shape.” By describing a magnified image as something “hard” and with “shape,” Cavendish argues the subtlety of microscopic view that Hooke praises fails to take us anywhere “neer” conceptual clarity or subtlety, but rather dissuades and leads us farther away from “subtile observations” that could result in a greater truth. We will see this same contrast in the next two chapters on Milton (and, indeed, the final chapter, on Finch). While Hooke underlines the unreliability and need for improvement of human senses with the external help of an optic device, Milton, aligning with Cavendish and Sidney, considers accurate and fruitful vision to be in a significant sense internally oriented. In the next chapters on Milton I will argue that Milton, in fact, believes the lack of physical sight doesn’t create as much harm as the deficiency of spiritual sight, as suggested by Milton’s delineation of Adam and Eve’s spiritual insight and faith in *Paradise Lost*;
to appreciate and understand the true beauty and significance of God’s creations, Milton’s texts imply, one must learn to read and decipher the material world through one’s spiritual eye.

4 CHAPTER 4: Milton, St. Augustine, and Illuminated Sight in *Paradise Lost*

At the very start of my project, I supplied a series of quotations that would guide my discussion, among them Sidney’s assertion that “the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher’s book.” I have now examined Sidney’s assertion in two general contexts: first, with Sidney himself, as a means of explaining the special position of the poet, who, he insisted, produces a special sort of truth, working from larger, universal principles and then assorting specific aspects of the material or physical world to match; and, second, with Cavendish, in the preceding chapter, I examined the implication of Sidney’s insistence on an “inward light” in terms of one of the most vigorous debates that would arise in the years following his death, the rise of experimental science and the steady adoption of an atomistic materialism seeking truth through minute, repeated physical observations, which the major authors in my study all stand in stark opposition to. In the following two chapters on Milton, I would like to focus more specifically on a theme that has been running barely under the surface of my discussion so far, the way that this “inward light” functions in terms of religion and spiritual sight, as well as the inference that this spiritual sight is far more complete than Hooke’s microscopic view. After examining Milton’s monist materialism, which collapses the traditionally recognized dualism between material and spiritual and thus privileges spiritual sight as the master of all human perception, I will introduce an additional major figure into my study, Saint Augustine. The link between Saint Augustine and Milton has been, as I will show, widely discussed by previous Milton scholars, and rightly so. As Irene Samuel writes in *Plato and
Milton, “As a Christian, Milton rejects Plato’s explanation that we won this knowledge in a previous existence, that is, he rejects the doctrines of metempsychosis and recollection; but he finds a convenient substitute in St. Augustine’s theory that God himself imparts knowledge of the eternal Ideas to the human mind” (139). Indeed, Augustine describes a “mind’s eye” that correlates perfectly with Sidney’s “inward light,” and these terms are freighted with additional urgency and poignancy given Milton’s failing physical sight and eventual blindness. After establishing a foundation for my use of the term “spiritual sight” that connects it squarely to my earlier discussions of Sidney and Cavendish, the next two chapters will proceed with a series of detailed readings of Paradise Lost, Samson Agonistes, and Paradise Regained to demonstrate the importance of recognizing a spiritual sight separate from and superior to physical sight in Milton’s poetry.

4.1 Milton, Matter, and Materialism

In Brief Notes Upon A Late Sermon Titled The Fear of God and the King by Matthew Griffith, D.D., Milton composed an acerbic critique against the priest who tricks his pupils into submitting to the sublime power of a sovereign:

[Griffith] begins in his Epistle to the General; and moves cunningly for a licence to be admitted Physitian both to Church and State; then sets out his practice in Physical terms, an wholsom electuary to be taken every morning next our hearts: tells of the opposition which he met with from the College of state-Physicians, then laies before you his drugs and ingredients; Strong purgatives in the pulpit,
contemperd of the myrrhe of mortification, the aloes of confession and contrition, the rubarb of restitution and satisfaction;\textsuperscript{171}

The attribute of rhubarb as purging aid is both metonymical and figurative here in Milton’s passage, as it is in other Renaissance poets’ use of the word.\textsuperscript{172} This immediate and visible attribute—what it does and how it tastes—also makes this word available for creating religious tropes about repentance and mortification. However, pay attention to the way Milton uses the word’s figurative sense—the bitterness of the plant is associated with “restitution” and “satisfaction,” random concepts that are seemingly unexpected. To understand the figurative sense of Milton’s use of “rhubarb,” readers should first understand how figurative language illuminates Milton’s resolution of the problem of mind-body dualism. In Milton Among the Philosophers, Stephen Fallon argues for Milton’s affirmation of monist philosophy against the rising authority of a mechanist world picture in the seventeenth century, and one of the most compelling pieces of evidence for Milton’s monism provided by Fallon is Raphael’s description of angels’ immaterial and material unity using the tropes of vegetables. Pointing at Hobbes and Henry More, two of the most prominent scholars and scientists of Milton’s time, Fallon tries to redirect previous Milton scholarship that “offers a chaotic list of sources and analogues for Milton’s materialism,” a list that includes ancient through contemporary authorities such as Gregory of Nyssa, Eusebius, the Zohar and cabbalist Robert Fluud, or Duns Scotus.\textsuperscript{173} Fallon

\textsuperscript{171} John Milton, Brief Notes Upon a Late Sermon, titl’d, The Fear of God and the King: Preached, and since Published, By Matthew Griffith, D.D., sig.A2r.


Literal representation can be as opaque as figurative representation if the tenor of each metaphoric articulation becomes more and more obscure and personal. Milton’s shifting representation and articulation of the celestial and earthly world reveal the changes in the poet’s philosophical understanding. “As with Hobbes and Henry More, Milton’s conception of angels derives from his ontological assumptions” (141), writes Fallon, and we can construe that the philosophical context of Milton’s depiction of vegetables with soul and angels with body is the hybrid creation of such “assumptions,” informed by and reacting against the contemporary metaphysical assumptions of body and soul. Fallon’s argument contrasts with that of Nicholson, for Fallon insists that Milton never demonstrated the Cambridge Platonists’ dualist response to the threat of Hobbesian mechanism that circumscribes the power of free will. Milton was able to link material nourishment with spiritual growth; such a trope consistently appears throughout Milton’s various works, and the trope is self-explanatory: the nourishment of words will feed the readers’ soul. The power of free will is the power to grow—with virtuous intention, one will look to God and grow taller and higher. And as the humans can grow and change, so do the angels:

Woodhouse for examining the possible influences of Eusebius, the Stoics, and Robert Fludd. He also suggests John Rumrich’s Matter of Glory: A New Preface to “Paradise Lost,” which links Milton’s materialism with Duns Scotus.

Wonder not then, what God for you saw good
If I refuse not, but convert, as you,
To proper substance; time may come when men
With angels may participate, and find
No inconvenient diet, nor too light fare:
And from these corporeal nutriments perhaps
Your bodies nay at last turn all to spirit,
Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend
Ethereal as we, or may at choice
Here or in Heav’nly paradises dwell (V. 491-500)

Following Raphael’s speech on the “one first matter” to Adam, according to Fallon, the text above “makes explicit the monist basis of that materiality” (141). In the previous lines Raphael introduces “one first matter”: “one Almighty is, from whom/ All things proceed, and up to Him return,/ If not depraved from good, created all/ Such to perfection, one first matter all,/ Endued with various forms, various degrees/ Of substance, and in things that live, of life” (V. 469-74). There is one matter, which is also the first matter; the rest and later are “endued” with different forms, and the variation of this “one first matter” defines the physical reality of the matter. The *OED* offers various definitions and uses of the word “endue” including “to take in, ‘inwardly digest’” (II. 2. b), “to put on as a garment” (IV. 6. a), and “to be invested with power or quality” and “to be inherent in” (V. 9. b). The last definition also offers an example from Milton’s Sonnet 7: “And inward ripenes doth much less appear,/ That som more timely-happy spirits indu'th.” No matter which definition best explains “one first matter all/ Endued with various forms,” there is an insight supported by Milton that the inward growth directly represents the outward growth, as
the matter is cloaked by the physical body, inward spiritual growth is literally veiled under the material body. But the spiritual growth is real and physical as well; the green leaf of the top of the plant is indeed the sign of the spiritual nearness to God, as much as ethereal angels’ being light and airy signifies their pure souls, making it possible for them to be near the higher existence. Inward purity will shape the outward appearance of the matter, as well as pure soul will compose and shape a body “more spirituous, and pure” enough to be lifted up and be “nearer to him,” explains Milton in *Paradise Lost* (V. 475-76).\(^{175}\)

According to Fallon, Raphael’s analogy between plant metabolism and the transformation of body into spirit in this text suggests the possibility of the “ontological continuity that he has just illustrated, that man can turn into angel” (141). The possibility is real and limitless though it has not yet happened, not been described yet. Furthermore, the possibility exists for both angels and men. Whether angel or human, they are all “one first matter,” thus containing the same substance and going through the same sublimation of their material substance: “Milton viewed angels and human souls as similar in substance; the tenuously corporeal angels of *Paradise Lost* resemble the tenuously corporeal souls of *Christian Doctrine*. Milton’s angels are not Aquinas’s disembodied spirits; their substance, like the mode of reason, differs from man’s ‘but in degree, of kind the same’” (Fallon 142). That Milton often uses tropes of vegetables and fruits, perhaps most frequently among the gardening tropes in *Paradise Lost*, is not uncommon to remark; many scholars have discussed Milton’s use of vegetation metaphors—as in the scenes when Adam and Eve discuss gardening and labor in Paradise in *Paradise Regained* as well as the tropes of farming and seasonal changes in *Paradise Regained*—in order to reveal the

\(^{175}\) “But more refined, more spirituous, and pure./ As nearer to him placed or nearer tending/ Each in their several active spheres assigned,/ Till body up to spirit work, in bounds/ Proportioned to each kind” (V. 475-79).
religious undertones of Milton’s articulations of literature as the vehicle of religious
transformation and the subsequent elevation of human kind.

Karen L. Edwards, in Milton and the Natural World, provides numerous insightful
examinations of Milton’s understanding of the new knowledge of the world fostered by the
advent of science, and I also find her inclusion of Hooke intriguing:

Hooke’s praise of “a new visible world” in the preface to Micrographia is often
taken to herald the experimentalists’ belief that to see is to know, a belief that led
ultimately to what David Michael Levin has called the “hegemony of vision.” But
Hooke’s praise of optic lenses does not make an easy equation between seeing
and knowing. He acknowledges that that which is seen must be interpreted. To
see a structure does not allow direct access to knowing any more than reading
words does, for the interpreting mind must represent what it sees. (80)

Edwards follows her reading with a passage from Hooke’s Micrographia in which Hooke
discloses that even though he wants to show the “true appearance” of various objects, he feels
the need to provide an additional interpretive step to produce a “plain representation” of them.¹⁷⁶

But notice how the microscopic view makes it rather more challenging for Hooke to find that one
“true appearance”:

I never began to make any draught before by many examinations in several lights,
and in several position to those lights, I had discover’d the true form. For it is
exceeding difficult in some objects, to distinguish between a prominency and a

¹⁷⁶ Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia. sig.F2v. The discrepancy between what one sees and what one
represents—draws or describes—is inevitable regardless of how “plain” the representation can get: “[T]he Gravers
have pretty well follow’d my directions and draughts; and that in making of them, I indeavoured (as far as I was
able) first to discover the true appearance, and next to make a plain representation of it. This I mention the rather,
because of these kind of Objects there is much more difficulty to discover the true shape, then of those visible to the
naked eye, the same object seeming quite differeing, in one position to the Light, from what it really is, and may be
discover’d in another.”
depression, between a shadow and a black stain, or a reflection and a whiteness in the colour. Besides, the transparency of most objects renders them yet much more difficult then if they were opacous.\textsuperscript{177}

As Edwards explains, it is hard to determine the extent to which Milton was influenced by the new knowledge of the world provided by experimental science. Even though Milton no longer had sight to read or see the microscopic details of a flea or a plant such as rhubarb, Milton’s "reformed mode of natural analogy," as Edwards calls it, is worth examining here because my discussion of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poets’ use of figurative language will ultimately reveal that the discoveries of scientific knowledge of the time advanced not just the abstract, objective, and empiricist understanding about the world, but also that these scientific discoveries promoted the legitimacy and expediency of turning poetic representation into day-to-day tropes about economic and social exchanges such as farming or gardening, and even more importantly, making tropes about religious enlightenment as real and literal as natural phenomena and conditions.

Through his description of the purpose of the microscope, Hooke argues that the world will become better-known through the mechanical aid of the device; thus he strives to "promote the use of mechanical helps for the senses, both in surveying the already visible world and for the discovery of many others hitherto unknown, and to make us, with the great conqueror, to be affected that we have not yet overcome one world when there are so many others to be discovered, every considerable improvement of telescopes or microscopes producing new worlds and Terra-Incognitas to our view."\textsuperscript{178} That blindness forced Milton to adapt virtually the process Hooke describes as a new, exciting direction available to the enlightenment is worth pointing out

\textsuperscript{177} Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia. sig.F2v.
\textsuperscript{178} Hooke, sig. D2v.
here. Seeing, in both a material and immaterial sense, becomes real with Milton and Hooke. Seeing directly leads the observer to discovery and knowledge, thanks to the very basic tenet of delivering “terra-incognita” into “our view.” Seeing what was invisible, and not being concerned in what sense an object was invisible at that moment to the naked eye, was never Milton’s loss when he lost his vision; at least, that was Milton’s belief, and *Paradise Lost* is there to show his possession of spiritual vision, more even to prove his spiritual gain. Milton might have lost his capacity to see what was visible to his naked eye, but not to see what was visible to his inner or spiritual eye. Hooke almost believes that the microscope offers the similar kind of revelation, seeing what was invisible through the distortion of the visible. Seeing “terra incognita” or the darkness first—the obliteration of what is visible to the naked eye to get to the point of seeing again—before seeing “new worlds” is inevitable for both Hooke’s microscopic and Milton’s spiritual seeing.

Milton’s tropes involving attributes of plants and animals perform a specific role of signification in his works; understanding how a plant grows into a tree or produces a fruit helps us understand Milton’s poetic and religious anticipation for the world that he desires to see in the future, presented in both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Seeing is indeed the mind’s work for the blind poet. Milton’s faith and anticipation for religious reformation and poetic innovation should remind us of the labor required for a pious believer who seeks God’s truth. Anticipation is critical—it not only exhibits the degree of faith but also postulates time and place in the future tense. It is clear that *Paradise Lost* is envisioned by a poet who looks forward to seeing the Paradise to come; this wishful tone is in the experience of reading the text as if
different color hues are perceived by the degree of various shades.\textsuperscript{179} Through \textit{Paradise Lost} Milton conveys the faithful believers’ aspiration for the Paradise to which they will someday return. The narrative about a heavenly place once promised but now lost always has a universal appeal, especially embodying the emblem of loss and promise of heaven altogether. Even though the tone of repentance and anguish continues throughout the text, \textit{Paradise Lost} also leaves readers wondering what the future will be, inspiring them to look forward into the future, not look back into the past. The tense of \textit{Paradise Lost} is in the past, but the readers are already looking into the future, aspiring to regain what has been lost. \textit{Paradise Lost} teaches its readers how to anticipate in and wish for something that is invisible and absent in their present, physical realm; the physical eye can’t accomplish this learning task.

Trivial things—such as a rhubarb—become significant in Milton’s works because the small, powerless objects become the symbol of growth and change that are immanent of greater aspirations. Additionally, time, as with Milton’s life-long political project, must take its course to make something small and insignificant into something life- and history-changing. Looking backward is an integral part of looking forward, as microscopic looking in and macroscopic looking out define each other. For instance, in \textit{Areopagitica} (1644), Milton argues that a nation’s cultural sophistication is defined by its “subtle and sinewy” rhetoric: “a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit; acute to invent, suttle and sinewy to discours, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to.”\textsuperscript{180} Again, pay attention to the conceptual movement and direction of the adjectives that Milton carefully lists

\textsuperscript{179} The hope is felt, not read—I will explore this idea more fully later in my discussion of the Augustinian theory of illumination and intelligent order and the difference between and co-existence of wisdom (sapientia) and knowledge (scientia).

above—slow, low, and dull to fast, high, and sharp. Milton’s phrase “subtle and sinewy” reinforces the idea that the invisible but subtle, abstract ideas are a living part of bigger, sharp, and tangible voices that move the readers to take an action; again, writing—writing poetry, more specifically—in this sense must go somewhere higher and larger than its printed page; when the sentence ends, its idea should live on and continue to work outside the text. With or without the microscopic information of the structure of the world, with or without the articulation of how the world exists through the aid of science and mechanical advancements, poetic representation finds a way to represent the world through mirroring and projecting, beyond the limitations as well as the expectations of scale or detail. Understanding the metaphoric relationships that exist in nature might be more delightful and instructive than looking through a microscope to find out what the naked eyes cannot see.

Seeing represents the faith beyond reason or belief for both Hooke and Milton. The unmoving will to focus and zoom in to find the light of enlightenment is undeniably paramount in the process of Milton’s looking forward to the regaining of Paradise and Hooke’s looking in to unveil “terra incognita.” Hooke makes an intriguing statement about opacity and transparency: “[T]he transparency of most objects renders them yet much more difficult then if they were opacous.” Milton uses the same word “opacous” in describing the nebulosity of the Earth, and Adam, in Book VIII of Paradise Lost, seems to be suspicious about the Ptolemaic idea of the sun revolving around the earth, asking Raphael about celestial orders and motions:

When I behold this goodly frame, this world
Of heav’n and Earth consisting, and compute

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181 For Milton, it seems to me, it is immoral to take time and space if there were no change or anticipation of change to come. We will revisit the issue of time when I discuss how Adam and Eve disagree about their idea of how to spend time. The word “spend” here however is polarizing.
182 Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia, sig. F2v.
Their magnitudes, this Earth a spot, a grain,  
An atom, with the firmament compared  
And all her numbered stars, that seem to roll  
Spaces incomprehensible (for such  
Their distance argues and their swift return  
Diurnal) merely to officiate light  
Round this opacous Earth, this punctual spot  
One day and night, in all their vast survey  
Useless besides, reasoning I oft admire  
How nature wise and frugal could commit  
Such disproportions with superfluous hand (VIII. 15-27)

Milton’s use of the word “officiate” is also noteworthy. The ambiguous micro- and macro-scopic implications of Milton’s and Hooke’s use of the word “opaque” reveal perhaps different but similar views of the way seeing aided their believing. Milton is obscured and veiled by the opaque sheen that prohibits him from seeing the Sun through his physical eye; he embodies the opaque body itself, the blinded, veiled orbit, the earth to be looked in, examined and tested, and protected and renewed by God, the sun. Note that the opacity here is not with God but covering over the object of examination; the opacity obscures the object’s—Milton’s--view of the sun, or God. And God is ubiquitous, but our certain corporeal circumstances make it difficult to see Him. Adam is both suspicious and inspired by the “opacous” sheen that creates distortions and disproportions and is part of “nature wise,” which is also created by God. In this sense, Milton implies the challenge he feels in seeing both physically and spiritually since the loss of his physical sight. This vexing irregularity and irrationality exhibited in nature is the proof of God’s
work and His existence, as the poet must confront and embrace the similar challenges of absent physical sight and a shielded view of the physical world. The poet not only embodies the blinded eyeball, but his blindness to the outside world also makes him compare himself to “the opaques Earth” after the Fall, as the poet calls the earth “this punctual spot” waiting to be found and saved by that warm benevolent force far away and above. When Milton compares the earth and himself to the “punctual spot,” it is clear that he faithfully anticipates the salvation and the return of Paradise; being punctual and remaining hopeful in the face of darkness requires a practice of patience and firm faith. The poet represents a persistent believer who patiently waits for the sun to shine through the poet’s obscured world and help him see beyond his own obstacles and ambiguities. That Adam wonders “how nature wise and frugal could commit such disproportions” suggests that the poet is suspicious of the Ptolemaic system, but more importantly, this insight signifies that the poet, like the night waiting for the daybreak, is so anxious to be found and shone upon by God’s warm light, soon and persistently, that he wonders why he doesn’t just circle around the sun, immediately and eternally, so that he can always be in the presence of such light. But this endless light without darkness will ruin all the grain and eventually burn up everything, including the poet. Seeing too much, all at once and permanently, has its fatal consequences, and the poet’s blindness allows his experience of being unveiled to be even more illuminating.

When Hooke looks through the microscope at the fly’s wings, he is faced with multiple layers of transparent surfaces, which makes the process of looking through each and focusing upon a specific plane difficult. Hooke’s statement that “the transparency of most objects renders them yet much more difficult then if they were opaques” ironically echoes with Milton’s both frustration and admiration of the ambiguous ways Nature, God’s creation, works; abundance and
clarity often do not go well together. There are perhaps too many transparent layers, too much to see and understand at once, so that the abundance of the information available at the eyepiece of the microscope is perhaps not an ideal situation for a scientist after all. As Hooke says, opacity confronts him with challenges, but they are challenges that enable and anticipate solutions and rewards. Perhaps science, religion, and poetry all agree on the slowly realized but certainly existing value of opacity reigning over the immediate and easily visible value of transparency.

Hooke is aware of the microscope’s potential danger to enhance the technological and mechanical abandonment of spiritual sight as he tirelessly tries to connect spirituality with the microscopic view of the world. In Milton’s description of “opacous Earth,” the poet is the one being looked at, being examined and signified by God, but Hooke’s objects cannot possess, or, more importantly, cannot unveil, the human qualities of anguish, anticipation, and aspiration. In his experiment, Hooke plays the part of the examiner who reigns over and looks at the minute things from the “opacous Earth.” Adam’s macroscopic view of looking out to the incomprehensible frame of the celestial world is juxtaposed with the blind poet’s microscopic view of the world that offers him a self-examining look into his imagined world in *Paradise Lost*, and this self-reflective, microscopic look into oneself concedes a self-expanding transformation that guarantees any kind of imperfection or hardship—even including the poet’s blindness—that is part of God’s design.\(^\text{183}\) Thus with Milton, opacity is not projected; it is not away from or outside the poet, but within. Therefore, the poet tries to understand and see the universe through the less-than-perfect, opaque lens within while the microscope rather tries to remove it (though the scientist does see the importance and necessity of opacity).

\(^{183}\) To state the obvious, but self-reflection is an integral part of understanding God; one must know himself first to know God.
Hooke’s desire to access and then interpret “terra incognita” signifies an empiricist quest for conquering, the sort of reductionist approach to obtaining new knowledge for which science has often been criticized. If Hooke wants to illuminate as much as possible through his mechanical device, Milton wants to reflect as much as he believes through his poetic device. Notice the fundamental fissure between Milton’s seeing rooted in imagination and Hooke’s seeing anchored to evidence. Milton’s approach to his articulation of the universe, whether influenced by the new scientific knowledge or not, still protects the domain of mystery and opacity. The zooming in, illuminating power of the microscope works against the very core of the mimetic process of poetry, which entails expansion through imitation. Even more, illumination is not about the light within oneself, but about giving light to something, someone.\textsuperscript{184} The word “illumination” always signifies the source of light outside itself, the light being thrown to something that makes something appear more than obvious. The microscopic illumination of the object might reveal some material interior of the object, but it cannot reveal the intellectual or spiritual presence within. The definitions of the word “illuminate” provided in the \textit{OED} clearly reveal the transitive verb function of this word, taking one or two objects to complete its action. The act of illuminating always requires the one that illuminates the other. To put a light on something is to make something show, and it is indeed a passive revelation, or, to be exact, not a revelation at all. What Milton then tries to accomplish, by avoiding the empirical approach of uncovering mysteries by illuminating lights on them and zooming in, is a reflection upon his own doubts and uncertainties as he slowly but surely comes to a better understanding of the mysteries he hasn’t seen through his physical eyes. This again supports why Milton imagines

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\item[\textsuperscript{184}] According to OED, the word comes from the Latin participial stem of “illūmināre,” which means “to throw light on, light up, brighten, set in a clear light, make illustrious”; also it means “to baptize, to kindle, to paint or limn in colours” in medieval Latin. As transitive verb, “illuminate” signifies “to light up; give light to” (\textit{OED} 1.a).
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“the mind through all her powers/ Irradiate” and desires to “there plant eyes” as he pleads for the spiritual eye in Book III of *Paradise Lost*; only the spiritual light that “shine[s] inward” can guide us to see the “things invisible to mortal sight” and to “purge and disperse” falsehood from truth (III. 51-52, 55).\textsuperscript{185}

The *OED* entry also offers a useful example of “illuminate” from *Paradise Lost*, including the lines from Book VII where Raphael describes God’s creation of light:

And God made two great Lights, great for thir use
To Man, the greater to have rule by Day,
The less by Night alterne: and made the Starrs,
And set them in the Firmament of Heav’n
To illuminate the Earth, and rule the Day
In thir vicissitude, and rule the Night,
And Light from Darkness to divide. (VII. 346-52)

This is not a kind of light that penetrates and blinds, but by degree and gradation it creates its own significance. Darkness exists on the earth as the lack or disappearance of the day, the specific time and space that is called “night.” This is a light that gives and creates, even in its absence.\textsuperscript{186} The microscopic zeroing-in process involves a different kind of illumination, willed by a mechanistic claim that probably can more fittingly be paired with a Hobbesian mechanism that believes that the extension of the material machine is as far as the mind can and ever will be extended. In *Paradise Lost*, especially in the conversation between Adam and Raphael, Milton

\textsuperscript{185} This passage (III. 51-55) from *Paradise Lost* is one of the main inspirations for this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{186} The example from *Paradise Lost* I included above appears in the first list of definitions of “illuminate” as a transitive verb in *OED* (1.a). Even though the sense of pervasiveness and exteriority—the light that shines upon and takes an object to shine its light on—is also inevitable, the sense of giving and regenerative light is more prevalent in those lines from *Paradise Lost*. The light shone through a microscope however delivers a different kind of illumination.
clearly eschews any metaphysical idea that suggests the limitation of free will—not just for human beings, but for any living thing, such as vegetables and angels. Any living thing has a potential to learn and grow—to “shine inward,” “irradiate,” “purge and disperse,” and to “see and tell/ Of things invisible to mortal sight” (III. 52-55).

Adam in the above lines from Book VIII expresses his doubt of the efficiency of divine creation. He acknowledges the world containing both heaven and earth as a constructed, material existence when he calls it a “goodly frame” (VIII. 15). When Adam tries to perceive the physical size and distance of the geocentric celestial sphere that God designed, he is trying to “compute their magnitudes” (16-17). The earth is a physically small place compared to the incomprehensible size of other celestial entities, as is seen when we review the signifiers he uses to describe the earth: “this earth a spot,” “a grain,” “an atom with the firmament,” and “all her [earth’s] numbered stars” (17-19). Note how the verbs describing Adam’s action change to reveal different cognitive processes occurring in these lines; at first Adam “beholds” the frame of the world—he looks, observes, and then he perceives. This act of “beholding” is both active and passive for Adam; as he looks at/perceives/conceives the idea of what he is looking at, he imagines the object he is observing—the goodly frame, the stars, and even God—simultaneously looking back at him, creating a concurrent reciprocal relationship between the object and the observer. The word “behold” also appears in Book IX of *Paradise Lost*: “How shall I behold the face/ Henceforth of God or Angel, earst with joy/ And rapture so oft beheld?” (IX. 1080-82). The *OED* suggests that “behold” here is used to signify an action involving human perception: “to hold or keep in view, to watch; to regard or contemplate with the eyes; to look upon, look at (implying active voluntary exercise of the faculty of vision)” (I. 7. a). On the other hand, the stars are “numbered” but they still “seem to roll spaces incomprehensible”—note
that the “spaces” that are “incomprehensible” signify both the atomist materialist world and the spiritual world, both worlds making it difficult for Adam to comprehend the divine "frame" of the world. It is a "goodly" frame, but impossible to be comprehended by human scales and perception. In his discussion of Hobbes and Milton, Fallon suspects that “simple diametrical opposition thus does not suffice as a description of the relationship between Milton and Hobbes” and argues that when most of Milton’s contemporaries supported incorporeal substance to fence off Hobbes’ mechanist materialism, “Milton’s opposition to him took another form, one that adopted an assumption shared by Hobbes and the new science: the materiality of all entities. It is against this common background that Milton’s opposition to Hobbes must be viewed, for the similarities make Milton’s ultimate repudiation of him more significant” (130).187 The certainty or lucidity of the material existence doesn’t signal the spiritual existence for Milton; however, the opacity of the material existence requires the need for spiritual abundance. The machine doesn’t run because it has been running; nor does it need an external force to get it running. It runs because of the inner will that initiated its movement. The body cannot move without its spirit, and the spirit has nothing to show or prove its moving, material existence.

Adam’s description of the earth is redolent of Hooke’s microscopic view of his small objects, looking from a distance necessary for the observer and the lens to position and observe the target object. Ironically, though one be microscopic and the other macroscopic, both Hooke

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187 Fallon argues that even though various critics try to explain Milton’s ambiguous view on science by pointing to “Milton’s Baconian enthusiasm in the ‘Third Prolusion’ and to the eager commendation of scientific endeavor in the ‘Seventh Prolusion’” and by contrasting those examples with Milton’s reticence toward astronomy in *Paradise Lost* and his criticism against showy but futile knowledge in *Paradise Regained* (135). Fallon explains that those opinions derive from the assumption that Milton disagrees with the new science “only because it is not congruent with the wisdom of the past” (135). On the other hand, Fallon suggests, Milton’s apathetic reaction to the new science, especially starting from the 1640s, is based on “rational and not merely nostalgic grounds” and that we should notice how “Milton did not wholeheartedly support a project that eagerly co-opted the metaphysics of Descartes,” as Milton “fundamentally opposed the separate existence of an aspiritual material universe, which was the laboratory of the new philosophy” (135).
and Milton show their concern and even obsession with the potential view that can be induced from looking in, for the movement is toward the object, not the vast structure that holds the content; in other words, when Adam says, “when I behold this goodly frame,” he has already moved onto questioning the content and function of the “goodly frame.” The adjective “goodly” could express the quality of good appearance and of well-proportioned as well as something that is “notable in respect of size, quantity, or number,” as the OED suggests, but what I would like to point out here is that the adjective “goodly” does focus on the frame of things, the appearance of things, or the exterior holding and assuming the interior. Adam indeed expounds that the frame of God’s creation, the world itself as it appears to him, looks good enough as far as appearance is concerned. Now, the real question is whether the good appearance of something means something is really good. Granted, this is the most basic and frequent question asked regarding appearance and reality, but my analysis of this particular passage shows Adam’s quandary about the discrepancies between what he sees—or what he doesn’t see—and the discrepancies between perception and truth.\(^{188}\)

How does a scientific observation conducted by humans, even with the mechanistic aid of scopes, observe, and even further, explain, what our sight cannot physically reach? The microscopic lenses can reach as far as they can, but what awaits after that? How do we believe

\(^{188}\) The OED definitions of the word “goodly” emphasize the outwardly, material appearance: “Of good or pleasing appearance; handsome, beautiful, good-looking; comely, fair” (1.a) or “notable in respect of size, quantity, or number; fairly large, sizeable” (5). The phrase “this goodly frame” appears in Shakespeare’s Hamlet (II. 2. 298). Hamlet compares his pretended appearance to the “goodly frame, the earth” where happy pedestrian life seems to obscure or forget the tragedies and disasters that occur day to day on the earth: “[W]herefore I know not—lost all my mirth, foregone all/ custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with/ my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth,/ seems to me a sterile promontory; this almost excellent/ canopy, the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging/ firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire,/ why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent/ congregation of vapors” (II. 2. 296-303). By comparing his “disposition” and “goodly frame” to “a sterile promontory” and “a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors,” Hamlet suggests the discrepancy between how he performs to appear to the world outside him and what really goes on inside his mind that he has to conceal from the world. I am quoting from the second edition of The Riverside Shakespeare. See: The Riverside Shakespeare, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).
and rely on the knowledge gained through observation to define or deter something? When Adam sees the world and “beholds this goodly frame,” he confesses “something yet of doubt remains” (VIII. 13). Why do the heavenly bodies circle around the earth at unimaginable speeds when it is more “superfluous” for the earth to move? Why did nature “wise and frugal” commit “such disproportions,” wonders Adam (VIII. 26-27). These are the similar suspicions Cavendish raised against Hooke’s description of microscopic details of minute bodies: a microscopic view might gain us more variety of seeing the world, but what do we do with all the information? For Cavendish, the abundance of information from observation threatens the logical representation and understanding of the world and thus too much information was proven unnecessary and unproductive for human perception and knowledge of the world. But for Milton the observation itself, combined with the theological “frame” of the world, creates a logical fissure in human perceptive understanding of the world. Why is there such an illogical mistake as stars rolling around the earth when it should be the other way? If there is indeed a fissure in divine logic, then how do we resolve it? The comely looking “frame,” after all, can contain “such disproportions.”

It is equally significant to note how Milton circumscribes the material limitation as the earth’s significance while the rest of the heavenly construction expands and blurs physical boundaries—geometrical and material quantification—that define their scale and magnitude. That the earth’s opacity blocks itself away from the warmth and light of the sun echoes with the “incomprehensible” size, distance, and speed of stars and “spaces” (VIII. 20). Note that Adam says he tried to “compute” the world’s “magnitudes” to understand the “useless” operation of the stars rolling around the earth. Fallon also points out that during Milton’s time with the advent of the new science the “materiality (which allowed for observation, quantification, and measurement) increasingly became a leading test of reality or existence. Proponents of active
incorporeal substance, by definition imperceptible, scrambled to provide empirical evidence of the activity of that substance” (134). Measuring units became more and more articulate and expressive in defining the materiality of both heavenly and earthly worlds. In *Paradise Lost* Adam wants to measure a qualitative entity using a quantitative and mathematical reckoning even though he simultaneously notes that it will be impossible to measure and understand “spaces incomprehensible” because the earth can only be measured by being compared to such physical and material entities as “a spot, grain,/ An atom with the firmament” (VIII. 17-8). Meanwhile, even though humans “numbered” stars and announced that they “seem to roll,” since the “spaces” the “goodly frame” holds together inside are incomprehensible, how far the stars “roll” and thus how “swift” the stars “roll” are impossible to be computed. The things comparable are the things comprehensible; the things with material weight and scale are the things that Adam can see as well as understand. In Adam’s doubtful inquiries, we spot the poet’s subtle articulation of how the conventional frame of the celestial world constrains and manipulates the human logic.

Perhaps then it is more than human logic, perhaps something more like a poetic imagination that Milton suggests might help us understand such inconsistent and illogical design. The “incomprehensible” problem that cannot be solved by computing should naturally be dealt with through a means that is beyond logical and measurable material means. However, Milton’s monist animist materialism doesn’t just deny everything “material”—what Milton offers is the combination of the two opposites, not the complete denial or obliteration of the other. The illogical, inarticulate, and immaterial something is in and with the logical and measurable material means.
4.2 Augustine’s Visual Metaphor and Spiritual Seeing

That Milton’s attention to inner or spiritual vision appears related to Saint Augustine has been widely remarked, and at this point I would like to introduce Augustine into my discussion to supplement my earlier descriptions of Sidney’s “inward light” (indeed, Augustine’s writings would have been familiar to the superbly well-read Seidney, as well). In “Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine’s ‘De Trinitate’ and ‘Confessions,’” Margaret Miles examines Augustine’s use of visual metaphor and argues that “the metaphor of physical vision constitutes the leitmotiv throughout Augustine’s many accounts of spiritual vision” (126). Augustine compares an act of seeing to knowing, and, as Miles astutely points out, “it is a metaphor which enables Augustine to distinguish internal spiritual things more subtly and to describe them more easily” (126). Augustine’s metaphor of the “eyes of our hearts, with which God may be seen” (Sermons 88. 5) not only emphasizes the distance between the material and immaterial entity, but it also links the physical eye as a constituent part of the spiritual eye, and this congruency between a material and immaterial entity enables men to see “That which is” (Confessions 7.17. 23). To see the truth, one must feel the truth through one’s heart, Augustine suggests, so that physical vision is the vehicle that connects the concept with the observer or receiver of the sensation, just as metaphors work by acknowledging the distance between the image and the word. The distance between the object and the articulation point—the distance to the observer’s eye or the brain that receives the image and interprets the distance between the thing itself and the means to articulate or delineate it—also makes necessary the human effort to

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grasp the distance and cancel it, as Miles writes: “Augustine’s model of physical vision underlines and supports his description of the necessity of human effort, concentration, and training” (126). As I have argued earlier, this human effort is present in both the activities of Hooke’s observational science and Milton’s poetic rendering of the Paradise as it is imagined, but only the blind poet’s epistemological ambivalence suggests that the distance between the viewer and the object is paramount in every act of seeing and knowing—and, furthermore, believing.

That “human effort, concentration, and training” to believe in something, even when that something is invisible to the physical eye, might be why Adam, in Paradise Lost, says “the sedentary earth/ That better might with far less compass move,/ Served by more noble than herself, attains/ Her end without least motion, and receives/ As attribute such a sumless journey brought/ Of incorporeal speed, her warmth and light” (VIII. 32-37). He thinks that the heliocentric system is less efficient—certainly it is not self-sufficient and not self-initiated for the earth—than a geocentric system. Though the earth and its tenant, Adam, might be placed in the center of the universe to receive the warmth and light from the sun, this center is nothing but a passive object, the “sedentary” receiver as Milton describes it, sitting and resting, exercising no self-motivation or will to be the active participant in the process of distributing warmth and light for themselves. Indeed, the warmth and light come from the sun—and alternately, from God for Adam—and there must be a hierarchy—as one must be the source generating warmth and light to share and give them to the other, but Adam suggests a more active involvement and, most importantly, service that he can offer. This service I mention here is paramount in the process of believing, especially believing in something that is so powerful that seeing it is as blinding as not being able to see God in His physical presence though the human eye. Through Adam’s doubtful
speech about the geocentric system, we hear the blind poet’s reasoning that the service one must offer to receive the warmth and light is logical and just. Furthermore, this reasoning offers Milton the reassurance that the magnitude of the outcome of his service might be higher and bigger than those without hardships that might challenge or obstruct the sight of God. I cannot stress this point more; any believers who seek the light of God should feel as if they are trapped in the darkness so they feel, as Miles asserts, “the necessity of human effort, concentration, and training” (Miles 126), and therefore willingly reach out to find the light and warmth from God. By sitting, as Adam argues, one only receives but never participates. Thus Adam complains that this “sedentary” position for the earth and himself “commit[s] such disproportions with superfluous hand” (VIII. 26-27) that it proves wasteful of not only the potential warmth and light we can receive from God but also all the greater things “many nobler bodies to create” (VIII. 28). To act upon our will to seek after God is not only logical because it is most efficient and rewarding for both the source of light and the one seeking the light, but also because the harder one desires and seeks out to see God, the brighter his glory will shine.

And this glorious effulgence involves a kind of interior enlightenment that brightens a man from inside out, not illuminating by shining the light upon him. The light and warmth are born and radiate from a man’s interior to his exterior; here, the man’s interiority becomes a direct, physical reflection of God’s warmth and light. But how does a man reflect or embody the divine light? To be clear, how does a man metaphorically communicate the warmth and light the sun provides, which is compared to the warmth and light God embodies? Through “human effort, concentration, and training” a man worships God, overcoming worldly obstacles and challenges, and this training can give the believer the mind’s inner eye that allows him to perceive and communicate the divine light rather directly and immediately, through himself.
Exteriority then plays a very small part in embodying the divine light, as embodying the divine light involves the interiority of a man. Since he is not illuminated by the external source of light, he is self-sufficient through his interiority. In *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine*, Robert J. O’Connell, S.J., writes that it is “impatience” that leads one to occupy the outer, the physical things that mediate and communicate the inner knowledge:

> It is far from clear that Augustine ever explored this phenomenon on its own terms: too often, he treats it as a corollary drawn from his epistemological conception that sets up an antithetic relationship between the operations of sense and intellect. Sense, he tends to think, apprehends the visible, sensible symbol; only the mind can attain to vision of the invisible reality that is symbolized. The visible sun may furnish a symbolic image of the divine intelligible Sun; the audible word or visible gesture may function as an exterior sign conveying—more or less trustily—knowledge of some inner personal conception, intention, or attitude. (40)

Anticipation and patience can be associated with the opposition of science and religion.

According to Svedsen’s *Milton and Science*, “there could be no absolute issues between science and religion, though he [Milton] knew the appeal of that quarrel for others,” and thus Milton was only remotely interested in the debates of cosmological theories (44). Svedsen suggests that Milton was aware of the rivaling ideas about the universe available to him, but for Milton the "conviction of man's moral responsibility in a theocentric universe outweighed everything else" (44). Svedsen points out that Milton’s description of the celestial system is rather “descriptive” than “technical” and thus reveals either “his ignorance of up-to-date astronomy or his disinclination to shift emphasis away from man” (45). That Milton knew less
about or paid little attention to some of the fashionable or controversial theories of the spheres
kept him away from “committing his poem to controversy” (45). Milton’s intention with
*Paradise Lost* was to compose a world of harmony, “the correlation between physical and moral
other, the true and final harmony of the spheres” (44). Thus, Milton deliberately puts his
judgment about particular facts or ideas concerning the universe in abeyance so that he can focus
solely on his poetic articulation.

More importantly, Milton was aware of the conflicting ideas concerning the structure and
operation of the universe, but he had a different agenda on his mind other than figuring out plain
facts. Facts weren’t the most critical concern in his poetic works. Poetry for Milton remained
poetically hermetic and self-sustained. Raphael’s comparison of the structure of the universe to a
plant in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost* induces a logical question against the encyclopedic classical
and medieval understanding of the universe—in that traditional view of the universe, the Great
Chain of Being is static; Karen L. Edwards also argues in *Milton and the Natural World* that the
depiction of Raphael’s belief shows Milton’s unconventional view of the structure of the
universe as she writes: “[T]his dynamic scale of being has important consequences for Milton’s
political and theological views” (Edwards 125). This “dynamic” view of the structure of the
universe reveals that Milton believed in a kinetic universe through which the souls could ascend
if they worked hard to get closer to God—as plants will grow closer to the sun. She further
examines Adam’s response to Raphael’s plant metaphor and the placement of scale in this
“dynamic scale of being” in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost*: “The scale of nature set/ From center to
circumference whereon / In contemplation of created things/ By steps we may ascend to God”
(V. 509-12). Perhaps the obvious idea (that I myself struggled with for a long time) we should
acknowledge here is that the scale being mentioned here is no longer a ladder. The movement is
not from the lower to higher, but from one horizon to the other, and in this sphere Adam imagines the scale is differentiated by the distance from the center. The fundamental concept of movement changes, no longer only about elevation but also about expansion. This is a sonic and symphonic growth, expanding horizontally and growing vertically--one can ascend to God as the plants can grow taller and closer to the sun. Furthermore, as Adam describes, there is a degradation between the scales, but where the center resides is unclear. Where do the steps ascend? Is it we who stand in the center and ascend toward the outside of the circumference? Or does God exist in the center and we ascend toward the center? And what are the implications of shifting the content of the center? What does the placement of our being and His being suggest about the celestial world and its mechanics, its operation? Does the kinetic scale of the universe then pose a threat to or buttress the conventional understanding of God’s position and our relation to God? But most importantly, how does this fit into the Platonic hierarchy of being or Augustinian order of being?

It is still hard to see that Adam’s doubts and questions about God’s construction of the universe demonstrate Milton’s skepticism about experimental science. Svedsen observes:

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton repeatedly moves from circumference to center, retracing through stock images the arcs of focus upon earth and man. And it is a two-way passage. Satan and Adam are centers from which radiate the flow of imagination, as when Adam and Eve contemplate the heavens and pray or Satan apostrophizes the sun after he has flung himself from its sphere to the top of Mount Niphates. No other poem is more explicit as to place; in Heaven, Hell, earth or chaos, the reader of *Paradise Lost* always sees things from a precise physical point of view and he always knows what it is. (45)
Svedsen’s emphasis on the idea of place is useful for my argument as well; assessing one’s place against the other’s—God’s—shifts the direction of our ascension. Knowing one’s own place or placement in relation to the higher or lower entities informs individuals of the difference, gradation, and depth between different matters because a single point of view that already assumes a perspective about the world can look up or down to find his or her significance in the universe. Therefore, though Milton doesn’t abandon the encyclopedic tradition of ascension and gradation, “the present exposition of the Miltonic universe works from circumference to center” (Svedsen 47). The nature Milton describes in *Paradise Lost* through Raphael’s analogy of the scale of being reveals the poet’s consent with the conventional Neoplatonic belief that differentiates living creatures by their movement. Svedsen explains that “Principles of order, gradation, and harmony are axiomatic in the encyclopedic view of natural science” (116) and thus that Milton’s treatment of things moving upward as professed through Raphael’s analogy of being shows “spiritual gradations are conveyed in the images of movement” (114). Indeed, to be near God is the ultimate goal at the end of this order. Milton uses the tropes of small and light things that possess more potential to be mobile, such as plants and insects, though these creatures are either rooted or sprung from the ground in *Paradise Lost*:

> At once came forth whatever creeps the ground,
> Insect or worm. Those waved their limber fans
> For wings and smallest lineaments exact
> In all the liveries decked of summer’s pride
> With spots of gold and purple, azure and green,
> These as a line their long dimension drew
> Streaking the ground with sinuous trace. Not all
Minims of nature: some of serpent kind
Wondrous in length and corpulence involved
Their snaky folds and added wings. (VII. 475-484)

The gradation beginning with smallest and lowest is at work here. The insects come from the ground, and they flourish from and above the ground as the season changes. The insects are also powerful enough to leave marks on the ground, “streaking the ground with sinuous trace.” Milton’s observation of insects and his use of their attributes postulate something larger and transformative to come, and his description of insects becomes more figurative as he focuses on what their attributes portend.

Drawing upon Svedsen’s argument that *Paradise Lost* constantly moves back to the center “retracing through stock images” of earth and man (45), I also believe that Milton’s epic poem thus focuses on the movement of nostalgia, remembering the harmonious center that is now lost. However, I would further point out that the nostalgic movement in *Paradise Lost* is also a movement forward, not a movement backward—the movement trying to return to the center signifies the poet’s anticipation for God’s paradise to return. Perhaps this movement from “circumference to center” could suggest that man looks at the horizon but not at the sky above; it could also mean that God’s presence is radiating from the center, and man looks to the center where God is and moves toward Him. No matter how we try to interpret this movement, one thing is clear—the scales are still there, and so is the movement. It is only the direction that has changed. As the upward movement is now replaced by the horizontal movement, the potential for ascension is replaced by the potential of expansion, a tangential and imaginative movement rather than a scaling and logical one. Raphael’s dismissal of Adam’s doubts about the

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190 This is also an example of modesty topos—Milton compares himself to an insect that leaves “subtle and sinewy” marks on the page.
heliocentric system doesn’t necessarily suggest Milton either contested or believed in one absolute cosmological theory. What Milton believes, however, is the power of anticipation and hope that induces movement and progression, whether it occurs vertically or horizontally.

It is obvious, considering how much Milton produced as a political writer and how he anxiously delayed writing his epic poetry until later in the seventeenth century, that every symbolic gesture he makes with his words—specifically pointing at his colorful use of animal and plant analogies that frequently show up in his prose as well as poetry—should suggest the poet’s pronounced appetite for political and natural anatomy. That Milton knew the anatomies of a bee and an ant is appropriate to point out here. In her chapter “Rehabilitating the Political Animal,” Edwards discusses Milton’s use of insect tropes—a Royalist bee and a republican ant—and how Milton used animal tropes to re-appropriate “the ‘old’ natural history” into “an ‘old’ political debate” (128). The attribute the poet understands and adds to the creatures in nature becomes the poetic value; it is not the truthful or factual value, but it is a poetic value that I am going to discuss further in this chapter. Poetic value, often quite distinct from the scientific value or literal value, provided a bridge to connect faith with epistemology, for, to Milton, a non-literal observation of a natural phenomenon wasn’t entirely wrong, if it were seen through spiritual vision. And, though it seems almost too obvious to point out, in Milton’s case most things were seen through spiritual vision, especially as he increasingly lost his physical sight.

How would a scientist like Hooke describe an ant or a bee if he could not see at all? Without his eyesight to look through his microscope, how would he produce his knowledge and believe in what he sees? And how does a poet, without his sight, draw the world out there beyond the reach of his sight, certainly enough to describe it with his words? How can Milton be

certain enough to draw paradise that he has never seen through his eyes, but believe in it enough to write an epic poem containing twelve books about this place while under the scrutiny of political turmoil that could end not only his poetic but also political and religious career?

Religious faith always demands a rehabilitation of scientific information. No phenomenon that nature reveals through a magnifying glass without any temperament of human anxiety and desire provides the satisfying or mortifying knowledge to inspire a man to believe in something so much he will endanger his own life and even the wellbeing of his community. Therefore, a spiritual man must believe nature does one thing to foreshadow or anticipate the other; and this analogy—and fallacy—works efficiently for both religion and poetry. The exactness in the truth provided through the scientist’s instrument is irrelevant and useless to a poet or a preacher unless such scientific fact can be reread and analyzed through a figurative lens.  

It is indeed the writer at the end who has to make sense out of what he sees by describing it into words, as Hooke confesses, and the writer takes the role of both reader and writer, as he first observes what is in front of him before he writes about it. As much as a poet might interpret and reinterpret the information he observes from the world, his representation will also shape the way his readers learn the attribute that “a bee” is associated with the Royalists while “the parsimonious emmet” associated with the roundheads. Edwards describes this eminent fissure between the scientific knowledge and poetic reinterpretation of scientific knowledge as “the tension between the two epistemologies”: “[The tension] creates a complex representational problem for the Creation narrative in *Paradise Lost*” (128). Of course, the

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192 In Chapter Seven “Rehabilitating the Political Animal,” Edwards refers to Catherine Wilson, who points out in her discussions of scientific observations of animal anatomy that microscopic information “was as impoverished in cultural terms as it was enriched in observational terms” (Wilson, *The Invisible World*, 212).

tension Edwards describes here is a kind of tension between political knowledge and scientific knowledge, but, going back once again to the point I made earlier about seeing and believing and the inscrutable role sight plays in the construction of personal and cultural epistemologies, this “tension between the two epistemologies” has existed since classical antiquity, involving the dualist figuration of material and immaterial realms as well as the dualist articulation of the world, as in Augustine’s ontology of spiritual and physical seeing. Fallon also describes the status of Milton’s ontologically-deprived evil while his material angels keep their ontological integrity as an “Augustinian ontology of evil” (169).¹⁹⁴

In Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye, Rudolph Arnheim writes that vision is not mere passive reception.

The world of images does not simply imprint itself on a faithfully sensitive organ. Rather, in looking at an object, we reach out for it. With an invisible finger we move through the space around us, we go out to the distant places where things are found, touch them, catch them, scan their surfaces, trace their borders, explore their texture. It is eminently active occupation.¹⁹⁵

That seeing can immediately establish the tangible materiality of the object without touching it should recall my earlier argument that Milton’s blindness helps the poet to see what he believes without actually having seen what he believes in—the physical blindness is spiritual enlightenment from within, just as the immaterial is immediately material in monism. This is once again not an external light shed upon the poet, like the light coming through the

¹⁹⁴ Stephen M. Fallon, Milton among Philosophers.
¹⁹⁵ Rudolph Arnheim, 43. In his influential work Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye first published in 1954, Arnheim writes that human perception is immanently personal project and projection of personal partiality, intuition, and subjective articulation of personal preference. For this study, I am using the revised and expanded edition of 1974.
microscope, but the light that comes from within, that shines from inside and glows outside. This light is almost untraceable and immaterial, though it is perceived through the material eye and felt as a material sensation. The classical metaphor for seeing does emphasize the idea of distance, the material as well as conceptual difference between the word and idea. As Margaret Miles observes: “For classical people who originated the metaphor, sight was an accurate and fruitful metaphor for knowledge because they relied on the physics of vision, subscribed to by Plato and many others, that a ray of light, energized and projected by the mind toward an object, actually touches its object, thereby connecting viewer to the object” (127). Augustine writes in *On The Trinity* that “the nature of the intellectual mind is so formed as to see those things which, according to the disposition of the Creator, are subjoined to intelligible things in the natural order, in a sort of incorporeal light of its own kind, as the eye of the flesh sees the things that lie about it in his corporeal light, of which light it is made to be receptive and to which it is adapted” (XII. 15. 24).

Supposing that we use our bodily sensations to gain intelligence about the world, Augustine suggests that “the intellectual mind” occupies both the power of corporeal senses and incorporeal mind to sort through the “natural order” between man and God, and that man must use both physical and spiritual faculties to understand its relationship to God. Things that are readily visible to the corporeal eye are “subjoined to intelligible things in the natural order,” but one must use more than the corporeal eye to see and understand “intelligible things” that are higher in the natural order and “in a sort of incorporeal light of its own kind.” In Augustine’s hierarchical structure of our condition in relation to God, the human or corporeal reality exists at

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the low level and the creator at the top. Augustine’s epistemology locates man’s sensation at the bottom of the epistemological hierarchy, postulating that man can rise above his corporeal status by way of reasoning—using either wisdom (sapientia) or knowledge (scientia)—to the higher types of vision. Man, both corporeal and spiritual, possesses both body (rationes seminales) and soul (ratio hominis) and can perceive reality through both his senses and imagination, producing wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom (sapientia) represents the knowledge acquired through the superior reason, and the knowledge gained through the lower reason is called science or knowledge (scientia). The unique ability to acquire and use sapientia or scientia sets man apart from other corporeal entities. Furthermore, epistemological knowledge exists to work antithetically against the hierarchy of being in Augustine’s theory of knowing. Man should be able to use more than his senses and apply imagination to achieve a spiritual understanding of reality, and even further, the intellectual level of eternal reasoning, equivalent to the eternal concepts in the mind of God. As Ronald Nash explains in *The Light of Mind*, sapientia and scientia differ in various respects since “science uses the method of investigation, but wisdom uses intuition” and “the end of scientia is action or accomplishment” (8). While scientia “enables man to harvest better crops, construct better buildings, or wage war more effectively,” the end of sapientia is contemplation. And even though, as Nash points out, “the

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197 For more on the Platonic tradition in Augustinian theory of knowledge, see *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* by Etienne Gilson, and Ronald H. Nash’s *The Light of Mind*. Nash presents a simple yet useful diagram of Augustine’s theory of reason and knowledge and the relationship between them. The structure of reason and knowledge can be understood by two modes of understanding a being—ontology, “the downward way of becoming,” and epistemology, “the upward way of knowing.” In order to sustain or gain certain ontological status, one must go through the three different levels of reality: bodies (rationes seminales) in the bottom, souls (ratio hominis) in the middle, and God (rationes aeternae) on top. Epistemologically, man is equipped with senses (corporeal knowledge), but capable of using imagination (spiritual knowledge), and ultimately with practice and endeavor man should be able to achieve reason (intellection), which will lead him to the eternal knowledge of God, rationes aeternae. As Nash explains, Augustine’s structure of thought derives from the views of Plato and Plotinus about reality and how we perceive it. Such a “downward way of becoming” reflected a Platonic pattern of knowledge, while Augustine presents “his upward way of salvation” as the way to use knowledge and reason to “come closer to its ultimate goal, The One” (Nash 4-5).
preservation and sustaining of human life depends upon scientia,” it is sapientia that delivers
man closer to the eternal knowledge of God: “Wisdom is superior in the sense that it is
concerned with the acquisition of happiness and the ultimate goal of human existence” (8).

Because I find something very congenial and important to my project in his description of
philosophy, I return to Robert J. O’Connell:

Philosophy, it has been said, begins in wonder. But all too often that wonder is
interpreted as something verging on inquisitiveness: the spur of puzzlement that
leads us to want to banish the darkness of ignorance or confusion, to inquire, to
get to know and thus—apparently—eliminate the very wonder that gave inquiry
birth. In other connections, our ignorance or confusion may be seen as touching
on our thirst for satisfaction: we yearn to understand why we are unhappy, how
we may attain to our restless heart’s desire. (167)

This is the kind of light that requires the eye—or the mind—to work to see the truth. No
“sedentary” and passive mind can find the truth because it takes patience and work to open the
mind to see the truth. In Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine, one of the pivotal works on
Augustine, Etienne Gilson writes that “illumination is rightly considered such a distinctive
feature of [Augustine’s] philosophy that we commonly call his theory of knowledge ‘the
Augustinian doctrine of divine illumination’” (77). Gilson further points out that Augustine’s eye
and mind metaphor clearly “came from the writings of the Platonists” and argues that Augustine
was “satisfied with this philosophical doctrine only because it agrees with the teaching of
Scripture.” More importantly, this metaphor assumes that

the act whereby the mind knows truth is comparable to the act whereby the
eye sees the body: “menti hoc est intelligere, quod sensui videre.” Moreover, it assumes that as objects must be made visible by light before they can be perceived by the sight, so scientific truths must be made intelligible by a kind of light before they can be grasped by the mind. Finally, it assumes that as the sun is the source of the physical light which makes the sciences intelligible to the mind. Thus God is to our minds what the sun is to our sight; as the sun is the source of light, so God is the source of truth. (Gilson 77)

Augustine further argues that “the corporeal eye, too, does not, therefore, distinguish white from black objects without a master, because it had already known there colors before it was created in this flesh” (On the Trinity XII. 15. 24). The incorporeal eye, the mind, receives and projects wisdom while awake or sleeping, while we use knowledge to weigh and organize the temporal objects and events: “If then, this is the correct distinction between wisdom and knowledge, that to wisdom belongs the intellectual cognition of eternal things, but to knowledge the reasonable cognition of temporal things, it is not difficult to decide which is to be preferred to or placed after which” (XII. 15. 25). Augustine developed his metaphor of seeing God through the eye of the mind from the classical account of physical sight as spiritual rays that “shine through the eyes and touch whatever we see” (IX.3.3). The tangible experience is even mutual and reciprocal—vision is manipulated by the information already held in the brain as much as the object being seen is manipulating what gets imprinted in the human brain. “By the vehicle of the visual ray,” Miles explains, the classical theory of vision imagines the observer’s sight as a tangible beam that reaches and touches the object distant from the viewer: “the object is not only ‘touched’ by the viewer, but also the object is ‘printed’ on the soul of the viewer. The ray theory of vision specifically insisted on the connection and essential continuity of viewer and object in the act of
vision” (127). As Miles points out, Augustine made it clear that the vision “must be initiated by the viewer” because, for the sight to fully embody the function of knowing, the individual will from which the beams originate and are projected determines the luminosity of the sight. In other words, no sight can be born, exist, or do anything if the sight isn’t aimed at a desired object for the eye to see and understand; as Augustine writes: “[T]he sensation proceeds, not from that body which is seen, but from a living body that perceives” (On the Trinity XI.2.3). And where does that “desire” that finds an object to desire come from? Augustine insists that it precedes the act of reception: “[B]efore the vision arose, there already was a will which directed the sense to the body in order that it might be formed by seeing it” (XI.5.9).

4.3 Milton, Poetry, and Vision

It is not premature to say that the blind poet’s sight is already and always willing, even before he sees anything; the spiritual eye has been open and has sought to reach out to the world. This will to look out and perceive unseen is undoubtedly physically persistent and spiritually felt—the blind poet must have the will to see before he sees, and what he sees he sees through his mind’s eye, not the physical eye. In Book VIII of Paradise Lost, Adam describes what he remembers about his own creation, waking up and seeing “this happy light” which he knew how to name right away: “My tongue obeyed and readily could name/ Whate’er I saw. ‘Thou sun,’ said I” (VIII. 273). This “happy” sun is the first thing Adam calls out loud, by its name, and speaks to, in his recollection of his awakening. Adam starts asking questions to the creatures he sees, including the sun, about how he came to be what he is: “fair light,/ And thou enlightened earth, so fresh and gay,/ Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains,/ And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell,/ Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?” (VIII. 273-77).

Obviously, the sun is the source of awakening and enlightenment to Adam, the sun that reveals
and illuminates the world for Adam to see and learn as he gathers knowledge from observing and asking questions.

Because seeing is directly linked to his intelligence, as is shown in Adam’s identifying and calling out names of objects, Adam will apparently learn nothing without the sun. Adam immediately sees the sun as teleologically both the observer and provider of knowledge for him. His first words, according to his description, were indeed “Thou sun”—he “obeyed” his tongue and called out what he “readily could name” (VIII. 272-73). After somehow learning and calling its name out loud, Adam then asks the sun questions about his creation, as if he assumes the sun has always been where he is and should know where Adam came from. An awareness of his surroundings and the first object that sparks an intellectual response informs Adam to identify the sun as “This happy light,” though the sun doesn’t answer back to him: “While thus I called and strayed I knew not whither/ From where I first drew air and first beheld/ This happy light, when answer none returned” (VIII. 283-85). In fact, the following lines demonstrate how Adam comes to consciousness surrounded by the light and warmth of the sun:

As new waked from soundest sleep
Soft on the flow’ry herb I found me laid
In balmy sweat, which with his beams the sun
Soon dried, and on the reeking moisture fed.
Straight toward heav’n my wond’ring eyes I turned,
And gazed a while the ample sky, till raised
By quick instinctive motion up I sprung,
As thitherward endeavoring, and upright
Stood on my feet; about me round I saw
Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,
And liquid lapse of murmuring streams. (VIII. 253-63)

Clearly, something has awakened him from a deep sleep—it is unclear whether the sun is the very first thing that awakes Adam. Yet, let us not forget Adam remembers waking up in the sunlight. More clearly, he remembers during the day light, and he sees everything that is around him, including the bright warming sun that “dried” his “balmy sweat” (255-56).

Adam catches his breath as he awakes—he comes to life by breathing in. The life starts with the breath, then the knowledge of being alive settles in with his senses; and undoubtedly, Adam’s first sensory experience is seeing. Milton uses adjectives such as “happy” to describe Adam’s first sensory experience. Yet seeing doesn’t give any answers to Adam’s inquiry about his creation. The sun, if what Adam says is true, doesn’t give any answer back, yet he still calls the sun “happy light.” Simple as it may sound, he is happy in the sun; he is pensive in the shade.

It is paramount to note here that Milton uses the word “pensive” to describe the first man’s first encounter with his own existence and the quandary of self-identification that inevitably follows. It is even more important, I would argue, that Adam is sitting down to think “on a green shady bank” (VIII. 286). Away from the sun, the thinking man finds shade to ponder how he came about, where or who he is.

But why does he find a shaded area to think? More specifically, if the sun is the source of knowledge, then why does Adam move away from the direct sun light and find a shady spot to ponder his own creation? There are a few points I should discuss further here. First, Adam reacts to the brightness of the sun, but the sun itself fails to be the direct source of knowledge. The “happy light” does not ponder; the bright, “happy” sun light cannot be the full source of the light of enlightenment. The “happy light” shines and dries, doing what it does, contented. There is no
desiring for more. This “happy light” is a kind of self-sufficient, self-consumed light that shines while it burns—oblivious, simple, just doing its job. Under the shade, the mind is finally at work, full of thoughts, meditating and reflecting upon his creation until he falls asleep: “Pensive I sat me down; there gentle sleep/ First found me, and with soft oppression seized/ My drowsed sense, untroubled, though I thought/ I then was passing to my former state/ Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve” (VIII. 287-91). What leads Adam to the state of enlightenment seems to be far away from “the happy light” as Adam falls asleep and then feels as if he is “passing to” his “former state”(290). The “green shady bank profuse of flow’rs” subtly but surely awakens his pensive thoughts, leading him to “a gentle sleep” as if he were in a trance, his sensory systems overloaded with abundant smells and sights of flowers. Under the shade, sitting down, Adam now pensive—either “sorrowfully thoughtful; gloomy, sad, melancholy” or in a state associated with “thought, anxiety, or melancholy,” states the OED—finally calms down and falls into his own thoughts.198 He is now in a reflective, meditative state, instead of tirelessly looking outward and asking questions to “whate’er [he] saw” (273).

Eve in Book IV asks a very simple question—why they “shut all eyes” at night, when moon and stars are still bright: “But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom/ This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?” (IV. 657-58). However, Adam believes the night is when things are veiled for a good reason:

Lest total darkness should by night regain

Her old possession, and extinguish life

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198 The first few examples for the definition and use of the word “pensive” in the OED show the word’s association to the heaviness of heart: “Pencyf, or hevy in herte” from Promptorium Parvulorum, c.1440, and “The heauy burthen of my pensiue breast” from Michael Drayton’s Legend Matilda in Poems, c.1605 (“pensive, adj.” A. 1). The general use of the word as the implication of seriousness or being full of thought, meditative and reflective still suggest a kind of heaviness in the heart, though the word appears to be linked with the mental state.
In nature and all things, which these soft fires
Not only enlighten, but with kindly heat
Of various influence foment and warm,
Temper or nourish, or in part shed down
Their stellar virtue on all kinds that grow
On earth, made hereby apter to receive
Perfection from the sun’s more potent ray.
These then, though unbeheld in deep of night,
Shine not in vain, nor think, though men were none,
That heav’n would want spectators, God want praise. (IV. 665-76)

About light and darkness, Adam assumes that the visible light reigns over the lack of light, thus characterizing the darkness as the loss of light, though it is not useless since it has its proper, designated purpose to throw into further relief the light seen and make what God has created shine even brighter. Here Milton is applying Neoplatonic astrology that ranked creatures by their “stellar virtue” through which animals, plants, and minerals become more refined. The sun is not for the meek. The coldness and darkness of the night is supposed to refine and temper the creatures, making them stronger and ready for the sun’s blazing light; and the stronger they are the more light they can take in and shine outward. The night is not a proper time for the creatures to show their beauties, but it is instead a time for them to gain “temper or nourish” so they will be strong enough to receive the sun’s blunt rays. Eve reveals a different understanding of the light, or more properly, about the darkness of the night, for she doesn’t see the night’s darkness as the loss of the sun’s light, but simply a different kind of light that shines differently while serving the same purpose.
Most importantly, Eve thinks they are not appreciating God’s creation fully enough by sleeping at night because she believes that those things that “all night long shine” are not only bright and visible in the darkness but also worthwhile to stay up and see. In contrast, Adam puts great emphasis on the urgency and authority of the sunlight over “total darkness” as he describes the night’s servile role as a transitional period to “temper” and make nature “apter to receive/Perfection from the Sun’s more potent ray” (IV. 672-73). For Eve, darkness still informs and illuminates, but Adam sees darkness as a subordinated form of the sun’s light. But as I have pointed out earlier, Adam’s “happy light” is indeed a shallow light that is felt skin deep; the interaction between Adam and the sun’s light has only been immediately physical, as the sun dries the sweat and shines brightly on the things he saw yet gives him no answers. No knowledge is truly gained from the bright sunlight; it is when Adam moves to the shades and becomes “pensive” he sees more than “whate’er he saw” and begins to really comprehend who he is and how he came to be. The inward seeing begins when he is away from the blazing sun and sits down to think “on a green shady bank” (VIII. 286). Maybe Adam should pay attention to Eve’s doubts. The lack of blazing sun light might make him less “happy” at night, but Adam might gain more knowledge about himself and the world by being “pensive” under the shades, away from the sun. Still, that will perhaps only lead him to a more pensive state. God indeed wants his human creatures to be satisfied and “happy,” and it is for Satan to be in the state of wanting and being pensive. It is clear that the “happy light” that shines obliviously and blazingly is indeed an external light that shines on things, but the illumination and enlightenment of the mind occurs from within, more likely summoned in the darkness or the shaded areas where the sun’s light is not too bright to obstruct the mind’s eye.
Adam’s understanding of the sun as the immediate source of enlightenment is not only premature but also varies from Eve’s understanding of the light, for she sees the light as the image of God’s creation. The latter needs much more explanation—obviously the latter is a kind of reading that perceives metaphoric associations that delay a matter-to-matter, linear reading of “whate’er [one] saw” (VIII. 273). This is not the kind of light that provides us the sight that helps a man prove a hypothesis or theory but the kind that proves nothing but the need for faith. Thus the latter is begotten by the lack of light, the bright, happy light that perhaps blocks one from seeing the other side of light. Shade, Milton’s poem implies, is as vital as light, and Eve is intuitively tuned to this knowledge. As much as Adam is aware of the fact that the world and its organisms still breathe and function in the darkness when they are unseen, his understanding is indeed a rational one. To phrase it more plainly, Adam needs to make sense, for he is the one asking questions, trying to reason with what he observes and what Raphael states. Knowledge about his existence and his place is important to him. Thus, when Eve exhibits a rather simplified curiosity as she wonders why “all night long shine [starlight], for whom/ This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes,” Adam tries to reason with her by telling her that nothing is lost, but at night stars are preparing the creatures to become “apter to receive/ Perfection from the sun’s more potent ray” (IV. 672-73).

This is a “happy” resolution that Adam can think of, to use the term Milton uses to describe the full, unapologetically lucid and determined light of the sun; even the stars and the moon that shine at night will eventually serve their ultimate purpose of completing their part in the sun’s mission, making their existence at night transitory and preparatory. But we also must pay attention to Milton’s choice of the word “happy.” Such an uncanny word for this particular occasion of denoting the sun’s illuminating qualities, it plainly screams bright, drying sunlight,
sight of lucidity. Yet the sound and meaning of this word spin out such a feeling of hollow bliss, ironically so much similar to the feeling of doubts and absence. The word “happy” sounds like an amplifying noise that obliterates what is around it, and when one is “happy,” there is nothing else; indeed, that is the point—one needs nothing anymore. The sound—and the idea—of this word instantly yield a complete eclipse of opacity or eradication of depth and darkness. This “happy light” is indeed a corporeal delight, a bodily sensation felt through physical senses, forming a knowledge about the world around Adam, but still not the light that comes from within, the divine light that brightens from within. Augustine writes in *On the Trinity* that if a man wishes for and pursues good things, not evil things, then he will eventually have them, and thus only he “who has all that he wills, and wills nothing wrongly” is a happy man (XIII.5.8). In other words, a man is not happy because he wills wrongly. If a man wills rightly, wills for the good things, as he is already good, he will have what he wills and he will be happy. Happiness only occurs in good things, and even though the process of getting happiness might be hard and torturous, it is only “transitory,” as Augustine explains: “For many have bravely directed their course through these transitory evils towards the good things that shall endure. They are certainly made happy by hope, even when they are in the midst of transitory evils, through which they arrive at the good things that shall not pass away” (XIII.7.10). Wanting—if wanting something good—is not the reason of unhappiness but the integral starting point of happiness because it assures man a chance to be happy. And as Augustine anticipates and believes, the man will be happy. Even though he still desires, it is getting as well as wanting that makes the man happy.

Here it might be useful to revisit Adam’s observation of his surroundings when he awakes in Book VIII, lines 253-63. Once he is under the shade, something different occurs. It is the shade that allows him to see things other than the shades. As Etienne Gilson explains: “The
intellectual mind which Augustine assigns to man as his own and which is, therefore, created, can be called a natural light, if we may be allowed to use a phrase which Augustine does not employ but which does no violence to his thought. The result of divine illumination is not, normally at least, a supernatural illumination; on the contrary, to be the receptive subject of divine illumination belongs by definition to the nature of the human intellect” (79). According to Adam’s explanation to Eve, the sun deserves its observers and receivers to witness and prove its luminosity, but the darkness of the night should remain subservient and obsequious to the sun. Even if the stars and the moon exist in the darkness, “these then though unbeknown in deep of night/ Shine not in vain” (IV. 674-75); if these lights during the night didn’t “temper or nourish, or in part shed down/ Their stellar virtue on all kinds that grow,” then the stars and the moon at night are being wasteful (IV. 670-71). It is because, as Adam further muses, the creatures created by God need to reflect and be praised as God’s great work; if not: “That Heav’n would want spectators, God want praise” (IV. 676). That is the “happy” and virtuous ending for “all kinds that grow.” In Adam’s rational world, the stars and the moon must exist for fulfilling their subservient role of supporting the sun, through which everything is illuminated by the “happy light.”

Adam believes “the happy light” is almost equivalent to the divine light that generates and illuminates the beginning and the end of every creature. In Book 8, Adam describes the sun as the source of “the happy light” that enlightens and illuminates even though his need to move away from the sun to ponder should tell him otherwise. Unlike Eve, Adam can’t seem to envision the night’s darkness as another representation of “happy light.” Eve actually never doubts that the stars and the moon must be brightly shining and enjoyable to those who don’t sleep at night and are able to watch their glory: “But wherefore all night long shine these, for
whom? This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?” (IV. 657-58). Comparing Adam’s rationalization of the purpose of night to Eve’s more nuanced insights, we see that Adam must make sense of the stars and moon spending their energy in the darkness by imagining their complete, “happy” course as if they are part of the sun’s destiny, a rationalization necessary to provide a reason for any light existing in the darkness. 199 According to Adam, the direct illumination, the happy light, is the source of knowledge, morality, and beauty. Without the direct illumination from the sun, Adam believes, there can be no happy light and hence no knowledge, morality, or beauty.

The “happy light” may, however, undermine access to the very things Adam imagines it provides. In *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine*, Robert J. O’Connell, S.J., writes:

> The philosophic task in any age is not a happy one: rigor of method, care for evidence must always keep us honest, prevent our aspirations from leading us into mere sentimental wish fulfillment. It must discipline the idealizations, chasten the constructions of our metaphysical imaginations so that they do not drift off into insubstantial fantasy. But the epistemological preoccupation, become imperialistic, can also hobble our advance, clip the wings of philosophic flight, prevent us from coming to know the very good our hearts most deeply yearn to know; it can, in the tones of a perverse kind of piety, interdict our recognizing the commanding beauty that, as moral beings, we must be ready to assent to.

Philosophical thinking, then, to retain its vitality, to maintain itself in readiness to

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199 Of course, here I am assuming this is Adam’s own rationalization of how and why the stars and moon show up at night. Though Milton might simply be borrowing from the Neoplatonic astrology to describe the idea of stellar virtue, and though he might indeed have doubts about the sun’s predominant virtue over the stars and the moon, it is worthwhile to closely examine how Adam believes this system must work. Obviously, Adam is uncertain that anything can be useful or good in the darkness—there can’t be any epistemological discovery in the darkness as there is no “happy light” and hence, very little ethical or aesthetic merit can be expected from the night.
respond to the riches of being, must consent to become a constant series of decisions, interlocking and mutually correcting—epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic. (169)

It is important to point out that O’Connell thinks it is the philosophical inquiry that desires to have a “wing” in the first place, but the empirical, practical mindset discourages and obstructs the wings of philosophical inquiry from flying. Perhaps, though, one might argue that philosophers and artists alike let their thoughts fly away, until those thoughts are proven not merely at fault for being abstract, but also at fault in reality, like Icarus’s waxen wings. To have successfully gone to the sun without having the wings melt and falling into the sea is to end everything—that is the completion, the “happy” closure that might bring contentment but kills the desire to want, ponder, and create. The “happy light” suggests the finite contentment that erases the desire to be close to the sun, as it is inevitable that being in the darkness is what drives human beings to seek the light. While philosophy lingers on the possibility of lack, empirical science hangs on the certainty of completion. To write about happiness and to write about the sun, one must be away from them. But empirical science must zoom in and get closer to the object of desire, and this is how, as O’Connell points out in the preceding passage, the “epistemological preoccupation, become imperialistic, can also hobble our advance, clip the wings of philosophic flight, [and] prevent us from coming to know the very good our hearts most deeply yearn to know” (169). For Adam, everything has to be explained and reasoned, and as we see in Paradise Lost, Eve remains satisfied with the answers she receives from Adam; and most importantly, she doesn’t doubt why the stars and the moon shine at night, but she simply complains that she doesn’t get to enjoy their beauty at night because she has to be sleeping then.
The difference between Adam’s and Eve’s thoughts on this issue is subtle but meaningful—Eve doesn’t think twice about why the stars and the moon are shining in the darkness, while Adam thinks they are shining at night solely to satisfy the sun’s purpose. Applying Augustine’s theory about the relationship between ontology and epistemology, Adam’s teleological reasoning for the lights’ existing in the darkness proves somewhat similar to the Augustinian theory of knowledge. The following passage provides Gilson’s precise and insightful analysis of Augustine’s metaphor, but most importantly, it resonates closely with my argument about the immanent, active light that comes from within as opposed to the passive light that shines upon and illuminates from outside:

The comparison between God and an intelligible sun serves first of all to point out the difference between a thing which is intelligible of itself and a thing which must be made intelligible if it is ever to become so; the sun exists, it is bright, and it makes bright the objects it illuminates. There is a great difference, then, between something naturally visible, such as the light of the sun, and something visible only because of a borrowed light, such as the earth when illuminated by the sun. In the same way, we must distinguish between God considered in His own Being, the intelligibility of God which is independent of everything but itself, and the sciences which derive their intelligibility from that of God. Thus the comparison allows the truths perceived by the soul no more light of their own than that possessed by things when deprived of the sun which illuminates them. However, we must remember that this is only a comparison and that even so, it is the intelligibility of the sciences rather than their comprehension by the mind that is here traced to the divine light. (78)
Interestingly, in this passage Gilson describes the sun’s light as “the intelligibility of God” that is autonomous and self-sufficient and compares it to “a borrowed light” that is dependent upon the object to be illuminated. God is the light of the sun, too bright for humans to see, which is sapientia; though we cannot directly see the sun’s light, we can see what He illuminates, which with limited vision might produce only scientia. Sapientia, though hard to directly access or see with the corporeal eye, can be gradually achieved by practicing opening the mind’s eye. Unlike the physical eye, the mind’s eye doesn’t get blinded by the sun’s light but seeks illumination from it.

I return to Augustine, who argues that “we ought rather to believe that the nature of the intellectual mind is so formed as to see those things which, according to the disposition of the creator, are subjoined to intelligible things in the natural order, in a sort of incorporeal light of its own kind, as the eye of the flesh sees the things that lie about it in this corporeal light, of which it is made to be receptive and to which it is adapted” (On the Trinity XII. 15. 24). It is important to point out that Augustine believes in the possibility for man to acquire higher knowledge and encourages us to “rather believe” in achieving intellectual vision through higher reasoning to attain knowledge of God. According to his passage, our soul already is the eye to perceive incorporeal light, as does our physical eye always see what’s out there in the corporeal world, under corporeal light. But unlike the physical eye, the soul’s eye—our “intellectual mind”—isn’t always open and readily seeing “the things that lie about it in this corporeal light.” For one thing, what the soul’s eye sees is not “the things that lie about it in this corporeal light.” Furthermore, in order to “see those things which, according to the disposition of the creator, are subjoined to intelligible things in the natural order, in a sort of incorporeal light of its own kind,” one must work hard to train the soul’s eye so that it will open to receive such incorporeal light and be able
to see it at the same time. And that training of the soul’s eye will require both scientia and sapientia, but most critically, sapientia. And, perhaps it is plausible that Eve, who appears more taciturn and less studious than Adam in the lines I previously examined, actually exhibits certain Christian-espoused attributes such as a childlike curiosity and playfulness of a trusting but intuitive person, who is more tuned to acquiring wisdom (sapientia) than knowledge (scientia).

Seeing what the sun readily illuminates provides man knowledge here and now, but contemplating under the shade—even falling asleep—allows man to recall and remember.

Adam’s thirst for knowledge provides him with what he desires through scientia, inquiring and learning while Eve exhibits a certain carelessness towards corporeal knowledge about the world and its order. She is more concerned with her inner self, inner happiness. Hence she often abides and accepts Adam’s knowledge (scientia) about things such as the solar system, but when it comes to her own work and self-efficiency, she has an idea of her own, and she is surely propelled by her own will: “Let us divide our labors, thou where choice/ Leads thee or where most needs, whether to wind/ The woodbine round this arbor or direct/ The clasping ivy where to climb, while I/ In yonder spring of roses intermixed/ With myrtle find what to redress till noon” (IX. 214-19). She understands what free will can do in gaining happiness, and according to Augustine, she who, innocent and good, wants something good and not evil, will find happiness: “If this be our condition this to dwell/ In narrow circuit straitened by a foe/ Subtle or violent, we not endued/ Single with like defence wherever met,/ How are we happy, still in fear of harm?” (IX. 322-26). What Eve suggests here is thought provoking and perplexing, as it clearly suggests that Eve thinks fear makes man unhappy. Or at least that the threat of fear makes one unhappy. But how does she know what fear is? Does she even know what fear is? Or, is she suggesting
that Adam, in the passage above, is the one who fears enough to “dwell/ In narrow circuit straitened by a foe”?

Of course, some might readily argue that Eve’s curious and credulous mind made her wander off alone in Paradise and eventually led us to our fallen state. But the fault is not entirely on Eve; most would argue that it is on Satan—she was only curious, only wanting to achieve the eternal knowledge and get closer to God. For instance, in *Paradise Lost* Adam acquires knowledge (scientia) while he asks Raphael questions about the solar system as they walk together. His intelligence, besides the knowledge already implanted in him such as what he learns during his dream vision about his own creation, often comes from sources outside him, such as angelic knowledge coming directly from the angel’s mouth. Eve also learns; however, her intellectual approach is more self-reliant, self-reflective, and spontaneous. She likes to wander off and observe things alone, and when she has doubts or concerns, she might discuss it with Adam. And she listens to Adam and hears what he knows and learned from Raphael, though she contemplates on her own. Adam would have asked millions of questions before even looking at the fruit. So what does this mean? If Eve were the gullible one, and Satan indeed approached her knowing that she would be more susceptible to his plea, then weren’t we already determined to be fallen? Perhaps the question we should be asking is—why did Milton painstakingly depict Adam and Eve such as he did? Why does Eve appear to be more spontaneous, intuitive, and credulous in her thoughts? Milton’s point might be exactly that—Eve had to be the one. Satan had to go to Eve first.

But there is more. There is Adam, who takes the fruit from Eve. Augustine’s theory of knowledge provides a clue as to how Milton generates his own understanding and answer to the question. Augustine’s theory of being—or Platonist Christian hierarchy of being—makes it
impossible for man to remain perfect and happy as God intended him to be. Any act of acquiring knowledge is driven by free will; even if God has already given Adam and Eve certain knowledge about the world during their conception, they still want to know something about the solar system or why the stars shine at night. It is the persistent will that helps man climb up the hierarchy of being. And it is the free will that also leads man to fall. Peter A. Fiore, in *Milton and Augustine*, argues that “there is a remarkable consistency between this teaching of Augustine and Milton’s treatment of Adam and Eve before the Fall” (41). Fiore explains that “before the act of disobedience, there was a weakening of the will, a slipping or falling from perseverance, a failing to abide in that goodness in which there is no sin. And the actual fall into sin took place with the eating of the apple” (41). Furthermore, there was a series of events prior to the fall that led to weakening of the will and eventually to sin, for “it would have been better if Adam had been less curious about the forbidden tree and had talked less about it to Eve, so as not to influence her dreams, or if he had heeded his own advice when he hopelessly discouraged her from going out alone” (41). Fiore further concludes that this paradox between Augustine’s depiction of Adam and Eve’s god-like perfection and the inevitable existence of the free will that led them to consent to sin actually yields an opportunity for us to contemplate the subtle complexity of Christian doctrine. The Fall might have never happened without the free will, and it will be impossible to understand the depth and complexity of Christian doctrine without the Fall.

In *Soliloquies*, Augustine describes reason as the contemplation of truth: “[T]he gaze of the soul is Reason (I. 6.13). It is reason that performs the mind’s “act of looking” (I. 6.13).200

200 Augustine further writes in *Soliloquies* that “very act of looking, even though the eyes be sound, cannot turn them toward the Light unless three things persist: Faith—by which the soul believes that, that toward which the gaze has been directed, is such that to gaze upon it will cause blessedness: Hope—by which, the eyes being rightly fixed, the soul expects this vision to follow: and Love— which is the soul’s longing to see and to enjoy it. […] And this intellectual vision is that which is in the soul a conjunction of the seer and the seen: as seeing with the eyes results from the conjunction of the sense of sight and the sensible object, either of which being lacking, nothing can be seen” (I. 6. 13).
And this soul’s eye doesn’t automatically offer the divine sight; it needs to seek and look to see the truth; as Ronald Nash observes, “the mere possession of eyes is not enough to guarantee sight, so too the mind must look if it is to see truth” (64). Through the active and diligent way of looking through the soul’s eye, man can acquire higher reason, and the “object of higher reason is the eternal world of the forms; its method is contemplation; its end is happiness; and its result is sapientia” (65). But the soul’s eye and man’s will can also err in the course of reaching for higher knowledge; thus in Satan’s speech to Eve in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost* we see Satan naming what Eve will acquire when she takes a bite into the forbidden fruit “wisdom,” indeed above “science”:

O sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving plant,

Mother of science, now I feel thy pow’r

Within me clear not only to discern

Things in their causes but to trace the ways

Of highest agents deemed however wise! (IX. 679-83)

Here Satan, the author, employs all the right buzz phrases—“wisdom-giving plant,” “mother of science,” and “the ways of highest agents”—to inspire his cautious audience to commit to “venturing higher than my lot” (690). Even further, Milton compares Satan’s eloquence and delivery to ancient classical orators: “As when of old some orator renowned/ In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence/ Flourished, since mute, to some great cause addressed,/ Stood in himself collected” (IX. 670-73). Milton seals the lines that describe Satan’s rhetorical delivery

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201 Nash, *The Light of the Mind*.

202 Nash also notes: “Augustine distinguished between the ratio superior and ratio inferior, the higher and lower reasons. These two aspects of the same mind have different objects, methods, ends, and results. The object of the lower reason is the temporal world of particulars; its method is investigation; its end is action; and its result is scientia” (*The Light of the Mind* 65).
with a final stressed syllable to properly provide the contextual support that Satan actually believes in his "heroic" cause. As if emulating a speech spoken by a great hero, Satan stands still and “collected”; note also Milton clearly distinguishes “motion” from “tongue” and describes each as an integral and independent “part” of Satan’s speech: “while each part,/ Motion, each act won audience ere the tongue,/ Sometimes in highth began, as no delay/ Of preface brooking through his zeal of right” (IX. 673-76). A slightly earlier passage challenges the reading of Satan’s heroic speech and suggests that Satan’s emulation of classical antiquity is false and insufficient, for it provides him with a model devoid of spiritual illumination. Even though the poet seems to hyperbolize Satan’s oratorical skills, he also describes Satan with the following accusatory words: “when now more bold/ Tempter, but with show of zeal and love/ To man, and indignation at his wrong,/ New part puts on, and as to passion moved,/ Fluctuates disturbed, yet comely and in act/ Raised, as of some great matter begin” (IX. 664-69). Milton’s iambic pentameter in the lines that describe Satan’s oratorical delivery provides dignity and distance without inserting too much decorum or conceit (lines 672-78), but some of those lines spoken by Satan are written in irregular meter rather than iambic pentameter (look, for example, at lines 679-680). I argue that the iambic pentameter of the first two lines spoken by Satan is questionable because the same vowels of the first words of these two lines—“O” and “o” in “mother”—disturb the flow of iambic pentameter (679-80). Moreover, the speech not only contrasts with the poet’s reading of Satan’s outward display of oratorical greatness but also confirms a subtle fissure in Satan’s seemingly heroic speech. About Satan’s oratorical delivery Milton does say the following: “ere the tongue/ Sometimes in highth began” (674-75).

Consistency is the key to the validity of measured lines, and if Satan aspired to attain the eloquence of Greek and Roman orators, shouldn’t he have consistently “in highth began”?
Indeed, Milton was known for his aversion to rhyme schemes, but poetic meter is a different issue, and his admiration of and adherence to the style of ancient Greek and Latin epic poetry ensures his belief in the poetic meter that was so important in the poetic tradition he emulated. Let us then closely examine the first two lines of Satan’s speech to Eve in lines 679-80 by reading them out loud: “O sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving plant/ Mother of science, now I feel thy power.” Most readers would see no metric irregularity in the first line, especially once being informed that this is Milton’s epic poem consisting blank verse with iambic pentameter and no rhyme schemes. Opening with a lowly and softly blowing sound of “O” without stress, most readers will read the line as perfect iambic pentameter. This speech by Satan commences with a single vowel/syllable that requires another syllable to immediately follow, hence creating amphibrach, “O sacred” (- / -), short syllables on both sides, and the following syllables thus fall into the pattern of iambic pentameter.

However, Satan seems to be invoking something that is already inside him, and his later lines do claim that a piece of the “sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving plant” is indeed inside him: “now I feel thy power/ Within me clear” and “Look on me,/ Me who have touched and tasted, yet both live” (IX. 680-81, 687-88). If Satan did invoke something that is inside of him, then

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203 I want to make sure that the readers are on the same page with me on this argument—as most Milton readers must know. Milton eschewed rhyme schemes and end rhymes. He found regular rhyme not only numbing but dumbing of the lively sound and beauty of English language. While abolishing rhyme, Milton remains quiet about poetic meter in his note on “the verse” added in the second printing, prefacing Paradise Lost in 1667: “The measure is English heroic verse without rime, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin; rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame meter; graced indeed since by the use of some famous modern poets, carried away by custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than else they would have expressed them. [. . . ] as have long since our best English tragedies, as a thing itself, to all judicious ears, trivial and of no true musical delight; which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings, a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory.” Then he adds and concludes that this abjuration of meter should not be considered by the reader as “vulgar” but as “an example” to free ancient heroic poetry from “the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming.” Milton does stick to iambic pentameter for his heroic epic poem—just no “jingling” rhymes.
how would he summon it? In a lofty tone, as if lifting up and breathing out something deeply lodged in himself, couldn’t Satan breathe those words—“O sacred, wise”—out with one extended “o” with a stress, followed by a trochee (“sacred”) or cretic (“sacred, wise” / - /)? This could also suggest a dactyl followed by iambic (“O sacred, wise” / / - /). According to Satan’s description of this “power within” him, shouldn’t such lofty power require a little more gravitas and time, thus perhaps extending the sound of “O” in the beginning of his invocation of such power? But most importantly, let us now examine the word “Mother” that begins the next line (IX. 680). According to Milton, Satan’s tongue “sometimes in highth began”—and the line that begins with “Mother” exhibits just that. It is clear that iambic pentameter is broken in the next line, as the word “mother” adds the stress on the first syllable (/ -). Even if one argues that “mother” can be read in iambic, there is still some irregularity in the syllables that follow the first syllable (“of science, now I feel thy power” - / - / - / - / - /), which makes this line impossible to be read in iambic pentameter.

These lines are no aberration, for Satan’s measured lines are often inconsistent and ill-measured. The ebb-and-flow of iambic pentameter is disturbed, and even worse, his lines “sometimes in highth began” and sometimes don’t. Milton’s delineation of Satan’s oratorical delivery as a whole therefore suggests a certain obliqueness—literally, something is off. This irregularity perhaps is most clearly presented in Milton’s careful arrangement of subtle denotations indicating disturbance and pretense. Satan shows “indignation,” he “new part puts on,” and “fluctuates disturbed” though he soon collects himself “comely” and “raised, as of some great matter begin.” Angered as well as amped by his previous failure in convincing Eve, Satan keeps manufacturing and fabricating a better speech by putting “new parts” on, until Eve will be moved to take a bite of the forbidden fruit. However, since Satan seems to demonstrate oratorical
sophistication inspired by classical antiquity, one must not make a hasty conclusion that Satan’s inconsistent meters suggests that Milton may have regarded classical poetics in a negative light. Clearly, Satan possesses intelligence and skills as other heavenly angels do, but he “fluctuates disturbed”—he moves obliquely, as he is motivated by a wrong cause, and for the worse, inspired by anger. It is more convincing that it is Milton’s intention to show Satan’s oblique motivation and reasoning in those lines that subtly shift from the normal iambic pentameter to unexpected and unrecognizable irregular meters.

In addition, Satan insinuates this fruit will give Eve corporeal knowledge (scientia) and, most importantly, divine wisdom (sapientia): “Wisdom-giving plant, Mother of science” (679-80). That both sapientia and scientia come from one plant is noteworthy, but it is paramount to pay attention to the subtle derivation of what is given and what is begotten. The plant, according to Satan’s speech, gives wisdom—“wisdom-giving plant”—when the plant is also the mother of science, who gives birth to science. The difference between “wisdom-giving” and giving birth to science is that there is anticipation and acknowledgement of a recipient; wisdom is given to someone or something, whereas science is the recipient itself. Wisdom, according to Satan’s speech, thus reigns above science as it is closer to the source of divine knowledge; wisdom resides within the plant and is still part of it, not a reproduction of it, even when it is given, whereas science is separated from the plant, no longer being the source of divine knowledge. Therefore, scientia is something that can be found and studied through observation and examination of the physical world, but to gain sapientia one must be near the origin of the divine intelligence from which wisdom can be given. Satan’s derivations of the two kinds of knowledge suggest a backdrop of Augustinian theory of knowledge, but the gradation between the two also
tempts Eve to want wisdom even more. Since the plant gives it, why shouldn’t she come and take what the plant does “give”?

Of course this is a trap and a deception—it is not a giving plant, and anything the plant can give, one must will and labor to take. Satan surreptitiously leaves this part out, focusing on the appealing claims that wisdom is indeed good, that it won’t kill Eve but rather will give her more life with the power of divine vision, and that the plant is there to give what Eve or anyone would like to possess—divine knowledge. But why should she take sapientia from outside, through a sensory experience? Unless it is scientia she is looking for, shouldn’t sapientia be sought within oneself, by opening the mind’s eye? In *A Treatise of Civil Power*, Milton emphasizes the guidance of the Spirit within oneself, as opposed to scientia gained from analysis of external events:

First it cannot be deni’d, being the main foundation of our protestant religion, that we of these ages, having no other divine rule or authoritie from without us warrantable to one another as a common ground but the holy scripture, and no other within us but the illumination of the Holy Spirit so interpreting that scripture as warrantable only to our selves and to such whose consciences we can so perswade, can have no other ground in matters of religion but only from the scriptures. And these being not possible to be understood without this divine illumination, which no man can know at all times to be in himself, much less to be at any time for certain in any other, it follows cleerly, that no man or body of men in these times can be the infallible judges or determiners in matters of religion to any other mens consciences but their own.\(^\text{204}\)

\[^{204}\text{John Milton, } A \text{Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes. The Prose of John Milton: Selected and Edited from the original Texts with Introductions, Notes, Translations, & Accounts of All of His Major Prose}\]
Aside from the historical implications of passage above, Milton supports Augustine’s theory of knowledge and divine illumination and believes that the knowledge gained through looking at the world outside the self only reveals its scientific origin, which is distanced from the self, as opposed to the knowledge acquired through the way of looking inwardly, looking into the self, by contemplating, which helps one to reach sapientia. Surprisingly, or, perhaps not, even though intuitive, Eve, who seems to be more in tune with her inner knowledge, doesn’t see that she does have the divine light within her. Her mind’s eye is shutting down tightly, as she is tempted and persuaded by Satan.

Milton’s meditations upon the limitations of physical sight, as well as its possible impairment of spiritual sight, involved far more than his own failing vision. Catherine Wilson’s The Invisible World: Early Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope offers a valuable study of the way the early modern period reacted to the emergence of modern science and how the extension of empirical sight enabled and disabled the spiritual and philosophical outlook to natural world:

The orderliness of the cosmos in the medieval tradition, the rankings of angelology and the hierarchical system of enclosed spheres, might be supposed to have conveyed a certain smug security. But medieval philosophy was ambivalent toward the natural world and the value of the sense of vision. Curiositas was one of the sins most repellent to Augustine; the profound ocular aestheticism of the Confessions is the other face of the fear that visuality and spirituality are as mutually exclusive as gratified lust and salvation. Representatives of Christianity, a religion of self-examination stressing not the obedience to external law but the

purification of motive, argued that this task was sufficiently absorbing to leave no energy available for external applications of the questioning faculty, a view that persisted until physic-theology and popular science converted the knowledge of nature in an idle culture into a moral pastime far less dubious than the reading of novels. (22)

As expected, seeing through the physical eye was trusted by neither medieval philosophy nor the Christian religion; furthermore, seeing too much and too closely through any sort of scientific machine using the physical eye meant the betrayal of the spiritual eye, and even worse, the squandering of the full potential of the divine light that should be actively engaged in the illumination of the mind. Christianity’s obsession with the inward vision necessarily found the physico-theological view of the emerging sciences as thwarting the necessary separation between the external, physical world and the spiritual world within, and Hooke’s microscopic view of the physical world does indeed blur the line between the two. Without sufficient inward contemplation, we have only knowledge observed through sensory experience, and though the empirical knowledge is important, one cannot gain sapientia through empirical knowledge. If Eve had been trained to see through spirituality, she would have noticed Satan’s “words replete with guile” (IX. 733). In a way, visuality offers more reason for Eve to be tempted—after all, she sees Satan alive and well after consuming the fruit. What she sees through her physical eye makes her incredulous of the knowledge she has gained from God via Adam while she becomes more credulous of what she sees with her eyes.

Even though Eve has exhibited far more autonomy when tuning in to her intuitive reasoning and contemplative thoughts, she here shows how no human is truly prepared to fight against a tempter who tries to allure him or her with any means possible, including the possibility
of immortality. Notice how Eve’s speeches noticeably get shorter and shorter, as Satan’s speeches get not only longer but enticingly more elaborate and persuasive; while “she scarce had said, though brief,” Satan’s becoming “more bold,” as if the tempter sucked and took the inner strength out of the tempted (IX. 664). Satan begins his first persuasive speech in Book IX, line 532, which goes on for seventeen lines (lines 532-548). Eve’s replying lines to Satan last for fourteen lines (553-66). Satan’s lines are consistently longer than ten or more lines, with an exception of the lines 626-30, where Satan replies briefly to Eve’s retorts. Satan’s speeches are consistently long and verbose, at the same time articulate and studded with notable rhetorical devices (IX. lines 568-612, 679-732) compared to Eve’s speeches that remain simple and short (lines 615-24, 647-54, 659-63). This pattern of Eve’s brief speech ends when she is fully persuaded and tempted, so she herself now delivers a long, elaborate speech that resonates with imagery and repeats content from Satan’s speech (lines 745-79); this is one of the two longest speeches spoken by Eve during the temptation scene, though this one is before eating the fruit. Almost tempted, “yet first/ pausing a while, thus to herself mused” (743-44), now Eve utters the lines that echo those of Satan’s: “This fruit divine,/ Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste,/ Of virtue to make wise: what hinders then/ To reach, and feed at once both body and mind?” (776-79). Eve now “mused” (744), for she is not using her wisdom (sapientia) to reason with Satan’s argument, but with the material knowledge he just has gained through looking and hearing as “his words replete with guile/ Into her heart too easy entrance won” (733-34) and her sight is “Fixed on the fruit she gazed” (735). The verb “muse” is a peculiar word choice by the poet to

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205  Ten lines, eight lines, and then five lines—as we can see, Eve’s lines are strikingly shorter than those of Satan. Of course, I am not at all arguing that the length determines the quality of the speech, but we must pay attention to how the poet contrasts Satan and Eve’s speeches in this way—the juxtaposition is peculiar. Satan delivers one of his most cunning and spectacularly subtle and surreptitious speeches at the moment of tempting Eve, while Eve’s speeches remain strikingly matter of fact and concise. Of course, ultimately Eve delivers a long, articulate speech that mirrors and builds upon Satan’s verbose and long speeches.
signal the subtle but certain shift in Eve’s mind, as the word could mean both contemplating and talking to oneself discontentedly. The most obvious and popular meaning of the word is “to be absorbed in thought” and “to meditate in silence” (*OED* 1. a) as an intransitive verb or “to ponder over, reflect upon; to contemplate” (1. c) as a transitive verb. As an intransitive verb, the word “muse” can also mean “to grumble, to complain, or to murmur discontentedly” (4. a). Since Milton clearly describes “his words replete with guile/ Into her heart too easy entrance won,” there is no doubt at this point that Eve is swayed. Eve “to herself mused”—something has ruffled her simple, contemplative mind, but it wasn’t just Satan’s speech alone, and she is musing “to herself” as if she grumbles and complains to herself. The peaceful solitude and quiet has been interrupted and is gone, and she now hears murmuring noises inside, grumbling and complaining because she is vexed by this quandary presented by the serpent and wonders why she can’t have the fruit after all.

Her musing acts as an inner complaint and reasoning against her inner wisdom, but most importantly, it functions as a turning point where we witness Eve’s capability to use her intelligence to examine the situation through a louder and more vociferous discourse. This is especially significant because she hasn’t been vocal or aggressive enough to argue against Satan, as I have pointed out earlier. Her speeches get briefer and weaker, so that one almost wonders why she doesn’t fight harder as Satan gets more aggressive and persuasive in his argument. Something about Eve’s silence, I think, I should clarify and explain here. Her lack of outward speech should not be criticized or measured as lack of intelligence; surely, when comparing the conversations between Adam and Raphael and the ones between Eve and Satan, there are some obvious differences between them, such as, for instance, the length of Eve and Adam’s speech. As I pointed out earlier, while Satan’s speeches get longer and more elaborate, there is not much
written evidence that shows her vigorous intellectual contest against Satan; furthermore, since Adam consistently speaks in lengthy, articulate lines while conversing with Raphael, it is indeed difficult for the reader to ignore the striking difference between these constructions. For example, in Books 7 and 8 of *Paradise Lost* when Adam requests Raphael to explain how God created the world and how the celestial system works, Raphael answers Adam in a long, continuous discourse that lasts throughout Book 7, and then in Book 8 Raphael encourages Adam to “dream not of other worlds” and suggests “know what passes there; be lowly wise:/ Think only what concerns thee and thy being” (VIII. 173-74).

However, in Book 8 we notice Adam gathering what he has learned from Raphael and using his intelligence to ask questions and voice his opinion outwardly to Raphael:

> How fully hast thou satisfied me, pure  
> Intelligence of Heav’n, angel serene,  
> And freed from intricacies, taught to live,  
> The easiest way, nor with perplexing thoughts  
> To interrupt the sweet of life, from which  
> God hath bid dwell far off all anxious cares,  
> And not molest us, unless we ourselves  
> Seek them with wand’ring thoughts, and notions vain.  
> But apt the mind or fancy is to rove  
> Unchecked, and of her roving is no end. (VIII. 180-89)

Adam here is clearly aware of how the mind might wander/wonder, even though he begins his question with a polite affirmation of Raphael’s answers. However, what is perplexing here is that though Adam says that God has prepared and wants Adam to follow the “easiest way” (VIII.
183), he is already locked into philosophical inquiries that are anything but simple or easy. Adam is a complex thinker, and his insights and inquiries in Book 8 lines 180-216 (also lines 250-559, a long, continuous speech describing his recollection of being created by God) show plenty of evidence that Adam is able to assay Raphael’s speech and develop his own argument against Raphael. But Adam also quickly yields; though he thinks “apt the mind or fancy is to rove/unchecked, and of her roving is no end,” he believes such “roving” has its end

Till warned, or by experience taught, she learn,
That not to know at large of things remote
From use, obscure and subtle, but to know
That which before us lies daily life,
Is the prime wisdom; what is more, is fume,
Or emptiness, or fond impertinence,
And renders us in things that most concern

Unpracticed, unprepared, and still to seek. (VIII. 190-97)

I am suspicious of, or at least interested in, how readily Adam puts the progression of his thoughts in abeyance and accepts Raphael’s suggestion: “Therefore from his high pitch let us descend/ A lower flight, and speak of things at hand/ Useful, whence haply mention may arise/ Of something not unseasonable to ask/ By sufferance, and thy wonted favor deigned” (VIII. 198-202). Figuratively speaking, here we see Adam’s reasoning coming down to earth, back to “things at hand” and the practical questions that are “not unseasonable to ask” that could give him “useful” answers. Adam here, I would argue, makes a mistake of linking “the easiest way” with “a lower flight”—his mind is already deep in the way of an informed, educated mind,
voicing insights from a fully functioning intelligent mind operated by scientia, and it is hard to say that the cause of his immediate withdrawal to “the easiest way” is inner wisdom and faith.

Rather, it seems to me that he is using deductive reasoning to eliminate what is the least practical and least reasonable to believe. More importantly, “the easiest way” could signify gracefulness and the easy execution of writing, as one of the OED definitions of the adjective “easy” demonstrates: “of written compositions: Showing no trace of effort; smooth, flowing” of a writer or thinker (A. I. 4. b); it could also imply a kind of nautical trope, as in something “not hard pressed: not hurried, gentle; said of motion, a breeze, a fire, etc” (A. I. 5. a). Adam, in Paradise Lost, refers to sapientia when he says, “to know/ That which before us lies in daily life,/ Is the prime wisdom” (VIII. 192-94), but it is hard to say that Adam’s reasoning comes from “the prime wisdom” offered in “daily life” as so far most of his intelligent decisions have been influenced by Raphael. Adam clearly thinks the more “apt the mind,” the more likely it will “rove” (VIII. 188), which supports my suspicion that Adam follows Raphael’s lead and hasn’t truly wiped out his doubts and questions; “the easiest way” to Adam is still less challenging, “a lower flight” (VIII. 199). Adam describes “what is more [than the prime wisdom] is fume./ Or emptiness” (194-94). Yet we should pay attention to the way Adam gains knowledge about the world; though he says what one could gain outside the natural knowledge is “fume” or “emptiness,” most of Adam’s knowledge comes from an articulate source, an interactive, Socratic discussion with Raphael. Adam knows about “the easiest way,” but he doesn’t practice it. And if “the easiest way” is what God intended us to live, then this course of action must be intuitively in us. When dealing with that inner wisdom, an internal contemplative dialogue between reason and self should take precedence over an external exchange of knowledge. The one that actually takes knowledge in “the easiest way,” without any trace of effort or eagerness
to learn, is Eve. After all, “the easiest way” must be able to simplify “perplexing thoughts” to render them less perplexing, and most importantly, “the easiest way” will require less words to articulate either perplexing or “sweet” ideas. Thus Eve’s musings show her inner wisdom, albeit wisdom that is tainted by Satan.

Looking at lines 739-44 from Book 8 carefully, one should notice that her musing is further heightened by her sensory experience: “Meanwhile the hour of noon drew on, and waked/
An eager appetite, raised by the smell/ So savory of that fruit, which with desire,/ Solicited her longing eye; yet first/ Pausing a while, thus to herself she mused” (739-44). And Milton’s brilliance is that he hasn’t forgotten that she is a human being, who after all does get hungry and senses her hunger. That her musing coincides with her heightened sensory experience isn’t a coincidence. Whether it is silent or murmured to herself, the grumbling speech she makes in the next thirty-five lines (745-79) must have been echoing inside her head. These lines reveal her reasoning as unsettled and confused, fluctuating between why she should or shouldn’t follow Satan’s suggestion. By the time she “muse[s],” she is already convincing herself

For good unknown, sure is not had, or had
And yet unknown, is as not had at all.
In plain then, what forbids he but to know,
Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?
Such prohibitions bind not. But if death
Bind us with after-bands, what profits then
Our inward freedom? In the day we eat
Of this fair fruit, our doom is, we shall die.
How dies the serpent? He hath eat’n and lives,
And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns,

Irrational till then. For us alone

Was death invented? (IX. 756-67).

For the worse, her musing has already been tempered by the inevitable corporeal reality—it is about lunch time and she feels “an eager appetite” as her body’s sensory system nags her to smell the fruit, see the fruit, and eat the fruit: “An eager appetite, raised by the smell/ So savory of that fruit, which with desire,/ Solicited her longing eye” (IX. 740-43). Now her body “raise[s]” her desire for the fruit and thoughts of eating the fruit. In the above lines spoken by Eve, Milton juxtaposes the two words “knowing” and “had” to demonstrate how Eve confuses two different kinds of knowledge, one inspired from the divine light, the spiritual knowledge and wisdom, or sapientia, and the other obtained through corporeal experience and learned examination, the external knowledge and worldly information, or scientia. Eve seems to equate nescience with immateriality: “unknown” is “not had” and “had and yet unknown” is “not had at all” (756-57). If never “had,” it is never known; for Eve, lack of knowledge signifies both material and immaterial scarcity. If never “had,” it is never known; for Eve, lack of knowledge signifies both material and immaterial scarcity.206 This is a very subtle and slippery argument; Eve here could mean that if she does not know something at this point, then she has never had that knowledge. The first condition, “for good unknown, sure is not had,” could imply having as obtaining the knowledge through physical experience, at which point knowledge becomes a material possession, like knowledge being transported from the fruit to the mind of a person just by consuming the fruit; yet the second condition—“had and yet unknown, is as not had at all”—is

206 In addition, this passage about Eve demonstrates Milton’s monism or animist materialism. As Fallon observes in Milton among the Philosophers, Milton’s monism involves the idea that a single material substance which is “animate, self-active, and free” can compose everything in the universe: “But where Hobbes assimilated mind to matter and explained mental events mechanically, Milton assimilated matter to current notions of mind and moved toward the position that all corporeal substance is animate, self-active, and free” (81).
much more opaque and defies analysis. Once again, it is hard to tell whether the word “had” signifies either the physical consumption of the fruit that yields the knowledge of “good,” or the spiritual possession of the knowledge of “good” that Eve should have already “had” intuitively. If the first is the case, then what kind of knowledge is Eve acquiring? Sapientia? Or scientia? If the latter is true, then obviously taking the fruit from the tree and eating it signifies she has lost her own divine light and didn’t work hard to regain its strength to fight against the temptation. The lines 756-57 could simply mean that if one never had experienced “good” then he or she will never know what “good” is. Yet I would argue the peculiar mentioning of knowing and having in Eve’s crucial musing suggests a strong platonic and Augustinian backdrop. Then the line “had and yet unknown, is as not had at all” questions the possibility of inner light that could exist before the physical or experimental knowledge. If that is the case, Eve denies all her intuitive knowledge and wisdom that set her apart from Adam and made her a more autonomous thinker than Adam. Depending on how we read those lines, one can argue that Eve turns immaterial, spiritual sapientia into something interchangeable with material and physical scientia that can be possessed, or that she challenges the possibility of spiritual knowledge by saying that knowledge is something tangible, something that can be observed and possessed, so that without scientia there can’t be sapientia “at all.” Eve no longer believes that the invisible, immaterial “good” can be apprehended through finding and reigniting the inner divine illumination.

Satan’s words become more powerful, the poem seems to indicate, because they are accompanied by visuality, and the above lines reveal how what Eve sees takes over and dims the illuminating light that is Eve’s spirituality, eclipsing and disabling her wisdom to reason and fight against Satan’s temptation. By this point, Eve is fully occupied by what she sees in front of her, as sapientia loses its place and strength to keep illuminating the inner wisdom that she
desperately needs—and, by extension in Milton’s theology, all humans need—ever more to fight against Satan’s temptation.

Wilson argues that Augustine’s and the general medieval theology’s theory of divine illumination rather proves the Platonic Christian fear of the empiricist doubting of the realness of spirituality, and that, as she asserts in the passage I cite above, “the profound ocular aestheticism of the Confessions is the other face of the fear that visuality and spirituality are as mutually exclusive as gratified lust and salvation.” When physical seeing began to offer sights as real and detailed as the microscopic or telescopic views of things previously unseen or invisible before those devices’ inventions, seeing began to be more real than knowing—at least the rationalist philosophers and theologians began both to predict and to fear the implications of such challenges as empirical discoveries piled up and science advanced. As Wilson describes above, visuality is the misleading, unwarranted portent that blurs the spiritual communication with and affirmation of God attained through the mind’s eye, without seeing God through the corporeal eye. In that sense, visuality offers more reason for Eve to be tempted. What she sees through her physical eye makes her incredulous of what she knows already as she becomes more credulous of what she sees with her eyes. Hence, Satan’s cunning timely words tempt her, “Look on me,/ Me who have touched and tasted, yet both live,/ And life more perfect have attained than fate/ Meant me, by vent’ring higher than my lot” (IX. 687-90). Pay close attention to the display of visual signs Satan lays in front of Eve, encouraging her to trust what she sees in front of her. As I have already discussed above, this abundance and assurance of immortality through physical seeing undermines the idea of God and wisdom gained through patient self-examination and self-illumination. Satan cleverly asks—“Look on me” (687). If individuals could “touch” and “taste” immortality as a physical existence, not as an abstract idea, wouldn’t they at least begin to
compare the sight of God they see and the vision of God they know and wonder if perhaps they should believe what they see through their eyes instead of what they envision? Whether or not Eve was already fallen at this point of Satan’s persuasion is not the point of my argument here, for regardless of whether or not she was, we can agree on one thing—Satan is certainly banking on empirical evidence to convince Eve. Indeed, Milton’s subtle and thorough construction of Satan’s argument gives Satan one of the most vexing and ominous questions directly challenging the ontology of religious faith:

The Gods are first, and that advantage use
On our belief, that all from them proceeds;
I question it, for this fair Earth I see,
Warmed by the sun, producing every kind,
Them nothing; if they all things, who enclosed
Knowledge of good and evil in this Tree,
That whoso eats thereof, forthwith attains
Wisdom without their leave? And wherein lies
Th’offense, that man should thus attain to know?
What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree
Impact against his will if all be his?” (IX. 718-28)

Satan here says he is not even sure why he must believe, or even worse, why anyone must fear something that they never know exists since they don’t see its existence in the things all around them. Subtly polarizing and distorting the singularity and omnipresence of God, Satan uses the plural “gods” and in a confessional tone proclaims his failure to see God in everything around him.
The argument Satan makes here is that if God is omnipresent and omnipotent, he should have been able to see Him readily, physically, everywhere in the physical world. But this is exactly why, as Wilson asserts, “medieval philosophy was ambivalent toward the natural world and the value of the sense of vision”—spirituality is devalued as it is materialized. However, this is not to say that Milton paints his God without spirituality, diminishing the abstract idea of God, to profess his monist faith. The idea of God’s being held in the mind’s eye and the faith in the possibility that God can be seen through the physical eye confirm the co-existence of spirit and body, but Satan’s speech cleverly describes his Augustinian “curiositas” as a wise and observant way of understanding God while simultaneously debunking the very fact that God created what he sees. All these points about Satan’s speech should lead us to one understanding about Satan—he has a bad spiritual sight, he is a bad reader of God. Or, at least, he is a proponent of ruining spiritual sight by confusing spiritual seeing with the ready and easy visuality that he argues should reveal God’s presence without the painstaking process of self-examination and contemplation. Eve, however, has a good spiritual eye; unfortunately she is not using it, and Satan happens to get her before she even fully opens it. Thus, the wrong sight—the physical sight—captures her mind, and her mind’s eye is occupied by the sight of “curiositas”: “his words replete with guile/ Into her heart too easy entrance won:/ Fixed on the fruit she gazed, which to behold/ Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregned/ With reason, to her seeming, and with truth” (IX. 737–38). The gaze is fixed onto the thing visible—not with the spiritual eye, but with the corporeal eye. This passage, I would argue, exhibits the very reason for medieval philosophy’s ambivalence towards visuality; physical sight possesses the ability to blind and obstruct spiritual sight. Thus, Satan’s speech here perhaps suggests the poet’s gratitude, for the loss of his physical sight accords with Christianity’s fear—at least following the medieval
tradition—that the abundance of physical seeing could ruin one’s spiritual seeing. Even further, I might argue that here we see the expressions of concern from a poet who espouses the kind of patient, self-contemplative “inward” seeing that his poetry champions.

5 CHAPTER 5: Inward Vision in Milton’s Samson Agonistes and Paradise Regained

Instead of being told through the creator’s point of view, Book VIII of Paradise Lost presents the story of Adam’s creation recollected by Adam, the created. According to his memory, Adam says that after “new waked from soundest sleep,” he began to muse about what he sees “about [him] round”: “Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,/And liquid lapse of murmuring stream” (262-63). Adam does not know or cannot recall who he is or where he comes from: “But who I was, or where, or from what cause,/Knew not; to speak I tried, and forthwith spake” (VIII. 270-71). Then, all of a sudden, he is able to call the sun by its name: “My tongue obeyed and readily could name/Whate’er I saw. ‘Thou sun,’ said I, fair light” (VIII. 272-73). Notably, after his “tongue obeyed and readily could name/Whate’er [he] saw” (272-73), Adam is able to identify the things he sees “round” him and speak to them. Adam cannot say the names of what was “round” him at first, but once he was able to “name/Whate’er [he] saw”—the sun—he begins to talk to everything he sees around him: “Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains./And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell./Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?/Not of myself; by some great Maker then,/In goodness and in power pre-eminent” (275-79). Seeing the sun and its “fair light,” Adam calls its name out loud, making his first attempt at communication. Light leads Adam to awareness of himself and his surroundings. Closely looking at Adam’s encounter with light, I will attest that light described by Adam in
lines 260-290 in Book VIII signifies more than the illuminating physical light. Light leads to seeing, seeing begets communication, and finally communication results in narratives.

Light revealed to Adam reveals what Adam sees, for light gives definition to the things Adam sees. How Adam wakes up and sees himself and the world further demonstrates how seeing portends the light in an intellectual or psychological sense of the word; opening one’s physical eye to the world illuminates and defines—or redefines—the meaning of self and the other. That Adam recollects seeing the light for the first time when telling the story of his creation is critical for our understanding of Milton’s insights on seeing as spiritual enlightenment in *Paradise Lost*. Adam’s recollection of seeing the world around him reveals the most basic yet the most comprehensive goal of seeing—telling. Seeing what is around him leads to a realization of the existence of “some great Maker” (278). This seeing prompts a narrative, and in this way seeing fulfills its greater potential—psychological enunciation of self and documentation of spiritual enlightenment. For example, in *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Augustine writes

> Let now the numerous variety of things furnish me some example. I behold the day-break, I foreshow, that the sun, is about to rise. What I behold, is present; what I foresignify, to come; not the sun, which already is; but the sun-rising, which is not yet. And yet did I not in my mind imagine the sun-rising itself (as now while I speak of it), I could not foretell it. But neither is that day-break which I discern in the sky, the sun-rising, although it goes before it; nor that imagination of my mind; which two are seen now present, that the other which is to be may be foretold. Future things then are not yet: and if they be not yet, they are not: and if
they are not, they cannot be seen; yet foretold they may be from things present, which are already, and are seen. (XI. 18. 24.)

Augustine’s reaction to “the day break” reveals that what one “behold[s]” now, which is “present,” isn’t all that telling is about; as his narrative above shows, while bending the horizon of time, telling comes to its existence. What one can “foresignify” is something “to come,” which the spiritual, immaterial eye can see beyond what is there or already there, like “the sun which already is,” even though “they cannot be seen.” Augustine interprets—foresignifies—the rise of the sun from seeing the day break.

In Book VIII of Paradise Lost, after recognizing and identifying that what he sees is the light, Adam also foresignifies the presence of the sun, which is more interesting especially because Adam is able to identify and call out the name of the sun even though he has just seen the light. Yet something in Adam, something almost immanent, urges him to utter the words, “thou sun”: “tongue obeyed and readily could name/ Whate’er [he] saw” (VIII. 272-73). Looking at both Adam’s and Augustine’s reactions to the visible world, I notice that spiritual seeing needs a kind of visual stimulus to initiate a negotiation between the physical sight and the envisioned sight inside the mind. The visual element is immanent in the spiritual vision. Furthermore, that Adam is able to signify the sun “this happy light” (VIII. 285) supports that the sensory experience of seeing provides a vital aid in not only gaining but also articulating the material

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207 The Confessions of Saint Augustine, translated with an introduction and notes by E. B. Pusey, 291. Various translations of St. Augustine’s Confessions do show variations, especially with the word “foresignify” in the passage I presented above. For instance, while Pusey says “What I behold, is present; what I foresignify, to come,” Chadwick’s 1991 version uses the word “forecasting” instead of “foresignify”: “What I am looking at is present, what I am forecasting is future” (Chadwick 234). F. J Sheed’s 1943 translation says the following: “What I am looking at is present, what I foretell is future” (Sheed 275). Although the differences between “foretell,” “forecast,” and “foresignify” might be small, I can’t ignore how “foretell” and “forecast” somehow flatten the sense of poetic—verbal—incantation that comes through the word “foresignify.” Although some studies suggest Chadwick’s translation as more current and authoritative, I am partial to Pusey’s 1950 translation, so I am going to refer to Pusey’s 1950 translation throughout my study.
knowledge about the visible world as this knowledge adds to the content of Adam’s telling. But
there is still one question: is “happy” what he sees, through his eyes? Where did the idea of
modification come from, and where did the modifier come from? But then, where did this urge to
say—“tongue obeyed and readily could name/ Whate’er [he] saw” (VIII. 272-73)—“thou sun”
come from, after seeing and identifying light as the sun? Without knowing that the light he sees
is the sun or is coming from the sun, Adam can “foresignify” the first visible object that he sees
as his consciousness moves out of darkness to the light. Augustine has seen and known about the
sun-rising, but Adam has just woken up from a sleep—at least this is what he recalls. Adam’s
“foresignifying”—if we borrow Augustine’s term—is both more advanced and more nascent
than what Augustine implies because it is never revealed how Adam gained his incipient
knowledge about the “happy” sun after his very first awakening. Yet most importantly, both
Augustine’s and Adam’s use of foresignification reveals that what they end up describing
extends well beyond the material magnitude or quality of what one sees—signifying beforehand,
simultaneously, or subsequently requires a prophetic sight. This differs greatly from “scientific”
seeing, devoted to objective reproduction, and produces an entirely different sort of narrative or
model concerning the material features of one’s surroundings.

    Clearly, in Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes, Milton underlines
the potential for prophetic sight as the only kind of seeing that results in meaningful story,
signifying and recording something beyond the physical eye’s ability to see. Seeing becomes
knowing, and knowing propels telling. And telling is the most instrumental element of
continuing and confirming faith. Sight is the tool needed for the construction of text, and the
instrumentality of telling gets further developed and examined in Samson Agonistes, where the
lack of sight—opting out from the abundance of seeing—helps Samson recollect his faith
through dark times. It is also equally intriguing that while optical devices were understood to be advancing and correcting human vision, as the microscope can allow observers to see the most subtle and small object invisible to the naked eye, Milton offers criticism against optic devices mirroring that in *The Blazing World*, where Cavendish points out the inorganic, clumsy, and perfunctory aspect of optical devices. It is even more noteworthy, perhaps, to point out the obvious; that the poet with his own diminishing eye sight makes a point about how optical devices rather magnify irregularities and unveil more imperfections of our own natural condition than our own natural sight, which can be full of imperfection. Both for the scientists and the poets, the goal is to present what they see. In that sense, optical devices and poetry assume a very similar objective—revealing and presenting what one sees. “By the help of Microscopes,” Robert Hooke argues in *Micrographia*, “there is nothing so small, as to escape inquiry; hence there is a new visible world discovered to the understanding.” The visible world definitely expanded, microscopically or macroscopically, as the scientific inventions and knowledge advanced, but the physical views of the world that became available through the optic aids still demanded vigorous acts of inward reasoning.

As the quantitative increase in distance and scope of the world became visible with the advent of new science, it inspired a change in the conceptual view of the world. This increasing availability and accessibility of the physical world could not completely disprove the spiritual presence of the qualitative world, and such uncertainty towards constantly growing awareness of terra incognita foreshadowed the change in conventional perception of both the celestial and corporeal structure of the world, which furthermore influenced the philosophical view of the world. Various Renaissance poets and thinkers attest to the prosthetic instrumentality of optic devices such as the microscope and telescope that rather refract and diminish the human spirit
rather than enhance it; they were far more invested in poetry that explores intellectual subtlety and human imagination and hubris as an instrument of sight—surely, Milton and the other poets I discuss here not only recognize but also self-consciously caution that the continuity and diffraction between the mechanically-enhanced and natural sight may alter the attribute of sapientia in poetry. In Milton’s later poems such as *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, the greater landscape or smallest detail that mechanically enhanced seeing can provide doesn’t portend either the moral or aesthetic quality of the narrative it tries to produce unless the sight is reckoned by the spiritual sight and told through the sight that is spiritually enhanced. Milton displays the mechanically enhanced sights as not only optical illusions but moral and spiritual deprivation, comparing the optic devices to the prosthetic eyes that only spiritually indigent creatures like Satan vaunt about owning and using.

In “Augustine on Evolution, Time, and Memory,” John Caiazza examines Augustine’s interpretation of the Book of Genesis and detailed commentaries on “the time bound nature of physical and biological processes in relation to God’s creative action” (116). Skeptics have argued the inconsistency of God’s creating light the first day and the sun and the moon on the third day, but as Caiazza points out, for those who wrote the script, it was more important to focus on “the [light’s] metaphoric role as the basis for understanding the universe, that is, as the sign and effect of God’s rationality” (117). The light unveils and teaches, through “sign and effect,” God’s work by performing the “metaphoric role” of making the signs visible and illuminating their meanings; light, then, ultimately is for reckoning God’s work, hence the “effect of God’s rationality.” How Milton presents Adam’s waking up, becoming aware of his surroundings, and seeing light reflects the process of reckoning “the sign and effect of God’s rationality” as the process eventually leads Adam to an action, when he “readily could name,”
that signifies the onset of his intelligence. That signification—the language being yielded or begotten by seeing light—of Adam’s coming to the realm of language demonstrates exactly the “light’s metaphoric role” Caiazza describes; the light as a metaphor should carry its observer to insightful illumination. Even though Adam says “who I was, or where, or from what cause, knew not,” Adam is able to name “whate’er [he] saw” right where he was illuminated by “whate’er [he] saw,” which reveals the metaphorical role of light as spiritual awakening and guidance. The light awakens something in Adam, and he “obey[s]”: “to speak I tried, and forthwith spake,/ My tongue obeyed and readily could name/ Whate’er I saw. Thou sun, said I, fair light” (VIII. 271-73). Adam sees light, light illuminates and activates his mind, and Adam’s tongue “obey[s]” what his mind triggers him to “forthwith sp[e]ake.” Adam’s first encounter with light demonstrates how the “light’s metaphoric role” delivers “the sign and effect of God’s rationality” (Caiazza 117).

Adam’s description of the nearness and urgency of ubiquitous light further reveals the paradoxical nature of the “sign and effect of God’s rationality.” As a metaphorical sign, light suggests the inward and meditative illumination, but its material sign exists externally and comes to Adam from outside as he sees the world around him made visible by light; and to make the light’s illuminating effect complete and rational, Adam articulates what he sees through another form of materialized sign, the “name” of the “fair light” (VIII. 272-73). What was external is internalized, rationalized, and came back to its external state again. The sign of God’s rationality is farther away from Adam while the effect of God’s rationality occurs near Adam; more than

208 Moreover, as Adam makes clear, the light he refers to is “thou sun,” which is more than ubiquitous and almost pervasive; thus, the event foreshadows a possibility of Adam’s lack of insightful understanding at the point of seeing the light. I examine this point further where I compare seeing under the sun’s rather straight, intrusive light as non-poetic light, as opposed to seeing in the shade, and argue that opting out from the abundance of light is equivalent to seeing through the un-aided, natural eye, which will make us rely more on sapientia, while mechanically-enhanced seeing will rely more on an artificial, material aid of worldly knowledge that promotes physical enhancement and increase over spiritual depth.
near, it occurs in his mind. The mind’s interiority manifests the external sign into a proximate significance, proximate enough to embody our mind’s interiority and compact enough to fit and be articulated in these lines. What makes the external and material sign become internal and immaterial? What makes the physically immobile sign conceptually mobile? What Adam’s tongue obeys is sapientia, “the sign and effect of God’s rationality,” the immanent authority of spiritual interiority. And that spiritual interiority shapes the way one sees, turning the external and material sign into internal and immaterial significance—spiritual seeing directly influences the moral and aesthetic authority of telling. In this chapter, divided into three sections, I will examine Milton’s poems and discuss how spiritual and poetic seeing generates a more persuasive narrative and epistemological authority than mechanically enhanced seeing that promotes servile and insular narrative. Regardless of his physical blindness, Milton exhibited an aesthetic and moral vigor in his narrative that suggests that spiritual seeing affirms one’s poetic insight and religious faith, while mechanically enhanced observation or scientific examination often points to the kind of seeing that only works to analyze and disprove.

5.1 **Seeing as Expansion, Seeing as Examination**

The scene of Satan’s temptation of Eve reveals why logical reasoning can fail to defend and sustain against Satan’s manipulation of both the sensory system and human logic. Scientia, as opposed to sapientia, ascribes to the artificial and instrumental aspect of knowledge; this learned knowledge often challenges the inner knowledge attempting to create suspicion about, conceptualize, or even fabricate its antecedents. Seeing accompanied only by scientia is bound to perceive and suspect any unexplained prohibition supplementing ideology and class—why can’t Eve have the fruit, obtain knowledge, and live forever too? Scientia hinges upon using the sight to question and inspect, and as scientific knowledge increasingly became the key to
understanding the natural world, the mechanical enhancement of human sight signaled an inefficacy of the realm of religion and folk worship and thus the improbability of seeing the invisible world or of any scholastic examination of spirituality versus physicality. Sapientia became even more spiritual, too unreal, unless the spiritual world can be defined and measured in the same terms as the natural world. Catherine Wilson writes:

Consider again the suggestion that the objectivity of science is a consequence of the perspective adopted by the mathematizing atomist who escapes both the inconsequentiality and discursiveness of the superficial performances of idle virtuosi and the illusions of subjectivity. And note first that the reductionist accounts of human perception and the elimination of sympathies and antipathies and other evident projections of the human psyche into nature were not the necessary accompaniments of atomism or mechanism. For Descartes, Galileo, and Boyle, mechanism and corpuscularianism were paired with sensory reductionism, the denial of real qualities. But Gassendi, Charleton, and for a time Thomas Hobbes, equally celebrated as moderns in their day, believed in visual species that they construed materially as icons, films, or idola, “decortications or sloughs,” which, emitted from the object, flew through the air like snakeskins carrying “an exact resemblance of all Lineaments and colours,” as Charleton described them, entered into the eye and mind, and so made us see. (Wilson 20)

Wilson further points out that even seeing itself as sense perception became the target of Cartesian reductionism: “The doctrine that qualities are simply the effects of corpuscular arrangement was an additional hypothesis, in which the knowledge that the eye was somewhat like an optical device, a camera obscura that projected a picture on the back of the eye, had to be
forgotten. The new view was that the eye was responding to a pattern, as Descartes knew, of pressures” (20). Descartes believes that sight is “the most noble and universal” of human senses and that “there is no doubt that the inventions which serve to improve its power are the most useful which can exist” (from *Dioptrique*, qtd. in Wilson 20-21).209 Yet this kind of classification of seeing as the mechanical means that serves merely our sensory perception implies that “seeing is essentially servile” (Wilson 21).

Under the aid of optical technology and scientific knowledge, seeing, as a sensory experience becomes even more servile as the distance necessary for conceptualizing and imagining what could be seen but hasn’t been seen gets diminished. If sensory experience only informs one’s physical condition and controls how one conducts his or her life, then the knowledge one possesses about the physical world becomes suspect of being tenuous and false. Perhaps these scientists do the work of philosophy, disarranging and unnaturalizing by questioning and analyzing, not relying on the given nature of things. Unfortunately, as I will argue, trying to reinforce the atomic reality of our existence cannot allow a room for “the illusions of subjectivity” and “human perception”; once the optic inventions try to prove the material reality of our existence by improving our seeing, seeing indeed becomes “essentially servile.” Atomic reality will eventually encourage, as Wilson asserts above, “the elimination of

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209 In his short treatise published in 1637 titled *Dioptrique or Optics*, René Descartes presents his purely mechanical optical theory, which argues that our visual experience should match the physical objects we see: “Hence you will have no reason to conclude that there is no need to suppose that something material passes from objects to our eyes to make us see colours and light, or even that there is something in the objects which resembles the ideas or sensations that we have of them. In just the same way, when a blind man feels the bodies, nothing has to issue from the bodies and pass along his stick to his hand; and the resistance or movement of the bodies, which is the sole cause of the sensations he has of them, is nothing like the ideas he forms of them. By this means, your mind will be delivered from all those little images flitting through the air, called ‘intentional forms,’ which so exercise the imagination of the philosophers” (*Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings* 58-59). Furthermore, looking out to the stars and the moon or looking at the microscopic details of our body or the “little images flitting through the air,” as Descartes describes them, appears to deflect introspection and take away from the Christian ideal of self-examination.
sympathies and antipathies” and the evacuation of spiritual reality; once sensory experience is deemed unstable, then natural seeing without any artificial aid becomes not only suspect but also subservient to mechanically enhanced seeing. Mechanism and corpuscularianism, or sensory reductionism, can’t fully explain how the material experience can induce something immaterial. As with Hobbes and Gassendi, yet more material constructions are needed to signal and point at the immaterial, such as “icons, films, or idola, ‘decortications or sloughs’” (Wilson 20). Hooke argues that “every considerable improvement of Telescopes or Microscopes [produces] new worlds and terra incognita’s to our view” because he believes these scopic devices will not only expand the scope of visuality but also increase and improve the detail and quality of visuality. Even further, “by the help of Microscopes,” Hooke argues in The Preface to Micrographia, “there is nothing so small, as to escape inquiry; hence there is a new visible world discovered to the understanding” (sig. A2v). However, a microscopic view simply provides one of many additional perspectives, as Wilson argues:

> And this is indeed a conclusion one might derive from leafing through the Micrographia. We are told there, because we could not otherwise guess it, that what we are seeing are bits and fragments of familiar substances—moss, mold, and vermin—presented under an unfamiliar aspect. Mold looks like a lunar forest, a flea looks like a crustacean, and so on. We might as well be seeing new landscapes and new forms of life; only their labels identify them. And from this one might then infer that the microscope can give us no information—or at least no direct information—about our macroscopic world and its objects, except information of the general form “this is how it looks under the microscope.”

(Wilson 244)
If “there is a new visible world discovered,” as Hooke says, and the purpose of scientific instruments such as the microscope is to enhance the human sight and make the visible more clear and perceivable to the physical eye so that the visible becomes more than just visible, then shouldn’t these instruments make “a new visible world” understandable to the mind as well? And by saying “understandable,” I mean to reveal and teach the viewer new knowledge about this “new world”? Yet, the instrument cannot show more than a material texture under “an unfamiliar aspect,” that is, under the microscope; as Wilson says above, “what we are seeing are bits and fragments of familiar substances—moss, mold, and vermin—presented under an unfamiliar aspect.” Can a microscope inform viewers that the presented images—often little more than textures—they see through a microscope are more than just a texture, that they are indeed “mold” or “a flea” even though they might look like “a lunar forest” or “a crustacean”? How do viewers identify what they see through a microscope after all? Most observers, when presented with “a new world” in front of them, respond with a consistent and similar process of recognition and assimilation—“that looks like so and so”—to make the unfamiliar familiar as they remember aspects of the old familiar world and compare them to this new world in front of them. In *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer suggest that Hooke envisions his scientific instruments as serving both instructive and editorial duties upon human senses and, furthermore, to inform human reasoning: “Scientific instruments therefore imposed both a correction and a discipline upon the senses. In this respect the discipline enforced by devices such as the microscope and the air-pump was analogous to the discipline imposed upon the senses by reason. The senses alone were inadequate to constitute proper knowledge, but the senses disciplined were far more fit to the
Shapin and Schaffer further note: “Things would be seen that were previously invisible: the rings of Saturn, the mosaic structure of the fly’s eye, spots on the sun. And other things, essentially invisible, would be given visual manifestations: the pressure of the air, aqueous and terrestrial effluvia” (37). However, even though what was “previously invisible” can become visible through the scientific instruments, the microscopic view remains as another example of “visual manifestations” still to be figured out and identified by the human mind. The unreliability of the human senses, combined with the realization of the artificiality of the machines, perhaps lead us to ponder the following question: how can human beings with the infirmities of human senses recognize or identify good from evil, or Satan in the disguise of a serpent, when they can’t even see well enough through their natural eyes?

In his very brief mention of the microscope in *Paradise Regained* Milton in his restrained voice presents his objection to such a claim that one can expand and increase the quality of human sight with a mechanical instrument. Brief and rather ambiguous, Satan’s mentioning of a microscope still deserves a detailed analysis. In his gaudy descriptions of the site of political power, which he uses to tempt Christ, Satan reveals that power stretches as far as one can see, and in his case, he can see quite far:

> there the Capitol thou seest
>
> Above the rest lifting his stately head

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210 Shapin and Schaffer argue that “the power of new scientific instruments, the microscope and telescope as well as the air-pump, resided in their capacity to enhance perception and to constitute new perceptual objects” in *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (36). Indeed, even though “a crustacean” might not be the view of a new world, one must take this into consideration—seen through a natural eye, a flea would appear as a speck, nothing like a crustacean. Shapin and Simon further point out: “The experimental philosophy, empiricist and inductivist, depended upon the generation of matters of fact that were objects of perceptual experience. Unassisted senses were limited in their ability to discern and to constitute such perceptual objects. Boyle himself reckoned ‘that the Informations of Sense assisted and highlighted by Instruments are usually preferable to those of Sense alone’” (36). As Shapin and Simon point out, Hooke believed that “scientific instruments enlarged the senses” and thus opened up a new, wider and more detailed view of the world that a natural eye cannot see: “In Hooke’s view, the task was one of remedying the ‘infirmities’ of the human senses” (36).
On the Tarpeian rock, her citadel
Impregnable, and there Mount Palatine
The imperial palace, compass huge, and high
The structure, skill of noblest architects,
With gilded battlements, conspicuous far,
Turrets and terraces, and glittering spires.
Many a fair edifice besides, more like
Houses of gods (so well I have disposed
My airy microscope) thou may’st behold
Outside and inside both, pillars and roofs
Carved work, the hand of famed artificers
In cedar, marble, ivory or gold. (IV. 47-60)

Satan here says that he has “disposed” his “airy microscope” because “the imperial palace”
seems to be so much “more like/ houses of gods”; in other words, “the imperial palace”
possesses such characteristics of divinity—“houses of gods”—with “many a fair edifice” and
“pillars and roofs/Carved work, the hand of famed artificers/ In cedar, marble, ivory or gold.”
This is an unusual use of the trope of the microscope, especially because the idea of a
microscope’s being “airy” doesn’t quite make sense right away. The word “airy,” just as with
Milton’s use of the word “happy” in Paradise Lost that I discussed previously, seems too
conspicuous within its context. OED offers various definitions and uses of the word “airy,” the
most obvious of which describes a state of being “in the air” or “of or belonging to the air, esp.
as distinguished from the earth, water, etc.; living or located in the air” or “located high in the
air, lofty” or being “exalted” and “celestial” (OED, I. 1. and 2.). When interpreted with this
intended meaning, “airy microscope” could simply mean looking into something from above, up in the air, up in the sky, so that Satan is bragging about his panoramic, eagle’s eye view upon the imperial palace. However, the word also has some other significant connotations, such as “being the nature of air,” either exhibiting the “consistency or appearance” of air to mean an “airlike” or “immaterial” condition of something or being “composed of air” to signify “soft” or a “spongy” state (OED. II. 5. a-b). The connotation that I am most interested in discussing here, however, is one that is depreciative, which represents a condition that is “intangible” or “insubstantial” or “slight”; it further could refer to a person’s “empty character” or judgment to mean something “superficial, shallow” and even further, “speculative, conjectural” (OED. II. 6. a-c).

There can be many explanations why Satan mentions this new scientific instrument to make his point about the great details of the interior and exterior decor of the imperial palace. One of the immediate and obvious explanations that come to mind is to bolster and hyperbolize the exquisite details of these palaces to influence and persuade Christ. Satan “disposed” his “airy microscope” because every small detail of these imperial palaces is so meticulously constructed that they are even more apparent when magnified. Descriptions like “Turrets and terraces, and glittering spires” and “pillars and roofs/Carved work” further suggest height, implying the bird’s-eye view or a wide open perspective from high above. And if Satan were indeed looking down to these palaces, the details must look small—thus the need for “microscope” to magnify the small details. However, considering the size of objects that can go underneath the magnifying glass, why would Satan want to use a microscope to look at something “conspicuous far”? Satan makes a point that he flies so high and is located somewhere up high enough that he has to look at the details of these “huge” palaces through a microscope. By signifying the magnitude of these imperial palaces and their political and economic power—“the Capitol thou seest/ Above the rest
lifting his stately head / On the Tarpeian rock, her citadel/ Impregnable, and there Mount
Palatine/ The imperial palace, compass huge”—Satan further implies his own “impregnable”
power that supposedly resides “above the rest lifting his stately head” (IV.48-50). He is after all
as powerful as how much he can see. As I pointed out earlier, implication of the height is the key
here. His self-positioning above all the rest of a miniscule world reveals Satan’s thirst for vanity
and self-aggrandizement, and his birds-eye view descriptions of the imperial palaces might
indeed demonstrate that Satan does possess the power of such towering and immense sight, but it
also reveals that his power is only as powerful as where he positions himself to be. And let us not
forget, he has “disposed [his] airy microscope” (IV. 56-57). The magnificent details of the
imperial palaces that Satan is able to see and describe, without the airy microscope or any
mechanical aid, demonstrate the material beauty and political power of the edifices themselves,
but they offer not much to prove Satan’s power, not even his seeing power, except for the fact
that he can fly high.

In fact, one must wonder about the following: a microscope is used to see objects that
appear too small for the naked eye, so why doesn’t Satan use a telescope to see palaces that are
remote and larger than himself, instead of a microscope? In fact, Satan does mention “telescope”
a few lines before he mentions his “airy microscope” in Book 4, line 56-57 of Paradise
Regained. While he has “disposed” his microscope because the details of the palaces were so
“well” constructed that they were “conspicuous far,” he still finds the telescope necessary to use
in lines 40-42:

On each side an imperial city stood,
With towers and temples proudly elevate
On seven small hills, with palaces adorned,
Porches and theatres, baths, aqueducts,
Statues and trophies, and triumphal arcs,
Gardens and groves presented to his eyes,
Above the height of mountains interposed.
By what strange parallax or optic skill
Of vision multiplied through air, or glass
Of telescope, were curious to inquire:
And now the Tempter thus his silence broke. (IV. 33-43)

Notice how Satan’s picturesque description of what he calls “long but in breadth not wide” (IV. 27) in the lines above contrasts with the specific and illustrated depiction of the city in lines 44-59, presented earlier. The description of the imperial city above provides pastoral scenery, open and idyllic, that is also synchronized by monuments and landmarks. Lines 35-38 demonstrate a sense of balance between nature and man-made artificial edifice, rhythmically listed: “On seven small hills, with palaces adorned./ Porches and theatres, baths, aqueducts./ Statues and trophies, and triumphal arcs.” On the contrary, in lines 44-59 where Satan describes the “outside and inside both” (58), the proper names and specific names of things and places dominate his description: “On the Tarpeian rock, her citadel/ Impregnable, and there Mount Palatine/ The imperial palace, compass huge” (49-51), “Turrets and terraces, and glittering spires./ Many a fair edifice besides, more like/ Houses of gods” (54-56), or “Outside and inside both, pillars and roofs/ Carved work, the hand of famed artificers/ In cedar, marble, ivory or gold” (58-60). The broad patterns of the pastoral landscape are marked by the elements of human civilization to create boundaries and definitions for Satan to want to see more—something more than a continuous pattern of green pasture or stream of water or mountains. Satan cleverly mentions the
telescope for seeing “long but in breadth not wide” (27), but when speaking of minute details he knows he is supposed to use a microscope.

No matter how high Satan flies, however, the cities are not getting small enough to fit under the microscope. How can one fit “Turrets and terraces, and glittering spires” underneath the magnifying glass? Satan’s statement is full of inconsistencies. When he says “I have disposed/ My airy microscope,” he still admits that he needs some kind of optical instrument to look at smaller details inside the palace—yet he is not even near the palace. Nothing that he describes in the first 60 lines or so in Book 4 is small enough to be under a microscope. He has removed himself so far away by flying high above the city that he will need a telescope to see the details of the palace. To top it all off, he speaks of the wrong instrument to do so. The fact that Satan thinks of a microscope in a situation where he is looking at things “huge” enough to be “conspicuous far” exemplifies his voracious appetite for self-aggrandizement and magnification of his power. The higher and farther he is from the objects he wants to see, the more power from his panoramic view he can get. So why does Satan use a microscope instead of telescope to look at things “conspicuous far,” and what does it say about Satan’s sight? Magnifying small details is not the main goal for him because he is concerned with bigger things; he doesn’t want to be in the position of the lower and smaller—he still wants to be above “the rest,” high up to be able to possess all the views. This is why a telescope won’t do—Satan can’t accept the fact that he is the smaller component of the universe that needs to look up and zoom in to realize that there is a wider and bigger universe out there.

Nonetheless, the telescope is being mentioned in line 42 as the “optic skill” that Satan would occupy to obtain the sight “curious to inquire” (42-32), even though somehow Satan switches from telescope to microscope—obviously a wrong switch—while looking at the remote
site of the imperial palace. Satan’s arrogance and ambition make him contradict himself. He wants to show off how much he can see, so he says he sees something so remote that it will take a telescope to satiate his curiosity; however, he won’t admit his need for a telescope because he wants to exaggerate the magnitude of his height and size. Thus he quickly switches to “an airy microscope,” as if all the remote details of the city he sees from the sky are so small that he can fit them under his special optic device. It is noteworthy that Satan mentions the two optic instruments in close proximity to each other—lines 42 and 57—albeit the telescope appears in the lines where Satan muses to himself while the microscope appears in his speech to Christ. First of all, these instruments are both optic devices designed to enhance the limited sight, the human sight, which suggests that Satan’s sight is limited, just like that of humans. On the other hand, this could also mean Satan’s own thirst for material power restrains his ability to see. Furthermore, Satan’s topographical musings point to the attributes of a verse genre characterized by the description of a particular landscape; the prospect poem uses a common motif in poetry and hymnody, often viewed from a height. Prospects often portray a distant, heavenly site that displays the common aesthetic attributes such as pastoral and sublime imagery. Since topographical poetry often indirectly contemplates cultural or social issues or addresses a political issue concerning the fashioning of an English national identity, poets used the poetic descriptions of the landscape as a poetic vehicle to express political or social concerns as well as to blend and seek compromise between extremes. These poetic descriptions present peaceful and paradisal scenery, distant enough from the observer that the observer can obtain the aerial view, yet close enough to be seen and described by the observer. Both devices, telescope and microscope, require not only the observer but also the object to be on a certain plane or space for the observation to occur, which in turn strictly limits one’s perspective. Seeing through the
natural eye, on the other hand, might not provide sights as accurate or fixed as those provided through the optical instruments, but it does provide multiple perspectives. Thus Satan probably can only see “long, but in breadth not wide,” for telescopes and microscopes do not have the optic ability to show a wide scope of things. By examining these perplexing descriptions of Satan’s use of optic instruments, we see that Satan contradicts himself in order to inflate his account of his power and to persuade Christ. Because Satan wants to prove to Christ that he can be as high and far from any earthly existence as he is above “the heighth of mountains interposed” (39), he has to vaunt the distance—height—that enables him to obtain certain sight of the city, and the telescope signifies the distance and remoteness; however, because he doesn’t want to perceive himself smaller than the world, he has to gain more height and be on top of the imperial city so that he can look down on it and use the “microscope” as if the city and its content are too small for him.

This brings me back to Milton’s own blindness—actually, more about the idea of lacking one of the most significant human senses and how this lack of physical sight could enhance the power of the spiritual sight. What Satan lacks, I would like to argue, Christ has in bounty. Though Satan might be able to see multitudinous things, his perspectives are limited. He might be able to see things through a panoramic view, flying above, but he cannot see the interiors that are small or hidden unless the details are made visible by human endeavor or divine operation. Thus, reading the “airy microscope” as something “intangible” or “insubstantial” or “slight” or even “superficial, shallow” and even further, “speculative, conjectural” (OED. II. 6. a-c) makes more sense, especially when this earthly mechanical device is paired with Satan in the poem.\footnote{This pairing, I would argue, further reveals Milton’s skeptical view of the newly created scientific instruments and their advances that thwart a human perspective that is less intrusive and manipulative. For example, in New Science, New World, Denise Albanese examines Milton’s suspicion towards the newly developed optical instruments and suggests that Milton might indicate that such “optic skill” is “the Devil’s work” after all (129).}
would argue that lack of good sight for Satan is also demonstrated in his lack of knowing which instrument he should use for the different objects. Even the new science employing the optical instruments of Galileo is unable to help Satan distinguish or trace the spatial depth or difference. That he is able only to describe a nebulous and unreliable view of paradisal prospect foreshadows Satan’s dismal fate that he will always remain remote and exiled from Paradise. However, as I will discuss later, Satan does not admit he is responsible for his own future as he covets earthly power with his physical sight. Without prophetic insight, he cannot see the sign or the indicator that he will fail to tempt Christ. The only thing he relies on is his own experience, and the past experience of winning over Eve gives him the reason to believe he can win again. Thus Satan is perplexed by his continuous failure in tempting Christ; as shown in Book 4 of *Paradise Regained*, Satan is “perplexed and troubled at his bad success/ The Tempter stood, nor had what to reply,/ Discovered in his fraud, thrown from his hope,/ So oft, and the persuasive rhetoric/ That sleeked his tongue, and won so much on Eve,/ So little here, nay lost” (IV. 1-6).

Most importantly, Milton also points to Satan’s weakness, for Satan is “self-deceived and rash” (IV. 7-8).

In *Paradise Lost* Satan looks at the right object using the right glass—a telescope for stars—while positioned correctly, looking up at the stars that are far “above all hills,” but in *Paradise Regained* Satan’s actions around the instruments indicate his tenuous knowledge of the instruments and his negligence about their use: “By what strange parallax or optic skill,/ Of telescope, were curious to inquire” (IV. 40-42). Perhaps it is because he is “self-deceived and rash” and that Satan is too anxious to pass up the opportunity to use the help from any apparatus to enhance his sight and further to secure his chance of persuading Christ. Furthermore, as if Satan became too anxious to trust that Galileo’s glass would be enough, he says he has a
microscope in hand, which he later disposes anyway (lines 40-42 and 56-57). Maura Brady, in “Galileo in Action: The ‘Telescope’ in Paradise Lost,” aptly describes the applied, additional, or added artificial aspect of Satan’s use of optic devices as his “prosthetic” sight, a term I find especially appropriate and will borrow for my discussion. Satan’s sight is limited because he can only see through his physical eye as most humans do with their non-spiritual sight, which proves why Satan desperately wants to have an access to these artificial devices. However, Milton makes it very clear that there is no ex machina that can help one possess spiritual sight if one is only aware of physical sight. The vision that one gains from a “prosthetic” apparatus cannot readily supply knowledge as comprehensive as the organic sight can. Too small or too big, the images from microscope or telescope are partial to a bigger entity—they are pieces that must be joined together to make sense and even to be used to create a hypothesis. Not to mention, there is always the machine in between the observer’s eye and the object. The mechanically enhanced sight, Brady insists, is obstructive compared to our regular human vision because it is external, an additional application from outside to enhance what ends up being most internal, vision. Satan with his attempt to qualify his limited earthly vision by using the mechanically enhanced vision therefore confirms that his vision only possesses “the very mechanisms of vision for the human observer,” what Brady describes “would obstruct the view of a celestial being.”

The vision that Christ possesses is a prophetic vision, not a prosthetic vision. To Satan who tries to tempt Christ with a prospect of imperial grandeurs, Christ replies:

Nor doth this grandeur and majestic show

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213 Ibid.
Of luxury, though called magnificence,
More than of arms before, allure mine eye,
Much less my mind; though thou shouldst add to tell
Their sumptuous gluttonies, and gorgeous feasts
On citron tables or Atlantic stone;
(For I have also heard, perhaps have read)
Their wives of Sertia, Cales, and Falerne,
Chios and Crete, and how they quaff in gold,
Crystal and myrrhine cups embossed with gems
And studs of pearl, to me shouldst tell
Who thirst and hunger still. (IV. 110-21)

Christ finds Satan’s evidence for his argument not only erroneous but also unmoving. All the
physical luxury Satan describes is uninspiring to Christ because even though the physical
“grandeur and majestic show/ Of luxury” does “allure [his] eye,” the material “magnificence”
merely appeals to his physical eye but “much less [his] mind” (IV. 110-11, 112, 113). The
“magnificence” refers to material exaltation and lavishness, which does not impress Christ’s
spiritual eye, though he admits that his physical eye does notice the magnitude of the empire’s
material greatness. Christ’s response is surprisingly honest and humble; notice how he candidly
informs Satan that he knows about the earthly subjects: “for I have also heard, perhaps have
read”—especially when compared to Satan’s over-confidence and pertinacious attitude toward
his constant failure to convince Christ. What Christ knows from hearing and reading, like the
knowledge gained from external sources constructed by others, moves “much less [his] mind.”
Satan remembers his victory against Eve and believes he can trick Christ as well, making him
“perplexed and troubled” at his failure (IV. 1). If Satan had possessed a prophetic vision, he would have known that he cannot tempt Christ; even though Satan’s “prosthetic vision” still provides nebulous vision, his lack of spiritual vision makes it impossible for him to turn his eyes onto himself. The prosthetic vision provided through optic devices not only fails to enhance natural vision, but it can also obfuscate our chance to achieve prophetic vision on our own.

Satan’s ambivalent and erratic delineations of the imperial city in *Paradise Regained* suggest that Satan values power to possess a variety of different sights over the validity or accuracy of the sight (IV. 40-60). Perhaps Milton suggests that, whether with or without the help of optic devices, Satan is doomed, banned from the site of Paradise that he covets and longs for through his eyes. No matter what instrument Satan possesses, not only is the Paradise still far away from him, but the optic technology is also questionable; thus he cannot obtain a good physical view of Paradise. The telescope’s technological imperfection was well-known during Milton’s time, partly explaining the moral and epistemological paucity associated with Galileo’s instrument in Milton’s writing. More importantly, the blurry and ambiguous sights in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are often hyperbolized and espoused by Satan, foreshadowing his earthly and selfish desire to possess abundance of sight, even if faulty. In his anxious mind Satan thinks that even though the distance is “long” he can still take it all in because it is “in breadth not wide” (IV. 27). Again, this clearly demonstrates what is inside and outside of Satan; inside is the abundance of corporeal desire and anguish but the absence of spiritual insight; thus there is always a paradise outside of him where he cannot be physically while there is no paradise inside of him, which completely alienates him from paradise physically and spiritually. Desperate, Satan attempts to use any power, any machine, or any apparatus to be near Paradise, but until he can possess the inner spiritual light, he remains blind to the true sight of Paradise. Satan’s
description of the heavenly view of the imperial city’s prospect reveals Milton’s criticism of human artifice and the tenuous and artificial truths that it provides, which exemplify the lost and abandoned site of Satan’s mind. Satan is physically distant from and absent in Paradise; thus he is always in need of external devices to connect himself to the site; however, Satan’s mind longs for paradise too, though it is absent of any ability to host or to train any inner light that can lead him to the inner Paradise. Satan embodies physical and spiritual mayhem.

Milton’s view of the new scientific discovery and its impact on morality and epistemology is closely linked to his co-existing Augustinian and monist materialist beliefs. Considering all the concepts of moral and epistemological accuracy, certainty, and empirical probability, we see that Milton’s poetry demonstrates moral and epistemological accuracy by being certain in his religious beliefs but not entirely in empirical probability. Satan’s moral and epistemological inaccuracy is revealed by his uncertainty—his reliance to the optic devices and what they might show, which reveals Satan’s lack of confidence in using his own physical sight alone. He does not trust his own sight, even when the blind poet exhibits incredible certainty in his insight. Satan’s sight is bound to his own greedy desire to see everything at once, and Satan has no time to ponder or contemplate what he sees. His wanting to see more obviates him from obtaining moral and epistemological clarity, resulting in epistemological darkness and moral anguish. Again, with his scarce inner knowledge, Satan fails to achieve the knowledge of the other, what is outside of him, such as God or goodness, whose moral and epistemological order doesn’t skip time. Satan’s ambiguous seeing method shows that he readily sees vast earthly establishments but fails to comprehend God conceptually. Therefore, lines 40-60 demonstrate a permutation of sights, stretched out through deduction or focused through magnification, yet always induced by Satan’s own anxiety to override Christ and persuade him.
5.2 Seeing as Anticipating, Seeing as Believing

Milton’s belief concerning physical and spiritual sight is rather simple. One’s bad physical sight might not hinder one’s spiritual sight, but one’s bad spiritual sight will obstruct one’s physical sight. For instance, in Sonnet 22, Milton writes that even though he is unable to see the world through his physical eyes, he still imagines how the world perceives him. Unable to look outside of himself, his vision is more than inward bound—it is turned so inwards that it deceives, that it does not show the abundance of his spiritual sight to “outward view,” to the eyes that seek only material sights to prove; he is protected in his own darkness, which blinds the “outward view” by the others, who would look for “blemish or spot” but wouldn’t see it.

Cyriack, this three years’ day these eyes, though clear
To outward view, of blemish or of spot,
Bereft of light their seeing have forgot,
Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear
Of sun or moon or star throughout the year,
Or man or woman. Yet I argue not
Against Heaven’s hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer
Right onward. What supports me dost thou ask? (Sonnet 22, 1-9)

“The conscience,” the poet says to his friend, is “what supports [him]” (line 10). This conscience drives and leads the poet straight into the storm; instead of retreating from the storm, he says he will “still bear up and steer/ Right onward” (8). An outward distortion, the loss of physical sight, induces an inward disruption and internal grafting of the mind, but through contemplative and faithful reasoning, the poet finds himself in a shielded orb that is his faith and imagination,
sailing and not lost, with a firm sense of direction as he will “bear up and steer/ Right onward.”

Even though his eyes appear “clear/ To outward view,” the poet knows his blind eyes are full of blemishes and opacities as they are “bereft of light” (3). Only the poet knows “thir seeing have forgot” as he is looking out and experiencing the darkness—“bereft of light”—from inside out. The poet not only identifies his eyes being “idle orbs,” but the “idle orbs” are what his blind eyes can physically see—close your eyes and describe what appears before your eyes. In Sonnet 22 the description of the poet’s sight is so intricately developed as he begins to describe his anguish, doubt, acceptance, and hope; the poet moves back to his inner self, articulating his emotional thoughts—he will “argue not” and “nor bate a jot/ Of heart or hope” (7-8). When the poet says he will “still bear up and steer/ Right onward,” the readers are led back to the sight of amplified action or demonstration, that is, exteriority, again. The exteriority and interiority of this image is paramount to understand how the poet defines his blindness. Physical sight only recognizes his eyes being “idle,” being unable to see; therefore, nothing occurs in the world of a blind person, as the blind eye balls embody “idle orbs” (4).

Milton’s Sonnet 22 demonstrates how the abundance of spiritual sight triumphs over the physical blindness by juxtaposing the subtle but fundamental difference between what the poet sees and what he imagines—the differences that constitute exteriority and interiority of the poet and how the world might perceive his blindness, while readers are led by his imagination that envisions how he appears to the outside world. The poet’s thoughts remain protected from “the world’s vain masque,” for while they move from inside to outside of the poet, what the poet sees, despite his being blind, is not bound or limited by the physical dimensions, but rather, his blindness allows the poet to move freely between the sights imagined and seen. This oscillation between inside and outside also helps the poet articulate the necessary distance and separation
between the inner and outer world that the blind poet must maintain in order for his inner spirit to remain pure and strong against the worldly infirmities and temptations. The poet is thrown into such harsh, unfortunate storms, and the waves of criticism regarding Milton’s failed reformation effort rise from “side to side” (line 12), which signifies another external movement that is seen and occurs in the world distant from the poet. The poet believes it is “Heaven’s hand or will” that creates the storm, and he, through his conscience, decides to “bear up and steer/ Right onward” (7 and 8-9). Paired with human elements that control, guide, and intend, this divine authority tests the poet’s unbreakable faith and devotion that the poet attests for his future poetic and religious career. The poet’s blindness yields an internal source of spiritual strength in Sonnet 22, which Milton describes as “[his] noble task”; reading Milton’s poems inspires the readers to wonder how the poet fulfills this “noble task” through his poetic works once he became blind: readers come to realize the lack of physical sight does not hinder his spiritual journey as he is “content though blind,” protected from “the world’s vain masque” (Sonnet 22, lines 13-14). His works are even more focused on the sight of the invisible world and the subject of a “noble task” against the worldly temptation in the works I will examine later. In Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes Milton clearly shows that his sight deficiency is only physically bound, and so is the limitation of it.

That which could be seen and understood through the spiritual sight has fewer limitations physically and spiritually because of the support of his “conscience” (Sonnet 22, line 10). For the poet who does not have physical sight, “Bereft of light” and “idle” signify neither limitations nor impassiveness; his blindness yields a chance for the poet to become more productive, to open up the spiritual eye and subscribe to spiritual sight. His conscience leads the poet to “still bear up and steer/ Right onward”; the poet promises that he will never give up, that he will never let
himself dwindle. The word “steer” typically signifies an action to “guide a vessel by means of a rudder or the like” or “to guide a vessel in a certain direction; to sail or row towards a specified place” (OED, 2. a. and c.). Yet the word “steer” is nuanced with mechanical conduct and operation that guides “something that is in motion”; according to OED it also signifies an action “to guide (a chariot, a horse, cattle, etc.),” “to guide (a plough),” or “to guide the course of (a vehicle, a bicycle, a balloon, etc.) by mechanical means; to guide (a floating object) by taking advantage of a current” (OED, 3. a, b, & c). Besides the machines and vehicles being mentioned above, there is one more possibility for the kind of vehicle that Milton might “steer” to “right onward”—to steer and write onward with his pen. The nautical conceit as a metaphor for writing becomes even more convincing when the line is read out loud. The pairing of the words “bear” and “steer” is peculiar, as there is initially a sense of less movement while the latter suggests the application of force to lead and move. The word “bear” clearly implies forces being held in, as it signifies thrusting down or holding against the external forces or weights; yet the word “steer” expresses a sense of external projection of inner desire or will. Reading the line out loud, one should notice there is a timely line break, which makes the reader pause, just before “Right onward.” This purposeful line break further yields a fresh start for the next phrase “Right onward” at the beginning of the new line. Clearly, this is the blind poet’s declaration that he will still keep writing and continue his poetic and religious journey despite of the loss of his physical sight. “The conscience,” then, could represent a kind of spiritual arbiter, or even the watchful eye of the conscientious and contemplative mind (sonnet 22, line 10). Note that this conscientious

214 According to OED, the word “bear” can have the following general connotations: I. to carry; II. to sustain; III. to thrust, press; IV. to bring forth. Also, “bear up” means “to keep up one's courage or spirits; to maintain one's ground (against difficulties); not to succumb” (OED, 21. C). The word “bear” clearly implies forces being held in—as it signifies thrusting down or holding against the external forces or weights, while the word “steer” expresses a kind of external projection of a desire or will.
mind of the poet is aware of how “all Europe talks from side to side” (12) about “[his] noble
task” that is “overplied/ In liberty’s defense” and has ended in vain (10-11). Though the poet is
depressed by “the world’s vain masque” (13), the sonnet’s last line also suggests a sign of hope
and even gratitude that shows how the poet overcomes self-criticism and self-doubt by realizing
that the physical blindness has shielded him from “the world’s vain masque” and the severity of
its worldly judgment that could have made him even more self-conscious had he still had his
sight—“content though blind” (14). Sonnet 22 shows how spiritual seeing takes self-governance
and practice because a conscientious poet is not only challenged by the external criticism, but he
competes against his own self-criticism. The poem is a reminder and promise to the poet himself
and his friend Cyriack that the poet must use self-restraint and self-determination—and not
“overpl[y]” his “conscience” this time (10)—to abide and still “bear up and steer/ Right onward”
(8-9). The need for spiritual seeing fuels the poetic imagination in Sonnet 22 because the sonnet
focuses on the sight of a distant, unpredictable future that is invisible to the physical senses.
Simply put, the lack of physical sight enhances the poet’s spiritual sight while an abundance of
physical sight creates “the world’s vain masque” and more opacity to the poet. This bitter but
worthy lesson is immanent in spiritual seeing and furthermore necessary to poetic imagination
because self-criticism and self-awareness are the very core of poetic inspiration.

With his persistence and mechanically enhanced gears, Satan in Paradise Regained sets
out to see Christ with his own eyes, ironically, and prove him wrong. Satan tells Christ that he
has never ceased his eye’s searching for Christ since he first knew about Christ’s birth: “[O]f thy
birth at length/ Announced by Gabriel with the first I knew,/ And of the angelic song in
Bethlehem field,/ On thy birth-night, that sung thee Saviour born./ From that time seldom have I
ceased to eye” (IV. 503-507). And Satan makes certain that he will tempt Christ; he tries with
every earthly resource, yet nothing works: “Since neither wealth, nor honour, arms nor arts,/ Kingdom nor empire pleases thee, nor aught/ By me proposed in life contemplative,/ Or active, tended on by glory, or fame,/ What dost thou in this world?” (IV.368-72). However, the following speech by Christ to Satan in *Paradise Regained* not only reveals why Satan’s attempts fail but also reinforces Milton’s treatment of the theme of spiritual vision. Here, Milton links the inner contemplative vision of Christ with the superior power of spiritual knowledge that reigns over the external corporeal vision of Satan and his vast material knowledge:

Think not but that I know these things, or think

I know them not; not therefore am I short

Of knowing what I ought: he who receives

Light from above, from the fountain of light,

No other doctrine needs, though granted true;

But these are false, or little else but dreams,

Conjectures, fancies, built on nothing firm.

The first and wisest of them all professed

To know this only, that he nothing knew; (IV. 286-94)

I have two points to make here. First, Christ is clearly uninterested in “these things,” the material things that are subject to know or be known. Second, Christ prefers “light from above” over “knowing what I ought,” which further suggests Christ espouses spiritual understanding over more empirical exploration. Knowledge, especially here circumscribed by the object “what I ought,” signifies the kind of conventional knowledge Christ avoids—after all, knowledge that one “ought” to know can be despotic, antagonizing insightful and spiritual thinking; to Christ conventional knowledge signifies “conjectures, fancies, built on nothing firm” (IV. 292). The
kind of knowing Christ calls out as “false” above is aligned with scholarly, orthodox knowledge, and thus the subjects of such “knowing” are often superficial and worldly “things,” pronouncing “what [one] ought” to know. Christ even points out that “doctrines” are unnecessary “though granted true” (IV. 290). Again, the word “granted” there signals artificial authority of the doctrines. It should become clear not just that Satan’s resources are only worldly “things,” but that they also signify a shallow materiality of “things” that possess no epistemological or moral worth to Christ. Christ’s acute insight reveals the capriciousness and artificiality of conventional knowledge; for Christ, there aren’t even specific or proper modifiers to describe this kind of knowledge—thus, “these things.”

Furthermore, Christ’s criticism of conventional knowledge above also subverts the concepts conventionally associated with spiritual knowledge or poetic inspiration, as he calls the orthodox knowledge “false, or little else but dreams,/ Conjectures, fancies, built on nothing firm” (291-92). His analysis of “these things” and his argument against material knowledge echo with Sidney’s argument for poetry, which emphasizes inward vision and abundant truths separated from mere arrangements of matter. In the lines above, we see Milton comparing Satan’s abundance of earthly knowledge to “nothing firm.” Here, Milton’s accomplishment is closely related to Sidney’s, for Milton actually inverts the attack against poetry, reversing the common comparison of poetry to the source of fictional imagination and moral corruption by describing conventional “knowledge” as “fancies” and “dreams” (IV. 290). Against the poetry haters’ criticism of poetry’s supposed emotional, unsound, and immoral influence, Milton argues for the sinuosity and heterogenousness of poetic sentiment: “The first and wisest of them all professed/ To know this only, that he nothing knew” (293-94). Sapientia begins with self-awareness and intuitive insight, just as poetic uncertainty admits and professes the idea that
“nothing [is] firm” and embodies the very truth it tries to reflect and instruct. Sidney’s argument for poetic imagination’s supple capability to mimic but also to inspire nature should also remind us of Milton’s argument for “subtle and sinewy” rhetoric that is more sustainable than the rhetoric of excess and certainty. It is through the rhetoric of excess and the prosthetic sight that Satan tempts the human race and attempts to humiliate Christ. Man-made knowledge practices more confinement and intolerance against other men, and the conditional and capricious foundations of the fact-driven knowledge or knowledge generated by scientific observations prove its lack of firmness. Milton suggests this hypocrisy through his “subtle and sinewy” poetic language, the kind of narrative that unveils one thing by obscuring the other.\footnote{Milton, \textit{Areopagitica}, \textit{Complete Prose Works of John Milton, Vol. II 1643-1648}, Ed. Ernest Sirluck, 551.} Christ’s use of “firm” here doesn’t refer to physical firmness, but abstract idea of firmness, in such way that “subtle and sinewy” suggests the strength and firmness of poetic imagination that abides the shifting conventions and worldly forces. Scientia, after all, is built upon “these things” that can be altered, if proven untrue by the conventions. This conventional knowledge can’t be true until it is proven to be true by a certain school of thought or group of scholars. The poetic imagination is closely linked with the spiritual eye, and, in describing the invisible reality, Milton clearly expresses his contempt for the abundance of earthly sight that leads only to more confusion and obstruction of spiritual seeing. Satan’s inability to see outside himself and his ambition suggests his lack of spiritual insight, which clearly leads to shallow “conjectures” that what he sees through his physical eye is worthy enough to move Christ. Satan, as we saw, even incorporates technological help, which proves to be only a prosthetic but not a prophetic aid; what Satan needs even to be able to understand and communicate with Christ is not a material aid, but a spiritual one.
After several vain attempts, Satan is “now/ Quite at a loss, for all his darts were spent” (IV. 3666). It is interesting that Christ compares the material abundance—“wealth,” “honour,” “arms,” “arts,” “kingdom” or “empire”—offered by Satan to “dreams,” “fancies,” and “nothing firm” (IV. 366-72). That Satan is completely unable to see why Christ cannot be tempted suggests that true blindness for Milton involves a spiritual, not a physical, lack. Physical blindness merely veils what spiritual sight can both recover and even improve with insights that physical sight can’t capture. Inner blindness means the loss of spiritual sight, a greater loss than physical blindness; obviously for Milton, one can repair and restore the outer, material loss, but the loss of inner sight results in ineffable calamity; thus, Satan is inevitably outside of paradise, seeing paradise as an always distant place but also always in hell, spiritually deprived of God’s love. Spiritual blindness suggests the occlusion of epistemological clarity and moral sense; even though Satan might be able to see a wider and fuller content in the world, nothing he sees through his physical eye helps him understand why he is wrong and why he cannot win over Christ. This is also why Satan fails to grasp that scientific aids are only material aids that connect one material reality to another and that a physical, prosthetic instrument cannot be transformed into a spiritual, prophetic aid that might unveil the spiritual reality through the physical one. Satan’s failure should also make us wonder—is anyone lacking spiritual insight damned, for instance? The Reformation theologians argued that the individual could come to an understanding of God through study of scripture. Satan is an extreme case that nevertheless illustrates a deceptive pattern of thought Milton viewed as very tempting to all humans—that our physical sight must tell the truth. This is why Milton stresses the importance of reading the scripture right, through the spiritual eye, instead of the physical eye. Especially from the Enlightenment onward, humans have been increasingly prone to ignore the spiritual and revel in
the material; a sole reliance on material vision like Satan’s presents for Milton an impossibility of even comprehending the existence of a spiritual realm, as, again, is seen in Satan’s puzzlement over his failure to tempt Christ. Even at the start of *Paradise Lost*, Satan is presented as a materialist. His response to being cast out of heaven isn’t a metaphysical one typified by remorse or the hope of absolution; instead his response is to rise from his armies from the dark and plan revenge through his massive forces. Milton depicts Satan being more active than being introspective so that his defeat was a military rather than moral one.

Milton, as a Puritan, might be expected to have a literal style of biblical exegesis, but, in keeping with my insistence that spiritual vision was more important to Milton than the more linear ordering of knowledge typified by material vision, Milton clearly espouses a far more flexible style of reading of scripture. Interestingly, Milton’s divergence from contemporary Protestant norms cuts both ways, for his reading style sought not just one true meaning but enabled multiple interpretations of individual lines or passages. An example is Milton’s reading of Psalm 2:7: “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” As Hugh MacCallum points out in *Milton and the Sons of God: The Divine Image in Milton’s Epic Poetry*, “Milton departs from Protestant exegesis by welcoming the literal sense of the passage from Psalm 2:7 and endorsing its subordinationist implications” (82). In other words, although Protestant orthodoxy demanded a figurative reading here to make Jesus co-eternal with the Father, Milton did not feel compelled to narrow his reading to a certain

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216 In *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton’s De Doctrina Christina as a Gloss upon Paradise Lost*, Maurice Kelley also describes Milton’s flexible poetic praxis: “In *Paradise Lost*, however, Milton seeks to figure forth precept in a concrete, speaking picture, to present ethical teaching in a form that is both attractive and stimulating; in short, to teach by the feigned image of poetry; and this concept of the feigned image, as the name implies, liberates the poet from the narrow and straitening confines of dogmatic truth. Thus, as a Protestant theologian, Milton is bound to induction or deduction from Scriptural proof texts; but as a Renaissance poet, he may aim rather at imaginative truth, and is free to enliven his subject, to give it interest and attraction, either by invention or by reshaping his source materials in any manner that his sense of literary value may direct” (98). The reader, of course, immediately notes how Kelley’s passage resonates with Sidney’s *The Defence of Poesy*. 
dogmatically endorsed meaning. Michael Bauman explores the same issue in “Milton’s Theological Vocabulary and the Nicene Anathemas,” pointing out that “Milton does not accept the Nicene notion that the son was ‘begotten not made.’ For him, the terms are frequently interchangeable” (77). Perhaps it is exactly that—“the terms are frequently interchangeable”—that troubled the poetry haters. Milton’s inclination for “interchangeable” terms coincides with his campaign for “subtle and sinewy” use of language that signals the element of deviation immanent in poetry and certainly in Milton’s poetry, which is vital for poetic imagination but a threat to the stability of morality and conventions. Nonetheless, Milton’s use of poetic language reveals how he supports the idea of seeing as anticipating and portending.

The distinction between literal and non-literal reading of the Bible is tied to my discussion of Milton’s spiritual vision versus Satan’s material vision because they represent antithetical modes of processing reality. As Peter Harrison asserts in *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science*:

> The Protestant insistence on the literal sense of canonical texts had far-reaching, if unintended, consequences. As we have seen, the allegorical reading of scripture proceeded from a particular attitude to the world of things. The allegorical methods of interpretation pioneered by Philo and Origen were premised upon the notion that the things in the phenomenal world referred to by words in canonical texts actually represented, through resemblance, other things. To insist now that texts be read literally was to cut short a potentially endless chain of references in which words referred to things, and things in turn referred to other things. A

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literal reading of the scripture was one in which the previously open-ended process of deriving a series of references from a single word was terminated once a word had performed its basic task of referring to a thing. (114)\textsuperscript{218}

One process, as with Sidney, enables “many Cyruses,” the other only one.

Satan’s spiritual blindness, as opposed to Christ’s indifference to the material world, signals Milton’s treatment of blindness as not just a mere poetic conceit for Milton but a real and always-present private concern. This argument can be further developed through a discussion of Samson’s physical blindness and spiritual awakening in \textit{Samson Agonistes} and the comparability between Christ and Samson as prophetic figures. While Manoa expresses his grief over Samson’s loss of his sight and imprisonment, he still believes that Samson’s loss must serve a greater purpose in God’s plan for Samson:

\begin{quote}
And I persuade me God had not permitted

His strength again to grow up with his hair

Garrisoned round about him like a camp

Of faithful soldiery, were not his purpose

To use him further yet in some great service,

Not to sit idle with so great a gift

Useless, and thence ridiculous about him.

And since his strength with eyesight was not lost,

God will restore him eyesight to his strength. (Lines 1495-1503).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{218} Peter Harrison, \textit{The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). Harrison further notes: “If the written word of scripture was to achieve the prominence in the Christian life which the Reformers desired, meaning, inevitably, had to reside in the plain sense” (114).
From Manoa’s faithful and prophetic lament in *Samson Agonistes*, we can infer how Milton treats physical blindness as a spiritual challenge to overcome, not a mere physical disability. Manoa says his son is “not to sit idle with so great gift” and still believes that Samson’s true strength is not completely usurped because “his strength with eyesight was not lost” (line 1502). Subtly, Milton juxtaposes Samson’s eyesight with Samson’s “great gift,” for Samson’s infallible gift is an inner strength, although it could easily be interpreted as a physical, visible strength.

Samson’s great strength “was not lost” because Samson’s physical strength comes from inside; it is God’s “great gift” after all. Even when Samson’s faith is challenged, Milton shows, Samson cannot obliterate what is begotten from God’s love and given to Samson as a gift. Further, notice that Manoa believes being “idle with so great a gift” is “useless” for Samson. Not using his gift is wasteful, and God will not let “such a great gift” go idle. Manoa’s prophecy reveals that no matter what physical or spiritual agony Samson is chained to, Samson is destined to recover his spiritual strength, which will compensate for the rest of his physical loss. Thus the “gift” remains in Samson as a spiritual entity—faith—rather than a material strength such as physical strength.

When Manoa insists Samson’s lost eyesight will be restored, Milton doesn’t mean the literal, physical strength; faith will restore not only the physical sight but also the spiritual sight that is being usurped, as much as Milton hopes the faith will carry him on even after his cause failed. It is the figurative strength that does the literal work of restoration and further might even be able to transform the permanently damaged physical into the state of spiritual, as when it “restore[s] him eyesight to his strength” (1503). Note that Milton suggests that the restoration of Samson’s eyesight goes further than mere material restoration but rather up “to his strength.”

The last few lines of the semichorus toward the end of *Samson Agonistes* reveal that Manoa’s
prophecy indeed came true and the restoration of Samson’s eyesight entails something greater than the restoration of physical eyesight, “inward eyes illuminated”:

But he though blind of sight,
Despised and thought extinguished quite,
With inward eyes illuminated,
His fiery virtue roused
From under ashes into sudden flame,
And as an evening dragon came,
Assailant on the perched roosts,
And nests in order ranged
Of tame villatic fowl; but as an eagle
His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads. (lines 1687-96)

Thus, Manoa’s prophecy tells that as long as Samson can overcome his doubt and sorrow, he will gather his spiritual strength again. Samson will be able to exert the necessary strength even to restore or replace his lost physical asset of eyesight, so that the loss of eyesight is not the worst that can happen to Samson—it is the loss of “so great a gift” that would be fatal. If we accept that Samson’s strength is not a mere physical gift, Manoa foresees that Samson’s restoration of his spiritual sight will lead not just to a recovery but improvement of material limitation through spiritual restoration.

That spiritual sight can be gained from a material loss of Samson’s eyesight should suggest that Samson’s physical loss is necessary for the restoration of both his physical and spiritual strength. This should also demonstrate Milton’s simultaneous use of both literal and figurative language, regardless of his Protestant religious belief. Without the figurative
interpretation and signification, faith loses one of its most effective narrative tools—prophecy. And I will argue that religion made more sense for Milton when prophetic aid performs as a facilitator of knowing and learning because his use of faith proves that faith is internal, both in literal and figurative sense, even when one experiences faith being visible. Harrison points out the role of the advent of scientific reasoning and rhetoric in the slow abdication of metaphorical representations:

> [A]s an inevitable consequence of this way of reading texts nature would lose its meaning, and the vacuum created by this loss of intelligibility was gradually to be occupied by alternative accounts of the significance of natural things—those explanations which we regard as scientific. In the new scheme of things, objects were related mathematically, mechanically, causally, or ordered and classified according to categories other than those of resemblance. (114)

Prophetic sight is deeply connected to what Harrison calls “intelligibility” above, which in the context of poetry can refer to Sidney’s concept of poetry’s imagination and its capability to not only mimic but also inspire nature. Rather, it is through prosthetic sight that Satan attempts to extend and improve the quality of his seeing; as I have discussed in other chapters, in the preface to *Micrographia* Hooke argues for the necessity of the external and mechanical instrument to discover the microscopic world. In order to understand and describe “a new visible world,” Hooke seems to argue that a new way of seeing has to be invented; however, “a new visible world” is still represented through the old method of singling out one small aspect of the bigger landscape portraiture.

The optically enhanced vision evoked the philosophical problems of disproportioned representation of physical reality that was co-produced by the machine and the “operations of the
sense, the memory, and reason” (The Preface).

Again, scientifically aided vision cannot surpass its prosthetic material reality, unable to circumvent the stigma that it can improve merely the physical sight, and remains as an artificial instrument attached to and controlled by the body. Hooke wanted to perfect and standardize the unstable expressions and appearances gathered from human sensory perceptions by “adding of artificial Organs to the natural” (The Preface).

There is a clear similarity between Augustine’s spiritual eye, Harrison’s “intelligibility,” and what Hooke calls “the natural”—they are identified or tested by what exists outside of them, what lacks their organic and internal attributes. They represent the inner, spiritual instrument of seeing that requires inner knowledge and spiritual willingness to see the physical world through self-knowledge and spiritual contemplation before the material communication with the physical world takes place. What Harrison calls “alternative accounts of the significance of natural things” or the sight enhanced by “adding of artificial organs to the natural” indicate a physical reality that remains subordinate to the soul; more importantly, for Augustine, whether prosthetic or prophetic, physical or spiritual, seeing can “never take place without the soul.” Augustine observes:

Hence, the parent, as it were, of that vision, that is, of the form which arises in the sense of one who sees, is the form of the body from which it arises. But yet the latter is not a true parent, and consequently the former is not a true offspring. For the vision is not completely begotten by the form of the body alone, since something else is applied to the body in order that it may be formed by it, namely, the sense of the one who sees. […] For that body which is seen is not at all spiritual. On the other hand the vision, which takes place in the sense, is indeed

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220 Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia, sig. A2r.
mingled with something spiritual, because it cannot take place without the soul.

But the whole is not so, since that which is formed is a sense of the body. (*On the Trinity* XI.5.9)

Spiritual seeing not only makes the invisible objects visible to the mind’s eye, but it makes both the visible and invisible world far more perceivable and conceivable to the mind; prosthetic vision doesn’t improve or impact physical vision much, and for the worse, it could rather interfere with spiritual vision or even obstruct prophetic vision. After all, as Hooke is clearly aware, the images seen through the “artificial organs” can easily provide erroneous information, misleading and misinforming “the natural” as much as the natural, physical vision can do the same alone because there is no guarantee that the machine or the physical vision will not err; thus he suggests the scientist rely more on the hypothetical stability of his artificial instrument and less on the tenuous human imagination and sensory experience.

5.3 **Seeing as Reflection, Seeing as Protection**

The optical instruments are as susceptible as human imagination and sensory experience to not only alter or obfuscate physical reality but even challenge moral and epistemological values. Margaret Miles also points out how the natural world can only be seen and understood more accurately by seeing through the mind’s eye, “the accurate ‘seeing’ of the visible objects” which “involves the exercise of spiritual vision” (Miles 139). Here, we can also relate Miles’ assertion of the need for seeing and perceiving the nature accurately to Maura Brady’s assertion that Satan’s lack of accurate vision not only reveals his lack of epistemological and moral clarity.

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but also the implications of “spotty” vision provided by Galileo’s intellectual and mechanical achievement.222 After all, the machine cannot reveal the nature alone, without human manipulation; as Brady argues, “[T]he dangers associated with Galileo’s instruments in Paradise Lost are moral as well as epistemological, that stargazing might tempt a viewer to aspire to godhead.”223 Milton makes it obvious that there is an interruption and obstruction of the astronomer’s solid and clear view of the moon in Paradise Lost:

He scarce had ceased when the superior fiend
Was moving toward the shore; his ponderous shield
Ethereal tempter, massy, large and round,
Behind him cast; the broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
At evening from the top of Fesole,
Or in Valdarno, to descry new Lands,
Rivers or mountains in her spotty Globe. (I. 283–91)

When Milton refers to Galileo’s instrument in Paradise Lost, Brady insists, “the astronomer’s activities are highlighted in ways that recall the historical Galileo’s methodological, rhetorical, and pedagogical labors with the instrument, and suggest that these labors may interfere with or distort vision” (139).

Brady further points out that these lines also reveal how the astronomer—the observer or the gazer—“actively participates in the production of vision” (140). The astronomer’s vision of the moon is not purely inductive, after all; as the “purposive infinitive ‘to descry’ suggests,”

222 Milton, Paradise Lost, Book 1, line 291.
Brady argues, even before the astronomer looks at the moon, he might already have an idea of what he is about to observe. He is already informed and manipulated by the features of the moon that “the Tuscan artist” has already viewed through “optic glass.” In addition, the negative connotation of the periphrasis “Tuscan artist” suggests Galileo’s endeavor and invention as a skilled artistry, underlining the ongoing argument against poetry makers that poetry and poetic imagination encourage idle life and even ignore the lack of morality because a poet doesn’t do anything practical, unlike a soldier who fights in a war. Most importantly, by applying the word “artist” to Galileo, “Milton links the work of the scientist with that of the poet, emphasizing the importance of the imagination—of expectation, hypothesis, and the inductive leap—in scientific endeavor” (Brady 140). This could easily be Milton’s refutation to Hooke’s claim for “artificial organs” improving “the natural.” Human imagination and sensory experience, even with the ample possibility of being erroneous and instable, are still as innately involved with scientific observation and prosthetic seeing. According to Milton, both poet and scientist need artistry to convert what they see into what they believe. Such transformative artistry cannot occur without the spiritual sight, sapientia, the kind of seeing that takes place and sustains its power because of faith. Even the scientists must believe in a kind of closure to their search and experimentation. Such artistry’s moral purpose or aesthetic merit is proven by its ability to hide the trace of transformation as much as possible, to make the artistry and the will as invisible as possible. To further Brady’s point, Milton in Paradise Lost methodically analyzes the new science’s moral and epistemological inconsistency by comparing the optical instrument—“her

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224 Milton, Paradise Lost, Book 1, line 288.
225 As Brady explains, “Tuscan artist” also denotes Galileo as “a skilled practitioner, as opposed to a theorist” (140).
226 Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia, sig. A2r.
spotty globe”—to poetic imagination (I. 291). That poetry sustains its moral and epistemological clarity by constantly reminding itself of its imaginative foundation makes it a more morally and epistemologically suitable vehicle to convey truth.

I would also like to reintroduce the aspect of the prospect poem clearly suggested in both Satan’s description of “an imperial city” in Paradise Regained and the “artist” who, standing at “the top of Fesole,” views “new lands” through “the optic glass” in the lines above from Paradise Lost. Scientists are associated with Satan, who uses seeing as an agency of controlling knowledge; Satan’s prosthetic gaze through the optical instruments suggests that he is an embodiment of the empirical gaze that associates knowing by seeing and describing what it sees obsessively. To those who associate seeing with agency, the quality of what they see becomes less critical; instead, how far one can see becomes paramount to an empirical gazer. A morally questionable and epistemologically confused gazer cannot see truth no matter what “artificial organs” he occupies to enhance his bad vision. As Augustine writes, “the vision, which takes place in the sense, is indeed mingled with something spiritual, because it cannot take place without the soul.”

This also brings us to question the moral and spiritual maturity of the observer and what kind of gazer Satan, Samson, Eve, Adam, or even Christ represents in Milton’s poetry I have examined so far. Do some of Milton’s characters possess a spiritually, morally, and ethically mature gaze and use their vision to gain spiritual growth, rather than material access and gain? And, if they rather exhibit the lack of a spiritually and morally mature gaze, what does Milton say about such lack? And finally but most importantly, what does Milton suggest about the new

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227 Hooke, The Preface, Micrographia, sig. A2r.
228 Saint Augustine, On the Trinity, XI.5.9.
science’s way of seeing and representing the world as opposed to poetry’s mimetic ability? Satan’s obsession with how far he can see reveals that he associates seeing with agency, as much as Eve becomes susceptible to Satan’s temptation when she ignores the inner knowledge she already has from her spiritual vision. Samson’s loss proves that even a man blessed with a divine physical strength can easily lose control of and abuse his physical strength to satiate his earthly desires. However, Samson’s avoidance of Dalila after losing his sight reveals Milton’s rather complicated treatment of physical sight—physical sight is as tenuous as spiritual sight will allow. At his weakest mental stage, therefore, Samson cannot bear Dalila even to get near him; he specifically orders Dalila, who just wants to “approach at least, touch [his] hand,” to stay away: “Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake/ My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint./ At distance I forgive thee, go with that” (*Samson Agonistes*, lines 951, 952-54). Just because Samson cannot see physically doesn’t mean he cannot see spiritually. Furthermore, Samson’s reaction to Dalila’s request reveals how a blind man’s searching hands can observe more thoroughly and subtly than the eyes while also highlighting the capability of poetic conceit, which connects two distant, most unlikely things—what can’t be seen by hands and what can’t be touched by eyes. Poetic metaphors can connect two distant things, physical and spiritual, earthly and godly, and haptic and visual. Now, relying more on his spiritual and moral sight, Samson in turn feels more intensely about his moral and spiritual lack. When his spiritual sight is unstable, he cannot even control his physical senses, thus ordering Dalila to keep her “distance” (954). Perhaps also supporting the theory that physical sight is the seed of our earthly desire, Milton

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229 I would like the readers to remember Jodi Cranston’s essay “The Touch of the Blind Man” from *Sensible Flesh*, which I discussed earlier. While discussing the importance of the haptic in experiencing art, Cranston writes, “the ‘seeing’ hand, with fingers that work like eyes” can feign “the cognitive functions attributed to vision” (241). Cranston concludes: “The hand that sees as if it feels and makes and feels and makes as it sees, indeed, has its origins in the Renaissance hand” (242).
subtly points out the undeniable power of physical sight that manipulates human body and mind. And this material desire manifested in physical seeing is why no one is safe from becoming a morally tenuous, spiritually impervious observer.

In addition, one can also argue that it is because of our weakness that we need such “artificial organs” as an “optic glass” to enhance our limited natural vision. In *Milton and the Natural World*, Edwards points out that scientists like Robert Boyle and Thomas Browne tried to defend science by explaining that the knowledge gained from natural science can protect human kind from “the consequences of seduction” (Edwards 39). As Edwards describes, Boyle suggests that if Eve had used the scientific reasoning and experimented with “the serpent’s claims, she would not only have avoided the Fall; she would have discovered in the created world further evidence of the Creator’s glory, power, and wisdom” (39). However, Edwards effectively locates the weakness in Boyle’s argument, pointing out the fact that God has already endowed Eve with solid knowledge, even before the advent of new science, and all she needed to do to avoid the Fall was look inside and find her spiritual light. Edwards observes:

> Yet Eve knows enough. Had she properly valued her own experience of the natural world, she would not have been led astray by the marvelous talking serpent. But she accepts his interpretation of God’s other book for her own, a form of intellectual laziness with the most serious consequences. Speaking of our individual responsibility to work out the meaning of God’s Word for ourselves, Milton declares *in De Doctrina Christiana*: “God offers all his rewards not to those who are thoughtless and credulous, but to those who labor constantly and seek tirelessly after truth.”

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Edwards’ observations are particularly useful in my own analysis. For instance, the bounty of visual information Adam remembers observing when he wakes up can’t give him much spiritual knowledge about the invisible world without his contemplating on it; Adam signifis the sun as the “happy light” and ignores some of the critical observations and insights that inform him about the sun’s bright light otherwise. Adam falls short of fully engaging his intuitive, inner knowledge as he gains more education from and relies on Raphael’s knowledge, and soon Adam begins to sound like Raphael, depending on scientia, consciously correcting his own insights and wisdom. Contrary to criticism narrowly targeting Eve’s yielding to Satan’s temptation, her ability to figure forth and foresignify is striking compared to Adam’s dependence on Raphael, albeit she does become a victim of Satan’s temptation because she begins to rely on her physical senses, especially what she sees and hears, the latter most likely to be tainted by Satan’s manipulation. However, that should only prove the importance of sapientia. Without the individual’s faith and willpower to seek the truth, no scientific observation or instrument can help one not only to find the truth but also to protect the truth. The new science might argue for greater material knowledge’s being more beneficial than a lack of material knowledge; however, without spiritual and moral soundness, there is no guarantee that one can protect and preserve what he or she already knows. That the “optic glass” conveniently envelopes and removes the spiritual labor of finding what to look at before determining a method of seeing creates a certain breed of lazy observers; a gazer who is not aware of the power of his or her own gaze is as dangerous as an empiricist gazer because one could easily yield one’s right to see spiritually to seeing far and wide through “optical glass” and be satisfied with how much appears visible.

Considering Milton’s own lack of physical vision, his treatment of Satan’s, Eve’s, and Samson’s lack of spiritual vision reveals his faith in an individual’s ability to gain spiritual vision
even when physical vision is taken away. Yet Milton shows very little faith in the possibility of revelation or restoration of spiritual vision through scientific seeing. The observer at the other end of the optic instrument always represents a spotty sign of doubt and opacity in Milton’s poems that I have been discussing. Even though Milton eschewed the idea of monarchy, he still believed in the efficacy of hierarchy, like many of his seventeenth-century contemporaries. It is the orthodoxy of Platonic hierarchy that buttressed the tradition of implementing spiritual over physical knowledge, thus teaching that mature vision must be founded on the system of hierarchy. One could also blame hierarchy as a tool for compensating for a failure to gain moral vision, but for Milton hierarchy is a far more moral and spiritual agent to access mature vision than the “optic glass.” When one looks through a microscope with a goal to achieve, not only does the instrument become an extension of mechanical power, but the observer’s act of seeing through the instrument also provides a steadfast control and power over his subject, which the observer might have never thought possible through his natural eye. The symbolic extension of both power and peril that the “optic glass” represents for Milton echoes the glorified empiricist signage of expansion and control enabled by seeing as wide and far as one can from above. With the optical instrument or any kind of “artificial organs” trying to improve “the natural,” how is any artist safe from becoming an empirical gazer? Perhaps I should revise my previous statement and suggest that a morally questionable and epistemologically confused gazer is afraid to see—instead of “cannot see”—truth. No “artificial organs” can enhance one’s bad, confused, and immature spiritual vision.

The connection between the lack of spiritual vision and the fear to use spiritual vision raises the question of awareness, especially with Samson. Samson seems aware of the difference between inward and empirical—literal—sight. For Samson, the power of empirical or literal
sight, which is closer to phenomenological perception than the inner vision or insight, is too visceral, too real to be felt; it wounds him when he is touched, as he exclaims to Dalilah he might hurt her if she touches him. Samson’s reaction to Dalilah reveals how much he is wounded, for the two reflect each other like a mirror image. This should give us a good clue that Dalilah, so full of visual glory, is the site to be afraid of and to avoid. Samson’s reaction to Dalilah’s request to touch him after he has lost his sight unveils a significant change in Samson’s ability to see; when his physical sight is gone, his spiritual sight doesn’t go away. The physical wound from the loss of his sight becomes a new, gaping wound for his spiritual sight to illuminate; and now the physical sight gone, Samson sees only through his spiritual eye. The loss of physical sight intensifies his other sensory faculties. But aside from such speculation, one can clearly see that Samson’s reaction to Dalilah’s request to touch his hand shows both anguish and fear. Even if Samson denies her request to touch him just because he despises her, why does her touch matter so much to Samson, especially after his fall? Perhaps Samson is afraid that he can feel—interpret—Dalilah’s touch. Dalilah’s touch embodies a metaphorical sign that provides more than literal touching; neither does it inflict any physical sensation yet. It might seem that I am making a dull point here, but we must pay attention to the fact that the mimetic representations of sensory experiences are being compared to Samson’s spiritual inner sight, and his inner sight reads and interprets symbolic representations, far different from literal seeing or empirical looking. Note how Dalilah hasn’t even touched him yet—she only asks him if she could “touch [his] hand”—though Samson’s dramatic reaction suggests that he is being threatened by the idea of—or the vision of, more likely—her touching (Samson Agonistes 951). Obviously to Samson, her touch is symbolic; even without his physical sight, Samson can interpret what her “touch” means; thus, upon hearing her request to “touch” him, Samson is already reacting against what
the word augurs. He hears the word, and he interprets what he hears. This is not too far from reading a text and interpreting its meaning; as a matter of fact, for Samson, I would like to argue, the hearing of Dalilah saying the word “touch” brings him the image of her touching, which becomes a text that Samson reads and interprets. Hearing becomes a sight, and the sight functions like a tactile experience when the sound or the noise heard becomes a signification; the sound becomes a text to be interpreted, which further proves touching and hearing not only tactile but also textual. Samson’s reaction to Dalilah exhibits how haptic experience can become even more visual once it becomes textual, which further demonstrates not only a politics of gaze and touch but also the transformative power of poetry that Sidney argues for in The Defence of Poesy.

The definitive epistemological discipline of the spiritual vision over physical sight comes from biblical tradition. Consider specifically the following significant verses from the Bible: “the light of the body is the eye” (Matthew 6:22) or “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). 231 Much Judaeo-Christian philosophy strives to substantiate the concept of hierarchy and separation between the body and soul. The eye is the material and symbolic organ that embodies a vehicle that delivers the physical light into the body and spiritual light into the soul. The physical organ of the eye enables both seeing physically and seeing spiritually. One sees the material world, from which God’s beauty and truth enter into spiritual knowledge. The physical light distributed in the body through the eye stands for the spiritual light of a see-er that reflects the spiritual maturity of the see-er. Therefore, the lack of willpower, self-governance, or

231 As Augustine insists, the eye is the light of the body.
spiritual insight can be revealed through the vision the eye sees; the eye that sees the bad vision might signify the augur of bad faith.

Therefore, the bad spiritual sight—the failure to see spiritually—comes after the bad spiritual vision—the inability to see spiritually. In other words, any abeyance in seeing spiritually should explain the human awkwardness in front of the enigma of spiritual sight, when dealing with anything sublime or divine. Gazing at any material object becomes more than mere material communication between the observer and observed, but this interaction presents a special spiritual challenge in the fallen world where everything we see doesn’t reflect God’s beauty and truth. In *Paradise Lost*, even before the fall, Eve could have avoided gazing at the fruit, but she places her eye on the fruit and “Fixed on the fruit she gazed” (IX. 735). Willpower governs the gazing body; whether Satan looking at Eve or Eve looking at the fruit, the gaze plainly signals what it desires. This is why the spiritual maturity of the gazer becomes paramount. The inner light should shine over and push out the dark shades of material temptations. And the need for spiritual strength becomes even more urgent when the moral, ethical, or epistemological clarity of the gazer is at risk. I would argue that the faith of the gazer controls the fate of the gaze, the culmination of the act of gazing/looking.

Surely, once blind, Milton’s Samson is even more aware of the two faculties of seeing in *Samson Agonistes*—the irony is that he is even more aware of others’ gazes once he has lost his own: “Now blind, disheartened, shamed, dishonoured, quelled,/ To what can I be useful, wherein serve/ My nation, and the work from Heav’n imposed,/ But to sit idle on the household hearth,/ A burdensome drone; to visitants a gaze,/ Or a pitied object” (563-68). Milton’s sonnet 19 delivers a more optimistic outlook on being blind, but in both Samson’s speech above and Milton’s

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232 Some might argue the fall has begun at this point, but the point I am trying to make here is that the gaze indeed shows where the will is.
sonnet 19 “When I consider how my light is spent,” the reader gets the sense that the blind speaker is struggling with the notion that the blind person cannot do anything. The despair for now, in present, always seems so dark and daunting that it blocks the person’s capacity to grasp that much ability remains, albeit it seems as if such ability has also disappeared along with the physical sight. In sonnet 19 Milton’s tone begins with bitterness and despondency, yet the poet quickly recovers the tone of dedication and purpose, proving that the physical hardship makes him more aware of “that one Talent which is death to hide” (3). Importantly, the loss of sight doesn’t stop him or make him “hide” his “talent”; rather, the poet argues he is even more dedicated to fulfill his “talent” as he sees his “soul more bent” to make his talent work. That “bent” is crucial, implying an exterior force that reshapes the poet’s will, literally bending it toward his “Maker.”

Also in *Samson Agonistes*, about 100 lines after Samson’s woeful speech upon his blindness, Milton reveals through the voice of the Chorus that the inability to see the world forces one to look inwardly, to find the strength within, to “feel within/ Some source of consolation from above/ Secret refreshings, that repair his strength,/ And fainting spirits uphold” (663-66). At this point of the play, Samson is still in the agony, “all helpless with th’ irreparable loss/ Of sight, reserved alive to be repeated/ The subject of their cruelty, or scorn” (644-46); he is neither convinced nor able to see his fall as “secret refreshings” as the Chrous tries to tell him (665). There is something to be said about the difference between what the Chorus tells the audience and what Samson says in *Samson Agonistes*. The revelation of “secret refreshings” arrives to Samson much later in the play, though such insight has already been pre-announced by the Chorus. To whom is the Chorus really speaking, then? In “Reading *Samson Agonistes*,” Joan S. Bennett points out that “we are not to look at this play—it was ‘never intended’ for the stage;
rather, we are to listen for the language of the spirit complicating the words spoken by all the characters, words such as ‘strength’, ‘dark’, ‘light’, ‘blindness’, ‘vision’, ‘prison’, ‘liberty’, ‘choice’, ‘promise’, ‘reason’, ‘fool’, ‘random’, ‘chance’, ‘necessity’, ‘love’, ‘law’, ‘deliverance’” (Bennett 222). Bennett further argues that it is the experience of reading Samson Agonistes that will inspire the readers to believe in and act on the right cause: “[W]e should expect, then, that by entering into Samson’s experience we will emerge strengthened in mind and spirit to meet such suffering directly in its full and complicated force in our world and in ourselves” (221). Milton presents a different kind of tragedy through Samson Agonistes where the words do more than present a mere reflection or imitation of the world—here we are reminded of Sidney’s “many Cyruses,” where words possess genuine constitutive power—and provide a persistent, singular inspiration to raise Samson to a greater act and give the readers a hope for the new “secret refreshings” (Samson Agonistes 665) if they still believe in the cause of the Reformation. The words in Bennett’s list above occur throughout the work in a careful pattern showing how one moves from darkness to light—again, closely examine not only the meanings of the words but also the order in which they are mentioned. Falling from the blessed state of his physical strength into the lack of strength, sight, and hope, and then slowly climbing back up to the vision and light, Samson falls and rises showing us how his physical blindness is necessary for his spiritual awakening. What we see consistently throughout Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes is that losing the spiritual sight is surprisingly easy—but once lost, the consequences are catastrophic, for it is not easy to restore. In Samson Agonistes, even Samson, who was “[God’s] nursling once and choice delight,/ His destined from the womb,/ Promised by Heavenly message twice descending” (633-35), has to lose his sight and strength first to begin to

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use his spiritual sight. We must not forget however that the spiritual sight can be restored and thus differs significantly from the physical sight, which once lost is much more difficult if not impossible to restore.

5.4 Seeing as Telling, Seeing as Foresignifying

Let us consider the visual imagery of the winged eye, the emblem of the insatiable Renaissance “QUID TUM” (“what is next?”) intelligence thirsty for the abundance of knowledge. If Hooke looked further into the small objects that could be seen through the natural eye, one could say the sixteenth-century British geographer Richard Hakluyt looked farther to the horizon to see what could be seen through the natural eye. Both, certainly, provide useful models of an outward gaze eager to digest, quantify, and map man’s material surroundings, and Hakluyt’s dispassionate delivery provided a model to invoke even greater claims if objectivity. Promoting overseas expansion and the colonization of North America, Hakluyt published travelogues such as *The principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* that became the most authoritative texts to inform the early English voyages to North America. Hakluyt’s flat tone and remote voice throughout his writing certainly yields the portrait of a rational, objective author and eye-witness who can be trusted for both the purpose of commerce and religion—his language is precise and his information effective in covering as many facts as possible, without losing the focus from his subject—as he describes the objects to be seen, examined, and recorded for the empire to use in colonization. Stephen H. Clark explains why Hakluyt’s writing style became the most emulated writing style for historical, empirical, and most importantly, imperial narrative in *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*:
A reading in the language of surveying is thus a point on a standard scale (or ladder) which correlates a selected object with a given fixed datum; the method is essentially that adumbrated by Hakluyt. In this kind of reading meaning is as monologic as it is possible to be. Plurality and ambiguity are utterly excluded, for only one point can occupy that place at that time—or rather, that place and that time within that formal system. The unknown is produced by extrapolation from the known, but the known itself is ultimately an arbitrary datum. Like any mathematical language, the geometry of surveying is self-defining and self-sufficient and this property contributes to its appearance of unquestionable rightness when, as a language, it is used to describe the world. (110-111)²³⁴

Advanced optical devices and means of transportation allowed the Renaissance scholars to see further, and being able to see more seemed to have become paramount to such prolific political and cultural periods as the Renaissance. There is so much to be seen and recorded, it seems as if Hakluyt had to constantly record what he saw, not what he felt—of course this is also why empirical writing represents itself to be more factual and reliable. Hakluyt’s writing, for example, is far more objective and dry than Hooke’s writing in *Micrographia*. Hakluyt is so trapped in the moment of describing and recording, he forgets to see what is really there—all his narratives are devoted to objective reproduction, page by page expanding the domain of his sight. Producing an entirely descriptive narrative depicting his surroundings, Hakluyt seems to be surrounded and lost in an unknown forest, in the middle of “a new visible world.”

The attempt at dispassionate, objective prose, however, highlights even further the materialist bent of Hakluyt’s voracious eye. Describing is intended as a means of conquest and

control, just as we have seen in Milton’s depiction of Satan; yet lacking poetic imagination or inner sight, the narrative remains flat and one-dimensional. Instead of working on his own redemption and salvation, Satan still cannot see why he is expelled out of Heaven. In *Paradise Lost*, completely obscured by “darkness visible” (I. 63), resentful and sorrowful Satan exhibits perhaps the most easy, typical behavior expected out of a confused and angry child who is unable to see why he is being punished. Unfortunately, Satan remains that way eternally, and he is always surrounded by Hell “on all sides round” and can’t seem to get away from “darkness visible.” Satan’s affinity to quantity and consumption unfortunately doesn’t help him see through his situation but forces him to see only his situation. To see outside and beyond that “darkness visible,” Satan will have to look inward, forget what others have but not forget the individual beauty and significance God gives to each one of his creation. Yet Satan proves to have no capability to look inward; he is too obsessed with what he sees outside himself to see what he could possess spiritually—his sight is driven by the conquering spirit of “quid tum,” and there is no way to remedy the inner spiritual impairment that makes him look only at what he does not have, what is outside him.

The spiritual sight works to focus on what is the innermost and significant knowledge, whereas Satan’s earthly sight spins and expands out of control, and as John Leonard points out in “Language and Knowledge in Paradise Lost,” “Satan uses the plural to allege divine malevolence” (Leonard 140). In contrast, as Diane McColley writes in “Milton and the Sexes,” “what seems to matter most to [Milton] is the eachness of each being” (McColley 185). Just as for Hakluyt, number and quantity signify power to Satan, but neither power nor
material abundance means anything to Milton because what he cares about is as small or immaterial as “eachness of each being.” For Milton, God is for each one of us, and that singular focus of God makes each one of us so rich and satisfied that we won’t need any additional external devices to expand our world or conquer the other. To be unable to call God with a singular case or name indeed reveals Satan’s lack of ethical, moral, and spiritual maturity; that inability suggests that Satan lacks the inner knowledge or spiritual sight necessary to accept that he is wrong to challenge God who is the only God. As I described earlier, in Book 8 of *Paradise Lost* Adam tells the story of his creation and remembers how he acknowledged the “happy light” even when he didn’t even know who he was. Even without knowing who he is, then, Adam is still able to recognize the inner light. Satan, on the other hand, throughout both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, deliberately tries to remain silent about God’s singular existence and the significance of his singularity. This un-mentioning of God’s singular existence is a rhetorical ploy not only to confuse Eve with vague rhetoric that pluralizes and undermines God’s authority but also to convince himself of his cause—if God were not just one omnipotent entity and Satan were up against several gods, then Satan might have a better chance to win the battle against the multiple gods. Satan’s rhetorical creativity comes through his great ability to deceive, which also includes self-deception. This logic proves, moreover, that Satan is indeed aware and scared of God’s one, singular entity—plural gods signify fragmentation and denudation of one powerful entity. In addition, how Satan gravitates toward scientific devices such as the telescope and microscope in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* to gain more access and control over physical knowledge reveals Milton’s uncertainty and suspicion toward using such external agencies to enhance one’s sight when, instead, sight can improve internally if each one of us is
willing to realize the spiritual sight that is already in us. John Leonard suggests in “Language and Knowledge in Paradise Lost” that “Adam asserts his will by setting limits to it” while Satan is “tactlessly blunt” (138). Leonard’s argument coincides with McColley’s point about humility that springs from knowing and respecting the “eachness of being” that is prevalent in Milton’s understanding of love and individuality (185). The criticism against Eve’s departure from her husband to be alone emphasizes the very fact that she disobeys Adam because of her individuality—but it is because of that individuality, her “eachness of being” as I would argue along with McColley, that Eve also gets her own education, albeit her course is far more condensed and difficult. This education is a life-long lesson to each human being, as we learn to properly use and celebrate our freedom to choose and be responsible for the choices we make. McColley says that Milton “was radical in his insistence on women’s spiritual completeness, responsibility, and fitness for ‘all rational delight’” (185). I ask a familiar question—why would God create us so weak that we inevitably fall? Perhaps God respects us more than we do since he gave us the liberty to be ourselves, celebrate, respect and develop “eachness of each being” through the freedom to learn and fall and learn again.

Milton’s “darkness visible” can be read both ways after all. For Satan it means the doom inescapable, but perhaps Milton suggests something more than inescapable darkness all around him—after all, Adam and Eve fall, too. As we see from Satan’s reaction compared to Adam and Eve’s, “darkness visible” is not an absolute condition of doom, for what is visible can also be invisible if it is veiled, and darkness must be there to show the light where it should shine. Satan’s reaction to “darkness visible” reveals that he might prefer darkness invisible, which truly

237 McColley further writes: “We have discarded some of the hierarchies Milton had to deal with, but we need not discard love of the distinct lustre of particular persons where each self is fuller of light the more it rejoices in other selves” (“Milton and the Sexes” 185).
represents the eternal doom, without growth or change. Darkness unveils the light, so darkness must be present, be “visible” to make things seeable, a point that resonates deeply with the poetry of Finch that I will examine in the next chapter. The unveiling of “darkness,” the negation of light and darkness, is the life-long lesson and development of one’s spiritual light. The light’s obliteration of darkness—making darkness visible by making it invisible—articulates the need and function of “darkness visible.” By negating the physical eye, the spiritual eye matures, and the fruit of this generative and creative negation is, not just for Milton but for all the readers of Milton’s work, an inner eye that is capable of seeing “darkness visible.” It’s the poetic mind that finds the light looming within and beyond darkness, not the eye that measures and examines what is visible now, here. This way Satan will never be past darkness; he will not only be stuck in permanently static and consistent “darkness” but also always outside of the realm of “visible.”

In *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England*, Barbara J. Shapiro points out that the logic and rhetoric of seventeenth-century England became the persuasive means of “enlarging and expanding similarities” to ground the new facts and experiences that became available through the advent of new science. The used-to-be hierarchy between rhetoric that formed popular discourse and the learned communication dominated by logic and dialectic began to deteriorate, and the relationship between them started shifting: “Amplification and ornamentation were skills taught by rhetoric and employed by poets as well as writers aspiring to eloquence. These practices were so deeply ingrained that they were not employed as mere

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This is Milton’s brilliant complexity—shouldn’t Satan be happy about darkness becoming visible? This expression is indeed a paradoxical reflection on the poet’s own blindness, but Milton is one step ahead of us. When most of us take this “darkness visible” as a sign of depression and inescapable doom, Milton reveals that darkness does become dark if our mind sees it that way.
illustration, but had become part of Renaissance proof and argumentation” (229). As Shapiro notes, persuasive rhetoric dominated every mode of communication and learning:

> We have seen that seventeenth-century philosophers, scientists, and historians were attempting to reconstruct knowledge by grounding it on fact and experience. This realm of the ‘probable’ rather than the logically certain was traditionally the realm of rhetoric. By the seventeenth century, however, rhetoric appeared to be too emotional, too personally biased, too ready to accept common opinion, and too amplified, verbose, and poetic for their purposes. Practitioners of the new fact-oriented learning became restive with the standard models of writing and thinking.

Rhetoric aims to win the argument, as its goal is not truth, but being persuasive based on probability. Certainty here takes more than factual or experimental proof—certainty is exactly why Satan puts identifying God’s singularity in abeyance. Certainty assumes epistemological darkness and requires one to plunge blindly into the unknowable while probability always hinges on the middle ground. With probability, chances are, Satan will feel trapped in the darkness that makes everything invisible. Satan cannot embrace probability because he must use seeing as an agency of controlling knowledge. To those who associate seeing with agency, the quality of what they see becomes less critical while how far they can see becomes paramount to such an empirical gaze.

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240 Shapiro 229.

241 As Augustine writes, “the vision, which takes place in the sense, is indeed mingled with something spiritual, because it cannot take place without the soul.”
In *The Empty Garden: The Subject of Late Milton*, Ashraf H. A. Rushdy suggests that Adam’s “first glimmers of consciousness” and Augustine’s dialogue with the world in the *Book of Meditation* exhibit a similar pattern of learning to understand God properly. According to Rushdy, this pattern of learning requires inner contemplation, through which one can transcend the corporeal knowledge perceived from the physical world into spiritual knowledge: “To see through the earthly and carnal to the heavenly and spiritual, to treat the material of vice in such a way that it is made the stuff of virtue, to meditate on the world in order to ascend to heaven: these are the options available to the faithful being in the duress of temptation.” Rushdy further argues that through “an act of meditation,” Christ in *Paradise Regained* is able to “see through the earthly and carnal” and distinguish Satan and his earthly temptations from the “heavenly and spiritual” (264). Christ through meditation achieves “the intellect filled with the Spirit” that enables him to “enigmatically address an intellect devoid of spiritual apprehension in order to address a different audience at a different level of understanding—the spiritual readers” (264). Then, meditation yields a spiritual battleground, or engenders spiritual tensions that allow the mind to perceive the difference between earthly and heavenly. Even though one can perceive the spiritual world through meditation, the difficulty of seeing the heavenly through the earthly ensues from the worldly knowledge observed through the physical eye, which often intercepts observation into the spiritual realm. Without the persistent and cautious contemplative effort to sustain the mind’s eye that sees the spiritual world, the physical eye often tricks us into

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243 Rushdy 264. This is true at all times, I would insist. Rushdy’s heavy reliance on Jung doesn’t alter the applicability of his observations to my own study.
becoming a bad reader of the spiritual world who forgets “the use of the eye beyond sense and reason, the most ethereal of the capacities unique to the human soul” (263).

Darkness gives the time needed for light to take its form. Milton did not write visible darkness—he wrote “darkness visible” because the illumination is the most important thing one must anticipate, and he is certain that it is coming, that things will be visible. Augustine sees what is there—“what I behold, is present”—but what he sees through his physical sight also fuels his imagination and suggests that the antecedent of something “visible” is indeed “darkness.” The idea of something becoming “visible” gives time and space the meaning that makes the dark present more bearable, and suggests the sort of fertility and fecundity of darkness that I will explore in the works of Finch in the next chapter. Poetic authorship, though it may seem odd at first to the reader, surprisingly relies on a certain level of blind trust and faith that the intended meaning will not get completely lost in the intervening space between the author and reader. Furthermore, the realm of poetry or certainty doesn’t remain static, but constantly intersects with the realm of probability. Human imagination and sensory experience, with the possibility of being erroneous, are responsible for both scientific observation and prosthetic seeing. Seeing becomes knowing, and knowing propels telling. Telling is hardly objective; there is no seeing that doesn’t involve self. If it is possible that the mechanically-enhanced sight is responsible for magnifying the blemish on “her spotty globe,” then it is also possible to erase or unsee that spot by the spiritually-guided eye. Telling, whether for the scientist or the poet, is the artistry that converts what one sees into what one believes. Indeed, telling is the most internal yet

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244 Paul urged the Roman congregation about the invisible within the visible: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (Roman 1:20). As Rushdy points out, “the writers of this meditative tradition would have the meditating mind perceive God through his created universe” (263).

245 Milton, Paradise Lost, Book 1, line 291.
communicative instrument of celebrating and confirming one’s belief. However, seeing that doesn’t “foresignify,” to borrow Augustine’s term, or lead to what Sidney calls “figuring forth,” is pointless and hollow to the artistry of poetry. This is why poets who are especially committed to using the poetic imagination to understand and represent the world must defend the artistry that requires the illumination of the spiritual eye, the spiritual light that is able to see that there is the light that becomes even more imminent and ubiquitous in the darkness.

6  CHAPTER 6: “No Fierce Light Disturbs, Whilst It Reveals”: Illuminating Darkness in the Poetry of Finch

That the World may ne'er invade,
Through such Windings and such Shade,
My unshaken Liberty.

No Intruders thither come!
Who visit, but to be from home;
None who their vain Moments pass,
Only studious of their Glass,
News, that charm to listening Ears;
That false Alarm to Hopes and Fears;
That common Theme for every Fop,
From the Statesman to the Shop,
In those Coverts ne'er be spread,
Of who's Deceas'd, or who's to Wed,
Be no Tidings thither brought,
But Silent, as a Midnight Thought,
Where the World may ne'er invade,
Be those Windings, and that Shade.  

The darkness of the night signifies an intimate and private source of poetic imagination in Anne Finch’s poetry—Finch sees the night’s lone and enigmatic presence as equally ubiquitous

and intense as the bright daylight. The night’s quiet and subdued state heightens the poet’s sensitivity to the subtleties of nature, whose never-ceasing mutability becomes more magnified and dramatized by the stillness of the night than by the radiance of the daylight. The night’s unwavering darkness doesn’t signify obscurity and destruction in Finch’s poetry; rather, she describes the inexorable night’s darkness as a personified solitary poetic genius—a representation of mysterious aptitude, bottled in the pensive and ingenious intellectual abyss of an inspired poet who anticipates unleashing a greater insight. While the night’s darkness embodies the dynamic and enthusiastic “inward light” that fuels the poet’s creativity, Finch’s polarizing depiction of light as both the excessive and homogenizing institutional force of uniformity and the night’s antecedent necessary for yielding the darkness challenges the traditional and deterring notion of darkness as the deficient state of light. Finch’s poems also reveal how the poet’s imagination becomes more engaged and productive in a delicate but refined mental state intensified by the opposite psychological states—for instance, in “The Consolation,” the poet’s depressed and subdued mood is compared to the delirium and colorfulness of nature and the grandeur of mythical figures who never seem to fall but rise: “See, Phoebus breaking from the willing skies,/ See, how the soaring Lark, does with him rise” (lines 1-2). What rises does fall, and to Finch, this duality and mutability in nature signifies the promise of rebirth and regrowth:

Glorious, and high, but shall they ever bee,
Glorious, and high, and fixt where now we see?
No, both must fall, nor can their stations keep,
She to the Earth, and he below the Deep,
At night both fall, but the swift hand of time
Renews the morning, and again they climb,

Then lett no cloudy change, create my sorrow,

I'll think 'tis night, and I may rise to-morrow.247

Finch sees the night’s darkness as a liminal doorway to poetic daybreak—darkness is as significant as light for her poetic imagination to become active. Fittingly, “The Consolation,” a poem about night being the poet’s consolation, opens with an invocation of Phoebus, the Greek god whose chariot pulled the sun, and the lark, the popular mythological and literary symbol of daybreak.248 The night is closely represented with the possibility of the fall in the poem, but the fall also generates and propels the creation.

This chapter will examine Finch’s enthusiasm and affinity for night and her esoteric and unconventional poetic decision to magnify the night’s darkness as the source of poetic creativity and psychological solace. While she praises the lack of light as an indication of advanced artistic and individual independence, she also suggests that the topos of light as the ubiquitous symbol of knowledge and life reinforces the homogenous cultural institutionalization of dualistic values such as light and dark or good and evil. By highlighting and reassessing the estranged values of the things usurped of light, Finch debunks the ego-ocular-verbocentrism of the hegemonic social and class structures that concentrers and hyperbolizes the more apparent and pronounced.249


248 The poem opens with the introduction of two mythical figures—Phoebus and the lark. The following are the first six lines: “See, Phoebus breaking from the willing skies,/ See, how the soaring Lark, does with him rise./ And through the air, is such a journey borne/ As if she never thought of a return./ Now, to his noon, behold him proudly goe./ And look with scorn, on all that's great below” (lines 1-6).

249 In the introduction to Modernity and Hegemony of Vision, David Michael Levin discusses how vision is one of the predominant modes of perception, and the culture of vision dominates the discourses of knowledge in Western culture: “Can it be demonstrated, beginning with the ancient Greeks, our Western culture has been dominated by ocularcentric paradigm, a vision-generated, vision-centered interpretation of knowledge, truth, and reality? If so, many more questions follow. Can it be argued that, in the period we call ‘modernity’ (the period
Finch’s casting the light away to preserve her creative relationship with the night further reveals her acute awareness of her marginalized subjectivity as a female poet, a subjectivity that inspires her poetic imagination; she also doubts and challenges the gospel of scientific objectivity, championing instead poetic individualism and subjectivity. Thus, she belongs to a continuing tradition of female writers including Cavendish who were skeptical of the modern scientific project and struggled to preserve their female subjectivity. Female writers of the English Renaissance, as they are constantly aware of their political and social limitations, express a similar anxiety and criticism against the advent of science. Cavendish, through her struggles with The Royal Society, illustrates the precarious position of the “woman of science” in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England; Finch, who followed a generation later, also found herself exiled to the margin of scientific knowledge. Women writers of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England such as Cavendish and Finch wrote about their experiences of being outsiders from the patriarchal production of knowledge and power; they share the distinction of offering alternate modes of discovering truth and, in their works, provide an interrogation of at least some aspects of the foundational doctrines of modern mechanistic philosophy that brought about what Susan Bordo has defined as “Masculinization of Thought.” 250 I am far from presenting these poets as representing the entire discourse against the fashioning of modern science in the seventeenth century, but they are intellectually related to one another in presenting important critiques and alternate modes of knowing the universe that lost out to science and were neglected.

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250 Susan Bordo, “The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought.” _Signs._ 11.3 (1986): 439-456. Bordo writes: “The model of knowledge that Descartes bequeathed to modern science, and of which he is often explicitly described as the father, is based on clarity, dispassion, and detachment” (440). This assertion, it seems to me, distorts Descartes’ actual role, especially considering his gifted contemporaries like Bacon and Hooke and the fact that the greatest thinkers to follow him, particularly Newton and Locke, were writing in opposition to Descartes’ philosophy.
or misunderstood to the point of outright hostility over the next centuries.\textsuperscript{251} And only recently have the complaints of these seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century skeptics regained a foothold in philosophical inquiries into the foundational beliefs of science, for contemporary theorists routinely decry the totalizing claims of science as both improbable and inherently dangerous in the social arrangements that they hail forth in modern civilizations.\textsuperscript{252} In \textit{Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature: the Art of Making Knowledge, 1580-1670}, Elizabeth Spiller also considers the entire experimental paradigm something that by definition attempts to hide its subjective and man-made nature, as “Experimentation depends on creating artificial situations for the purpose of discovering universal scientific laws” (7).\textsuperscript{253} Spiller further argues that these scientific experiments were not about scientific discoveries but about empirical reinforcements that support the pre-existing social and cultural hierarchy of patriarchal hegemony: “From most premodern philosophical and historical perspectives, this goal represents an epistemological paradox, yet by the end of the seventeenth century claims for the power of experiments are becoming widely accepted along with new assumptions about the existence of

\textsuperscript{251} With the publication of Sir Isaac Newton’s \textit{Principia} in 1687 any scientific thought not following a mechanist world view became unthinkable and outside the purview of the field of science itself. As Richard H. Schlager points out in \textit{From Myth to Modern Mind}: “It was Newton’s vision of the corpuscular-mechanistic universe based on various forces that finally displaced Aristotle’s organismic cosmology, providing the general theoretical framework for physical investigations until the end of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth century” (233).

\textsuperscript{252} For example, in \textit{Beyond Kuhn}, Edwin H.–C. Hung describes the aftermath of the important revisionist philosophies of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. Hung asserts that according to Kuhn and Feyerabend, “the observational/theoretical distinction is untenable. There is no such thing as a stable observational vocabulary, independent of our theoretical commitments. The way we perceive depends essentially on our theoretical mentality. All observational terms are theoretical in that they are functions of the theories we hold” (5).

universal scientific laws that they point to.” At the start of the following century, Finch’s exploration of a subjective, mutable self under the influence of the passions provides an especially cogent critique of the masculine, self-aware figure of the scientist then coming into prominence.

Furthermore, Finch’s consistent representation of the human psyche as the source of mutability shows the poet’s own potential to grow and excel while she challenges the patriarchal tools of a process of knowledge production that oversimplifies women merely as intellectually servile and socially marginalized. The poet’s pensive and sometimes inactive, sedentary mood prevailing in Finch’s poetry is merely external and deceiving. The poet’s affinity for quiet solitude signifies not only her desire for social independence and personal solidarity but more importantly her intellectual independence. This is also why the sense of mutability and individualism governs Finch’s sense of time and space in her poetry—over and over Finch points out that mutability and heterogeneity tower over stability and regularity as her poetic inspiration comes from ambivalence and opaqueness. Finch wants to retreat from the hegemony of regularized, masculine time and space. Solitude might be the only way she can confront and delay the traditional sense of time. Therefore, she must use the space of solitude—the shaded areas and the poetry itself—to delegate the expected flow of time. She retreats from the punctual time, seeking out the night’s darkness that always antagonizes the daylight. Such an eccentric and capricious denial of the socially and ideologically accepted use of time and space provides the psychological dynamic and unease useful for informing the poet’s creative imagination. Even though Finch seems to advocate a choice between the two opposites by praising the night’s enigma and solitude over the daylight’s expressive refulgence, her literary virtues often seem to

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254 Spiller 7.
rise from a synthesis of the two opposites, a kind of intimate fantasy fusing the two opposites. Articulated through her intensely strained emotional voice, the visions of mysterious and solemn night, or winding roads shaded by trees, represent a maverick gesture and convey the intrepid outlook of the poet. The amalgamation of all aspects of reality, either effulgent in the light or variegated in the shade, produce a more accomplished and compelling representation of reality. Finch’s argument for the underappreciated or usurped themes such as darkness and melancholy might come across as one-sided, but her awareness of divergent aspects of reality suggests otherwise. Finch’s argument for the heterogeneous view of darkness cannot succeed without admitting the necessity of light. The element of ambivalence and heterogeneity was prized in poetic production during the English Renaissance and seen as the basis of the poetic imagination; the poetic imagination, as Sidney argued and many others subsequently affirmed, requires opposites—metaphors analyze and merge dissimilarities to generate the sharpness and subtlety of meaning a poet desires to articulate without succumbing to the conventional shelving of hierarchy between two things. Finch’s romantic view of psychological clamor and emotional intensity as the source of poetic inspiration further points to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century’s neoclassical attempt to join fancy and judgment to explain wit. In an effort to define poetic inspiration or imagination, many critics debated the proper definition of the term “wit” in the ever-changing critical effort to locate and describe the imaginative source of poetry. Hobbes argued that fancy minus judgment or reason could not constitute wit; fancy and judgment should work together to accomplish wit, and Finch’s attempt to marry the effects of sensory perceptions and reason in her poetic creations echoes the idea that wit embodies both intellectual judgment and artistic imagination.
6.1 Poetry’s Promise of Mutability and Finch’s Use of Mutability

The tropes involving the human body and its sensory operation often reveal the metaphoric association between the writing body and the body of a written composition. In Finch’s “The Spleen,” the association between touch and figurative language extends to the poet’s figuration of her own malady as un-touchable, ungraspable. The spleen, the malady itself, is a metaphor for the poetic predicament that the poet faces and has to overcome—and the poet might have chosen the most fascinating and challenging subject to test and show off her poetic skills. Her triumph over this task will be a poetic achievement, one that deserves hyperbole. Finch believes poetry can capture and clothe the spleen, this protean beast that does not “remain in one continued shape.” As the poet reveals in “The Spleen,” the taming of the malady signifies being able to capture the private and subjectively experienced symptoms into words, transforming the internal into external. This is poetic metaphor’s singular capacity—joining two opposites, even unlikely ones. As Finch describes the spleen, she turns her own, mostly ocular private sensory observations into her poetry’s public realm where the reader experiences both ocular and tactile effects. The protean form is captured in the poem. Even though it might change its form afresh every time it is read, the fact that Finch’s poetic imagination delivers the figuration of the spleen remains unchangeable.

Furthermore, in Finch’s nocturnal poems, the poet’s rejection of light is often associated with her deliberate denial of the conventional production of ocular epistemology; as I have argued before, seeing is closely linked with telling, yet the eyes that saw and hands that wrote belonged to those writers who thrived on the speaking ego of the male author. The poet’s dismissal of the day light reveals her attempt to evade the obligation of performing the exchange of social and ideological values of the hegemonic system, but such specific affinity towards
nocturnal images further signifies her desire to obstruct and delay the practice of ego-ocular-verbocentrism by producing the images of the other: the narrator often suspected of possessing a rather eccentric, feminine, and fragmented ego strained by melancholy, the night’s darkness devoid of worldly significance, and the conscious censoring of the “lines intend for publick view.” By magnifying the unconventional properties of the night, the spleen, and feminine subjectivity, Finch negates the ocular verbocentrism that generates the ideological narratives of patriarchal hegemony. Sensory perception and emotional experience govern Finch’s poetic imagery and her attempt to restore the internal values that lost out to the social and ideological values that carry significance in the external world.

The poet in Finch’s poetry, represented as a lone, romantic figure possessing a singular, anti-social, and eccentric genius, often appears to remove herself from the external pressures of social conventions as well as poetic tradition. Nevertheless, her poems often demonstrate her awareness of the ruling poetic conventions of the day as she points to the conundrum poetic conventions pose to the genuine and personal articulation of intimate thought. Even through her association with the peculiar themes of nocturnal imagery and melancholy, Finch has been historicized, linked and associated with certain poetic traditions. Wordsworth once described Finch as one of the very few exceptions since Milton whose poetry “contain[s] a single new image of external nature.” However, Charles Hinnant cautions that Wordsworth’s famous claim on Finch’s poetry only provides “the archaeological nature of [Wordsworth’s] enterprise,

which revived interest in Finch’s poetry only by constructing a kind of historical mythology in which the poems become recognizable from the vantage point of their Romanticism” (Hinnant 27). Hence, to Wordsworth, Finch’s poetry represented “an early, buried version of that Romanticism” (27). Many critics followed Wordsworth’s “historicizing approach to Finch’s poetry,” a project that only undermined Finch’s works as unfinished, still-in-progress, “adumbrations—shadows that looked forward to the fulfillment to come” with the full flowering of Romanticism (27). Hinnant suggests that it was Reuben Brower who first offered a counter criticism against Wordsworth’s historicizing of Finch. By recognizing Finch’s difference and “distance from the Romantics,” Hinnant describes, Brower “locates these so-called nature poems early in Finch’s career and thus grounds them in a seventeenth-century tradition of metaphysical poetry” (Hinnant 27). If the development of a poetic movement reflects a linear historical progression, Brower’s reading of Finch places her at the mature end of a seventeenth-century movement when Wordsworth lines her up at the incubating start of an eighteenth-century movement.

In addition, part of Finch’s poetic inspiration often comes from the idyllic solitude found in a pastoral landscape. Finch combines the peaceful pastoral life with the night’s silent solitude and creates an ideal setting for her own private development of poetic imagination and intellectual discernment. Finch also invokes classical muses such as “Phoebus breaking from the willing skies” and “the soaring Lark” for inspiration, only to reject such external conventions in favor of her own emotion and imagination. Finch demonstrated an increasing awareness of the poetic traditions of her own period as well as those governing older verse. Her work’s affinity with the metaphysical tradition is evident in poems such as “The Petition for an Absolute
Retreat,” which represents the distanced perspective of the speaker through the image of the telescope, an emblem common to much religious poetry of the seventeenth century.

Yet Finch’s poetic creativity is more intensely connected to—or comes from, to be more specific—her corporeal body. The corporeal body reminds the poet of the distance between celestial perfection and corporeal inadequacy, and the poetic metaphor is the poet’s tool to move upward. The desire to get closer to the celestial perfection—to ascend from small to great or partial truth to complete truth—governs the motion of the poetic imagination. Indeed, Finch’s poetic metaphors are meaningful and succinct as they indicate upward motion. Yet Finch’s poems openly discuss her physical malady affecting her mind, and instead of trying to veil the symptom, she explores and exploits the symptoms—the symptoms become the subject of her creation, not the obstacle for her creation. Tuned to the reveries of unnoticed and obscure subtleties, Finch delves into the abyss of a contemplative melancholic mind. This perhaps contradicts the upward propelled motion of poetic imagination. How do the cynical and unbalanced characteristics of the spleen or the lack of light embody the ascending motion to ontological perfection and undisturbed truth?

Finch’s representation of the malady shows the poet’s profound grasp of the polarizing effects of the spleen, and it is Finch’s poetic ambition to confront and join the conflicting opposites together. Finch’s poetry shows that the ascension to truth by poetic imagination can also happen on a rather unconventional, meandering journey, by travelling “thro’ those Windings and that shade.” Finch’s winding and shaded path will reveal the poet and her reader things that could have been absent or hidden had she taken the hierarchical path to truth. In this sense, Finch resolves the moral dilemma caused by her polarizing formal and thematic subjectivities.

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found in her poetry. She understands that her subjectivity is polarizing to her poetic ambition. The spleen is both mobilizing and immobilizing; she embodies the spleen. The spleen inspires and discourages the poet, and even though the poet might dread its conflicting effect on the body and mind, she finds the spleen’s derailing impact on both body and mind forceful and sensational enough to stir her poetic imagination. The happy life without depression, the bright light without the shadow, in other words, results in a torpor of the poetic imagination. Notice the transformation she traces out in “The Spleen”:

I feel thy Force, whilst I against thee rail;
I feel my Verse decay, and my cramped Numbers fail.
Thro’ thy black Jaundice I all Objects See
As Dark and Terrible as Thee,
My Lines decry’d, and my Employment thought
An useless Folly, or presumptuous Fault:
Whilst in the Muses’ Paths I Stray,
Whilst in their groves, and by their Secret Springs
My hand delights to trace unusual things,
And deviates from the known and common way.\(^{258}\)

The poet clearly suffers from the malady that blurs her poetic creativity: “my verse decay, and my cramped numbers fail.” Like a nebulous fog, her body moves too slowly, but her mind changes too constantly. However, in the midst of hazy “paths [she strays],” the poet also encounters something “unusual” and tangible as her “hand delights to trace unusual things.\(^{258}\) And deviates from the known and common way.” Being lost in the spleen’s “dark and terrible” forest

\(^{258}\) Finch, “The Spleen, A Pindaric Poem,” lines 75-84.
proves to be an inspiring experience; the poet who initially felt herself losing her creativity in the battle against the malady somehow finds poetic inspiration and strength in the state of “dark and terrible.” Finch isn’t the first poet who tackled the subject of melancholy—though her approach is startlingly genuine, intimate, and emotional, as opposed to the grieving elegy tradition from the previous century or the poems about pensive solitude and melancholy popularized by Milton’s *Il Penseroso*.

It is also paramount to notice that the overall temperament and mood of “The Spleen” echo with the mysterious, unruffled, self-sufficient coolness of the night that eschews the light’s “vulgar crowd,/ [its] slaves, more clamorous and loud.” To Finch, darkness is enigmatic, romantic, and singularly creative while the day light is “vulgar,” “loud,” just like the slavish majority that blindly follow the obvious—indeed, they become the “slaves” of the malady by choice:

Whilst in the light, and vulgar Croud,
Thy Slaves, more clamorous and loud,
By Laughters unprovok'd, thy Influence too confess.
In the Imperious Wife thou Vapours art,
Which from o'erheated Passions rise
In Clouds to the attractive Brain,
Until descending thence again,
Thro' the o'er-cast, and show'ring Eyes,
Upon her Husband's soften'd Heart,
He the disputed Point must yield,
Something resign of the contested Field;
Til Lordly Man, born to Imperial Sway,
Compounds for Peace, to make that Right away,
And Woman, arm'd with Spleen, do's servilely Obey.\(^{259}\)

Finch points out how the symptoms of the malady are easily misinterpreted and glorified by the popular majority. Regardless of the real symptoms of melancholy, which Finch vividly describes in her poems, the melancholic temperament, as articulated in such expressions as “the aromatic pain”—from which Pope borrowed his famous “die of a rose in an aromatic pain”—became romanticized and mimicked by many, as exhibiting these symptoms became the sign of cultural refinement and malaise prescribed for the higher class. Finch’s description of the spleen as “the vapours” that exist “in the imperious wife” derides the appearance—“new are thy motions, and thy dress”—of the malady that became fashionable among women who perform a state of physical weakness and mental frailty as the sign of femininity and servility.

Though this might not seem plausible, the hyperbolic descriptions of the spleen might be the most fitting rhetorical choice for Finch to create the vivid impression of how the spleen attacks and usurps her mental and physical condition. The symptoms Finch illustrates show nothing but tedium, yet it is challenging and unpredictable—“thou Proteus to abused mankind”—and the ominous yet mysterious appearance of the malady seduces the ordinary people, so that showing the symptoms of the spleen becomes fashionable: “New are thy motions, and thy dress.” Finch portrays the spleen through the hyperbole of “unusual things” where the “muses’ paths [the poet] stray,” through which the poet also “deviates from the known and common way.” The spleen therefore becomes a metaphor for her poetic vision—the sublime “force” of “the airy phantoms” might also be the “dark and terrible,” but Finch does not deny the

spleen’s mystical power over mankind; rather, as the poem reveals, she is fond of its association with terrifying and unorthodox unpredictability and mutability. Though she opens “The Spleen” with the question, “What art thou, Spleen, which ev’ry thing dost ape?” one can argue after a careful reading of the poem that Finch realizes what could “ape” the poet is the lack of melancholy. The nonfigurative, the ever-changing attributes of the disease challenge the poet to become more alert and perceptive. As the poem progresses, Finch’s use of figurative language slowly unveils that the spleen does deserve the hyperbole and the “perplexing form” (line 5). Further, the poet’s struggle against the melancholy is not just an internal and personal one; it is also a source of her professional ambition and distress. Although her poetic works were published anonymously, “The Spleen” clearly demonstrates how the poet feels her “verse decay, and [her] cramped numbers fail” because of the poet’s private anguish and anxiety from the malady.260 The complaint is both private and public; her complaints against the spleen constitute the poem, but the poem can also be seen as the triumphant song of the spleen—a Pindaric ode to the spleen. Finch chooses one of the most outward and hyperbolic modes of poetry to express her anguish over the most intimate and inward clash between her personal and professional space. In this sense, the poet’s brave and unconventional poetic decision also deserves as much hyperbole as the malady itself.

Because the conflict between her personal and professional life creates “the contested field,” Finch articulates her debilitating inner, psychological war through the images of solitude, darkness, and melancholy.261 In doing so, Finch further suggests that the creative space of a poet should be isolated and protected from any external forces threatening the poet’s intellectual

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260 We must pay attention to how the phrase “cramped numbers fail” expresses her anxiety and poetic ambition at the same time. It’s not that she doesn’t have enough to say—the “numbers fail” because her ideas have to be “cramped” in the limited time and space, the conventional frame of poetry.

integrity and creative solitude; poetry-making requires diligent study and contemplative solitude, but sometimes it also involves skillful negotiations with the outside world. For instance, the main subject of Milton’s Sonnet 8 is Pindar, and the poem reveals that he is about to be assailed and thrown out from his home. The old poet who occupies his old home is about to be evacuated from his home; Milton represents Pindar as the emblem of deteriorating past poetic tradition by describing the moment where the poet is threatened and pushed out of his establishment by the militant, external forces. Milton’s Sonnet 8 embodies, both figuratively and literally, the creative nook that holds and protects Pindar inside. Poetry provides a sanctuary for a poet who is in political exile, but even under the shield of poetry the poet is being threatened by the external forces. Thus, in Sonnet 8 Milton pleads that his life should be spared just as the house of Pindarus was spared from being destroyed when the army of Alexander the Great sacked Thebes: “These defenceless dores may sease,/ If ever deed of honour did thee please,/ Guard them, and him within protect from harms” (lines 2-4). The house being occupied by a poet signifies a poetic space being occupied by a poet. Here, one can argue that a poet’s creative inner space isn’t always protected but often ends up being unlocked and bombarded by external forces as much as a poet fabricates the world people read and remember. However, as Sidney argues in The Defence of Poesie, a poet can imitate and create many versions of truth and even enhance the original; Milton argues that his pen will prevail through any political pressures--the poet holds the power not only to record history but also manipulate it: “He can requite thee, for he knows the charms/ That call Fame on such gentle acts as these,/ And he can spred thy Name o're Lands

262 As the lines progress close to the end of the sonnet, Milton makes certain that the words of the poet are indeed what lasts after the ruin and transcends the truth: “The house of Pindarus, when Temple and Towre/ Went to the ground: and the repeated air/ Of sad Electra's Poet had the power/ To save th' Athenian Walls from ruine bare” (lines 11-14).

263 After losing his political battle against the Royalists, Milton experienced his poetic and political career being threatened—“these defenseless doors may seize/ If deed of honor did thee ever please,/ Guard them, and him within protect from harms” (lines 2-4).
and Seas./ What ever clime the Suns bright circle warms” (lines 5-8). The space of poetry is forgiving and affirming—it is personal and public, egotistic and didactic.264

When it comes to Finch, a female poet writing in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, the poet’s personal space is her poetic space; her personal space and poetic space are one, walled away from the outside. Most often, a female poet during this time period cannot build enough physical and mental distance between her domestic and social or personal and public domain; thus, the two will collapse or coincide. In Handmaid to Divinity: Natural Philosophy, Poetry, and Gender in Seventeenth-Century England, Desiree Hellegers writes: “While the symptoms of the spleen or hysteria confirm the ‘femininity’ and delicacy of the upper class woman, they also undermine her claim to intellectual quality and justify her confinement to and subordination within the private space of the home” (148).265 The opening question of Finch’s poem, “What are thou SPLEEN which ev’rything dost ape?” expresses the poet’s “central concern with the flexibility of the discourse of the spleen and with the semiotics of disease” because the public discussion of her malady could render her vulnerable and again, feminine to the society.266 At first, “the contested field” seems to suggest that her domestic and social space becomes too “crowd[ed]” with the malady. Too many occupants populate her already clouded mind. The battle between her malady and her verses keeps getting more intense as the contested field remains over-crowded, and the conflict becomes more acutely poetic; hence she feels “[her] verse decay, and [her] cramped numbers fail.” However, according to Finch’s description of the malady, we can induce that melancholy isn’t entirely the source of her

264 It might be useful to quote what Maurice Kelley says about poetic language in This Great Argument again. To protect his private poetic space from external ideologies, a poet “seeks to figure forth precept in a concrete, speaking picture, to present ethical teaching in a form that is both attractive and stimulating; in short, to teach by the feigned image of poetry” (98).
266 Hellegers 149.
physical and mental debilitation but rather a source of sublimity and magnificence for the poet.\textsuperscript{267} In fact, as she feels more anxious to write poetry and as her mind is more occupied by the melancholy, she feels something that “delights” with “[her] hand while she “trace[s] unusual things.” What kind of experience can offer the poet such delightful experience with her hand, tracing “unusual things” while under the spell of the spleen? Where do the readers see the unusual things she traces “whilst in the muses’ paths [she] stray[s]”? Is it plausible to argue that her crowded, “contested field,” turns out to be a more generative and active field of poetic inspiration?

In “Melancholy in Anne Finch and Elizabeth Carter,” John F. Sena points out that even though “melancholy was the bête noire of some Englishmen, the malady was looked upon with pride and deference by many. If melancholy caused physical infirmity and psychological distress, it was also associated with genius and artistic creativity” (115).\textsuperscript{268} In addition, Hellegers points out that “the public form of the Pindaric also seems to be a particularly appropriate medium for treating a phenomenon that was viewed, from the late seventeenth century onward,

\textsuperscript{267} In *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England*, Douglas Trevor points out that sometimes the depressed moods are preferred by those who sought spiritual ascendance rather than elevation of moods. Neo-Platonist belief stated that the upward motions of a purified and purged soul requires the downward motion of emotional sorrows and suffering, or, as Trevor asserts, “poets need to suffer in order to create verse that will ‘quench’ their thirst”\textsuperscript{(36)}. Sadness marks the moralistic mourner while purifying the religious sufferer, and Trevor argues that Spenser’s sadness in *The Shepheardes Calender* “substantiates one’s moral and religious virtue,” serving as “a tool by which to prod his readers into supporting his career as a poet. The very ubiquity of sad figures in Spenser’s verse testifies to his worldly aspirations, with poetry functioning both as the vehicle for his ambitions and the cure for his episodic misery” (36). The distinction between Neoplatonic sadness and Galenic melancholy is similar, Trevor asserts, to the differences between “announcing oneself as irremediably sick and coveting and marketing pity. Spenser eagerly participates in the latter, but shies away from the former” (36). Anne Ferry, in *The “Inward” Language*, writes, “The actual word *expression*, commonly used by Wyatt and other writers throughout this period for the utterance of what is in the heart, describes the relationship here of outward signs to inward states. In either a literal or a figurative reading, *expression* defines outward signs, like tears, as the emission of what is in the heart; to utter also meant to emit or exhale” (69). Poetry provides a useful tool for poets to immerse themselves in narcissistic grief, but poetry also treats—purges—the affliction through the poetry’s innate outward motion of expressing one’s inner thoughts.

as peculiarly English.”²⁶⁹ During the sixteenth century, Renaissance scholars and writers perceived that the melancholic artist possessed an aura of artistic superiority, and even today artists tend to link creativity with suffering, solitary confinement and pensive melancholy. To many seventeenth and eighteenth-century English upper class aristocrats, the spleen signifies a privileged sickness “associated specifically with the upper classes and with a sedentary life of luxury. In this respect, as John Mullan among others has emphasized, the spleen marked not simply affliction but also privilege.”²⁷⁰ Associating the malady with more refined and “superior mental endowments” wasn’t entirely without medical foundation either. Physicians also believed that the spleen was caused by “physiological factors similar to those responsible for intelligence and wit.” Those with more sensitive and refined spirits were more susceptible to the melancholy. Great heroes and talented people throughout history were often described as those touched by this malady, and the spleen had become a rather fashionable disease for poets and thinkers alike in the eighteenth century. In “From Delusion to Illumination: A Larger Structure of L’Allegro-Il Penseroso,” David M. Miller argues that the pleasures only melancholy can provide can never be fully appreciated without knowing the pleasures from mirth: “The delights of L’Allegro are real and valued, but like the glories of Greece they cannot stand against the ecstasy of Christian contemplation. Partial truth is inferior to complete truth. It is Il Penseroso who represents the proper Christian pattern” (37).²⁷¹ Miller incorporates a taxonomy borrowed from Lawrence Hellegers, Handmaid to Divinity, 147.

²⁶⁹ Hellegers, Handmaid to Divinity, 147.
²⁷⁰ Ibid. In addition, John Mullan discusses how the medical symptoms of the spleen, or melancholy, became standard markers of creativity and authorship after the eighteenth century’s celebration of “feelings”—sympathy and sensibility—and argues that such an image of the melancholic writer was not unusual, in Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century. According to Mullan, philosophers like David Hume and novelist Samuel Richardson exhibited “various dispositions to melancholy, hypochondria, or ‘spleen’” (17).

²⁷¹ Miller suggests that many of Milton’s poems show the poet’s affinity toward melancholy and that Milton seems to be in favor of pensive solitude rather than “thoughtless excess” of mirth and social life: “In Il Penseroso thoughtless excess must be controlled least man abdicate the responsibilities of his amphibious nature.”
Babb’s discussion of *Il Penseroso* in “The Background of *Il Penseroso*” that posits two distinct kinds of melancholy—black and gold—and associates the latter with a more divine and artistic portent for poets: “Golden melancholy was the concern, not of physicians, but of poets. And its products were not despondency amid madness, but the highest of man’s artistic achievements.” Milton also refers to the black melancholy as “loathed” while golden melancholy remains “divinest” (33). Finch’s melancholy embodies both gold and dark; it not only comes to her as a dark and untraceable “monstrous vision” that surreptitiously usurps her at night, but the poet also associates the melancholy’s numbing hallucinatory effect with enlightening, divine golden melancholy.

In “The Spleen,” Finch’s description of golden melancholy deviates from Milton’s association with poetic inspiration and the malady, however, as Finch shows a clear aversion toward the malady’s debilitating effect—“the jonquil o’ercomes the feeble brain” (40). Finch’s critical tone against “men of thoughts refined” who are “fool[s], to imitate the wits” (64) and the “coquette, whom ev’ry fool admires” (99) suggests that she is against the popularization of the malady—she might be complaining that the malady becomes too accessible and common, losing its novel and distant existence. Hellegers also points out the fashionable artistic attribute of melancholy fail to include the certain members of society: “For the male writer, at least, displays

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Miller suggests that Milton perceives both extremes culpable even though he finds the second is “morally superior to the first” (33).

272 Referring to Milton’s *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, Miller points out that Milton describes melancholy as “loathed Melancholy:/ Of Cerberus and blackest midnight born/ In Stygian Cave forlorn” in the beginning of *L’Allegro* (lines 1-3); also as “But, hail, thou Goddess, sage and holy,/ Hail divinest Melancholy,/ Whose Saintly visage is too bright/ To hit the Sense of human sight” in *Il Penseroso* (lines 11-14). See: David M. Miller, “From Delusion to Illumination: A Larger Structure of *L’Allegro-II Penseroso*.” Also, Lawrence Babb, “The Background of *Il Penseroso*."


274 It will indeed make gold popular, ironically making it more valuable to the common public, but in return, what is valuable to “the world” is no longer “golden” to Finch.
of splenetic symptomatology became a means of affirming or enhancing social, political, and intellectual authority. The discourse of the spleen, Finch implies, legitimates ‘scientifically’ the claims of upper-class men to power and privilege.”

It is not the spleen’s capricious and ominous visits the poet eschews; she abhors the patriarchal force behind the medical science and society’s identification of the malady as a feminine symptom of weakness and vulnerability. As Miller suggests, Milton’s “twin” poems of duality—melancholy and happiness, day and night, solitary and social person—envisage delivering the “complete truth.”

Finch values the artistic depth and complexity she can draw from the symptoms of the spleen greater than the pain and malady caused by the illness. The oscillating but persistent fore- and overshadowing of the spleen’s physical and mental symptoms render the duality tenuous and capricious. It can easily sway the “vulgar crowd,” who servilely follow its “dynamic charm”; unlike the “vulgar crowd, / thy Slaves, more clamorous and loud,” the poet isn’t deluded by the spleen’s dynamic charm: “New are thy Motions, and thy Dress.”

Furthermore, the contemporary fascination with the malady deserves Finch’s unfavorable tone because she believes that those who idolize and imitate the creative spirit of melancholy do not possess the poetic and creative capacity that she herself possesses. While the “vulgar crowd” chase and idolize the malady, the malady sought and chose the poet—in other words, she had no choice but to receive the malady and surrender. In the beginning of the poem, she does appear to be passive and powerless when the dark symptoms of melancholy take over her at night. With the spleen, everything seems to be out of balance, out of proportion: “From Harmony no help is had; Musik but soothes thee, if too sweetly sad, / And if too light, but turns thee gayly mad.”

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275 Hellegers 147.
276 As Miller writes in “From Delusion to Illumination: A Larger Structure of L’Allegro-Il Penseroso”:
“Partial truth is inferior to complete truth” (37).
is hard to achieve “harmony” with the spleen because an element of magnification and manipulation—mutability—generates the enigmatic power of the malady. Yet Finch’s representation of her malady evolves from a self-effacing and self-deprecating articulation to an active and vivid description of the illness propelling the manic genius poet. Though she petitions against the spleen, she finds the malady enigmatic and its effect on the mind tangible: “secret, the mysterious ways,/ by which [it] dost surprise, and prey upon the mind” (144-45). Even when she finds the malady gloomy and unfair, she describes the perturbed and jaundiced state of affliction with self-contradictory and oxymoronic expressions such as “fantastic harms” or “the dire effects of thy more pow’rful charms” (112, 115). The exaggerated contrast—the imagined distance—between the spleen’s dark and yellow or destructive and creative capacity proves that the melancholy’s power is actual and functioning, controlling the poet’s creative process whether she desires it or not. Without the dark shadowing of melancholy, there is neither depth nor definition to keep things sharp and intense: “Through thy black jaundice I all objects see,/ As dark and terrible as thee,/ My lines decried, and my employment thought/ An useless folly, or presumptuous fault.” The melancholy, whether it represents creative inspiration or demonic malady hindering artistic creativity, influences the sharpness of the artist’s work.

Yet vision of darkness doesn’t automatically mean impeding poetic creativity. Although the poet says the melancholy is shapeless and formless, her description of the spleen as “black jaundice” presents the melancholy in both black and gold colors. Unlike the articulation of melancholy as either golden or black in temperament, Finch’s depiction of melancholy in “The Spleen” combines the two characteristics and creates a more believable and accurate picture of the malady—it can’t be defined as one or the other, and when the malady is both creative and destructive the poet seems to be most confused but greatly inspired. This complicated yet murky
state of melancholy leads her to “the Muses’ paths” where “in their groves, and by their secret springs” she comes across the tangible delights while “trac[ing] unusual things.” In the midst of melancholy’s dark cloud, Finch employs various sensory perceptions to keep a keen sense of herself and her capacity to write poetry—the first twenty-five lines of “The Spleen” involve ocular experience. From lines 26 to 43 she focuses on describing how she experiences her malady through the sense of smell. Quite fittingly, the third sensory experience she employs is touch, which she closely aligns with ocular experience to demonstrate how colors are being manipulated into moods, to express her heightened state of feeling melancholy. The description of her hands tracing unusual things is a trope for both writing and envisioning, and her ocular experience coincides with tactile experience. Compared to her earlier descriptions of the melancholy creeping into her bed as she passively lies there, she is more active and her experience is more tactile when “[her] hand delights.” In the beginning of the poem Finch’s description of the spleen provides a rather elusive picture of melancholy; constantly shifting between the extremity of moods, being resolutely sad or intensely happy, the poet describes the spleen “Proteus to abus’d Mankind,/ Who never yet thy real Cause cou’d find,/ Or fix thee to remain in one continued Shape/ Still varying thy perplexing Form” (lines 2-4). In the beginning of the poem Finch perceives the spleen lacking a tangible or real body, thus a Protean but hollow form. The hyperbolic attention the spleen receives from the poem—“the son of Bacchus pleads [its] pow’r” and “Retained thy pris’ner, thy acknowledged slave,/ And sunk beneath thy chain to a lamented grave”—gives this elusive and distant temperament a more concrete identity (94, 149-50). And this tangible identity of the poet’s malady also redefines the poet; after all, the sickness initiates internal struggle and germinates the poetic mind, and prepares the poet’s professional career. Without the poetic urgency that encourages the poet to oblige “the Spleen,”
the poem loses its personal significance that distinguishes itself apart from any other poems professing the romantic view of melancholy.

The poet’s sensory experience of the malady is mostly ocular in the beginning of her poem, but when she begins to describe her writing process, the details of her splenetic experience interfering with her writing experience becomes more tactile. Here in “the Muses’ paths” the poet actually feels something tangible, but imagines her poem gaining more tangible flesh. Although the poem begins with the description of the spleen as protean and intangible, the spleen slowly takes a concrete form; the once “monstrous vision,” impossible to trace or grasp, has been captured and written down. As the poet “trace[s] unusual things” and “[her] hand delights,” the blurry sight of the spleen becomes less abstract and intangible, though the poet still preserves the malady’s mysterious entity as opaque and clandestine. Finch compares the malady to the motion of the sea—the waves rise and fall; affliction and change are essential part of artistic begetting—“Now a Dead Sea thou’lt represent,/ A calm of stupid discontent,/ Then, dashing on the rocks wilt rage into a storm” (6-8). The rising and crashing motion of the sea wave echoes with Finch’s own experience with the malady’s unpredictable and violent visits. Clearly, writing about the spleen gives the poet a sense of purpose and control over the malady even though she laments the difficulty of pinning down—“fix thee to remain in one continued shape”—this protean affliction inside herself; however, she knows where she can encounter and confront this protean form: inside the frame of poetry, in “those windings and that shade,” as she writes in “The Petition for an Absolute Retreat.” This attempt is ambitious and heroic, and Finch’s poetic aspiration becomes more forcible and acute as the malady’s deterrence over her artistic creativity becomes more controlling and consuming of her body. The deterrence generates more encouragement, not discouragement of the poet’s artistic creativity.
Finch’s description of the melancholy does not veil the malady’s debilitating effect; rather, her poem begins with the description of how the spleen spreads and takes over the poet’s body like a slow, surreptitious, nightmarish dream: “On sleep intruding dost thy shadows spread./ The gloomy Terrours round the silent Bed,/ And croud with boading Dreams the Melancholy Head.” She complains that the spleen’s unpredictability and coverture keep the poet “trembling sometimes” in “a panic fear” (9-10). Eleanor M. Sickels’ *The Gloomy Egoist* also examines the different seasonal and weather themes involving the expression of melancholy. Sickels argues that there is a large group of poets whose poems show “the continuing and increasing love for pensive autumn and barren or stormy winter” and that “the moods represented are roughly analogous to those of evening and night” (Sickels 267). Most poets desire the scholarly pensiveness and nocturnal solitude associated with melancholy: “The poet’s love for evening was partly conditioned by the fact that only then was [the poet] released from labor and free to indulge his delight in solitary rambles” (270). In Finch’s “The Spleen,” when the malady visits the poet during the solitary quietness of evening, the poet’s reaction seems to illustrate a desirable disposition of malady.278

Finch’s ominous description of the malady slowly turns into ornate renderings of the spleen’s power in elevated tropes and hyperbolic tones. When under the attack of spleen, she is both active and passive; she is not only being consumed and controlled by the illness but also inspired and mobilized. Thus the night becomes the time of change and transformation. The poet’s description of her “day” life—her social and public life as a wife, which is also her domestic life—at first seems to create inflexible exteriority that circumscribes the poet’s creative

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278 In *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England*, Douglas Trevor writes: “The dreamy optimism of ‘Il Penseroso,’ which disregards sickness as a potential consequence of late-night, solitary studying, is an indication of the rather remarkable disposition that Milton uncovers in himself in the face of Galenic warnings” (160).
motions. But this friction and congestion between the poet’s various inner and outer identities further suggests that what populates the poet’s “congested field” is not outside the poet but rather inside. The melancholic interiority of the poet expands and congregates, which makes the poet feel restricted and crowded inside.\textsuperscript{279} In the night when she is secluded and isolated by darkness, she finally finds her inner poetic self that gets tucked away and ignored during the day’s social and public time. Finch’s affinity toward the inner, private world becomes more apparent in other poems; for example, in “A Nocturnal Reverie” she eschews the obvious, intrusive, and loud public world that seems to undermine and impede her poetic career.

6.2 Female Subjectivity and the Lack of Light

The subtitle above precisely represents the close and inseparable relationship between the two topics; very few female thinkers or poets, or female subjects in general, before and during Finch’s time period, perhaps with an exception of Queen Elizabeth, had been the illuminating subject of literary or scholarly discussion. Finch’s assertion of a subjective, mutable self under the influence of the spleen further provides a persuasive critique of the masculine, self-aware authority figure that governs the production of knowledge—the male figure of the poet, the scientist, or even the husband. Finch will need to be presented as part of continuum of a longer tradition extending even before Cavendish of female writers recognizing that science was a social project organizing intellectual endeavors in a way that privileged male participation and superiority.

Although Finch clearly suspects the social dangers of science on account of its relentlessly gendered nature, she chooses a less self-aggrandizing method than Cavendish’s

\textsuperscript{279} This “congested field” also echoes Finch’s complaint that the “cramped numbers fail.” There is indeed the frame that holds poetry, where its lines are numbered. This is again why writing an epic poem becomes not only a poetic but also a spiritual accomplishment.
direct and expressive criticism to voice her concerns. The autobiographical nature of Finch’s observations of her own physical malady makes her work one of the most compelling critiques imaginable of the possible existence of an objective consciousness able, in the manner of Bacon, to purposefully remove one’s subjectivity from one’s own experience of the world; unlike Cavendish, Finch is uncomfortable with representing herself in the linear narrative of Cartesian ego that controls and dominates the terrain through measuring and mapping her control—here it would be her authorial terrain. Finch is suspicious of both empiricism and rationalism—she is suspicious of the enterprise of knowledge production. As Hellegers points out, Finch’s “The Spleen” presents the poet’s criticism against the “medical narratives that naturalize and legitimize the privileged position of a masculine elite atop the hierarchies of gender, class, and race.” Yet the ideological practice of science overrides and usurps the social and political critique of the dominant masculine view of the female body written by women; the tradition of western metaphysics reiterates feminine attributes as naturally inferior to those of men and, Finch’s “‘The Spleen’ recognizes that late seventeenth-century medical narratives simply reconstruct existing conceptions of feminine instability evident in the works of male poets from Sidney onward under the aegis of a new narrative authority.” Contesting the “existing conceptions of feminine instability,” Finch’s works such as “The Petition for an Absolute Retreat,” “The Consolation,” “A Nocturnal Reverie,” and “The Spleen” focus on reevaluating the heterogeneous irregularities found in the immaterial realm of human psyche and emotions. In these poems, the poet asserts that the social and public activities of the day belong to “the Fair, the Gay, the Vain” and further suggests that the peculiarities of introverted social outcasts should be left alone to enjoy “more extensive Joy,/ When all Heaven shall be survey’d/ From those

280 Hellegers 141.
281 Ibid.
Windings and that Shade.” These eccentricities must perform under the veil of normality and abide by the scrutiny of pedestrian happiness during the bright day light. However, in the darkness of the night, when socially and publically obliging forces are subdued and discouraged, the oddities feel secure enough to express their true identity. The night’s darkness takes over the vociferous and triumphant daylight that once antagonized and cornered the oddities to the shaded areas; unlike daylight, the darkness of night does not forcefully magnify and expose these unconventional subjects to the visible world. Finch signifies the brilliance of the daylight as the external, obvious, and inevitable attributes of forceful hegemony—too much light will end up marginalizing the sight, and too much certainty will obliterate the chance of new discovery.

Finch often represents the appropriate, dominant sense of time as an antagonizing male figure, and the poet employs her poetic construction to challenge and decenter the linearly projecting time that is necessary to create the fictive “I.” Linear time reinforces the existence of the Cartesian ego by assuring its consistent placement and reappearance in the flow of time and history. In such linear fashion, time plays a threatening, arbitrary role that ignores and forgets lives outside its linear pattern. Finch’s playful protest against linear time renders pointless the speaking “I” of Cartesian thought and even further challenges the Platonic hierarchy of low and great, dark and light, body and spirit, or corporeal and celestial world. For instance, in “The Spleen,” the speaker’s physical malady distorts the recollected ordering of sensory experience, disabling time’s orderly linearity and the sense of a superseding Cartesian ego. When the speaking center shifts, the reliability of the narrator and narrative becomes suspect. In “The Spleen,” the depressed mind is being controlled by the depressed body; the mind’s clock must oblige the body’s, albeit the body can’t keep up with the passage of time due to the melancholy

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282 Finch, “The Petition for an Absolute Retreat.”
that often sustains and wallows in one memorable—or perplexing—moment in time. The Platonic preference of mind over body is put in abeyance by the poet’s protest against the unity of time. By employing madness to question the ideological center of “I,” Finch’s poetry suggests a possible escape from the rituals of patriarchy and human reproduction that construct the subject as a willing participant in the putatively male realm of sexual politics and scientific knowledge.

Freed of linear time, Finch’s text plays with the normative pattern of classical rational thought and validates experiences normally viewed as inappropriate when seeking “truth”: vision, dream, and fantasy. Finch’s affinity towards temporality undercuts the notion of continuous rational objectivity as well as the empiricist outlook of the universe that scientific experimentation presupposes, one which views the possibility of reducing material events to abstract models that can be labeled as truth. Such a practice, however, required a belief that individuals could exist outside of the obvious events they are observing under the lurid light of mechanical devices and make objective measurements and descriptions; viewed in this light, Finch also represents an articulate spokesperson for a persistent strain of anti-mechanist thought in England. Finch’s refusal to publish under her own name demonstrates her self-effacing censorship against her own poetic career. Then it becomes clear why the poet desires to find a place to keep her poetry live and hidden at the same time, away from the expected, regular surveillance of dominant ideology, apart from the socially-constructed narratives of time that summon the routine performances of social and class ideology that hinder Finch’s poetic pursuits. For Finch time is punctual and objective; it is unforgiving and controlling—time is patriarchal and male. The tropes of sensory impressions in “The Spleen” and “A Nocturnal Reverie” reveal how Finch anxiously attempts to manipulate time in order to preserve her poetic exile and refuge against time’s clockwork.
In Finch’s "A Nocturnal Reverie," the indicators of the flow of time such as conjunctions and prepositions appear punctually and persistently in the beginning of every third or fourth line, as if to prove that the poet’s anxiety over time becomes more intensified as the time passes. The frequent reminder of time and place—“In such a night”—throughout the poem reveals the poet’s attempt to hold time in abeyance: “In such a night, when every louder wind/ Is to its distant cavern safe confined;/ And only gentle Zephyr fans his wings,/ And lonely Philomel, still waking, sings;/ Or from some tree, famed for the owl’s delight,/ She, hollowing clear, directs the wand’rer right:” (lines 1-6). The poet’s struggle against time’s greed and selfishness is inevitable—even though the poet “Joys in th’inferiour World and thinks it like her Own” and desires to “abroad remain,/ Till Morning breaks” (lines 46-8), time is indifferent to the poet’s wishes and will not stop, and with its growth will summon the day break:

When the loosed horse now, as his pasture leads,
Comes slowly grazing through th’ adjoining meads,
Whose stealing pace, and lengthened shade we fear,
Till torn-up forage in his teeth we hear:
When nibbling sheep at large pursue their food,
And unmolested kine rechew the cud;
When curlews cry beneath the village walls,
And to her straggling brood the partridge calls;
Their shortlived jubilee the creatures keep,
Which but endures, whilst tyrant man does sleep;
When a sedate content the spirit feels,
And no fierce light disturbs, whilst it reveals;
But silent musings urge the mind to seek
Something, too high for syllables to speak;
Till the free soul to a composedness charmed,
Finding the elements of rage disarmed,
O’er all below a solemn quiet grown,
Joys in th’ inferior world, and thinks it like her own:
In such a night let me abroad remain,
Till morning breaks, and all’s confused again;
Our cares, our toils, our clamors are renewed,
Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued.283

The entire poem is only fifty lines long, but I wanted to cite this admittedly large portion of the poem to make it immediately clear to the readers how the lines are initiated by the anticipation of time. Note the progression of adverbial elements: “When,” “Till,” and “In such a night.” The flow of time is against the poet’s hope for a longer period of creativity—she wants to remain “in such a night” “when a sedate Content the Spirit feels” (39), but “morning breaks, and all’s confused again” (48). By constructing twenty-five heroic couplets recording the obscure yet fantastic charms and virtues of a night, Finch creates a unique figure of night suspended by the sinuous flow of sensory impressions. “In such a night,” all the senses are heightened and celebrated. Hues and shapes of nature are “seen” (10); the mythic creatures—Zephyrs and Philomel—are heard (4 and 5); “[t]hro’ temp’rate Air” the night wanes down the “repelling” odours (22). Night’s solidarity generates clarity and authority that the day’s hectic and clamorous dominance over the world prevents—only through night does the poet find her identity: “in the’inferious World and thinks it like her Own” (46).

Night provides an intimate refuge for the poet where her sensory perceptions are enlightened by the night’s calm and sublime energy: “no fierce Light disturbs, whilst it reveals;/ But silent Musings urge the Mind to seek/ Something, too high for Syllables to speak” (40-1). The stereotypical representation of night as the time of inactive darkness is subverted by Finch’s

prompt and persistent invocation of night’s capacity to queue up and orchestrate such overwhelming sensory experiences. “In such a Night,” as Finch repeatedly points out, the night’s profound and sublime control over sustained time triumphs over the day’s brilliant but shallow expressions of busily moving and fleeting time: “All’s confus’d again:/ Our Cares, our Toils, our Clamour are renew’d” (48-9). The trope of “night” in “A Nocturnal Reverie” represents the sign of serenity and protective sanctuary for the poet. As a metaphor—it could be metonymy—of sustained time and space filled with nature’s poetry, “night” supplies poetic energy to the poet who clearly eschews the day’s obvious servile commitment to the flow of time. Time gets more transparent and comprehensible during the day as the daylight’s transparency obliges people to be more social and rational. At night, time loses such advantage and faces a much harder task; the world becomes clandestine and unpredictable. In “A Nocturnal Reverie,” night’s display of obscure yet fantastic and singular happenings provides a more generative and productive time for the poet. In addition, this is a particular night distinguished from all the other nights—“In such a night” signifies one specific night, a specific incident—and this specific time is expanded and extended as it is remembered and reiterated by the poet.

But what is "Something, too high for syllables to speak" after all? Various scholars point to the idea of "the sublime,” and though the idea originated from classical Latin thought, it was still a less-known idea during her life time; thus it is fitting for a female poet like Finch who strives to challenge the male-dominated poetic tradition to find her poetic inspiration from the nocturnal carnival of sensory impressions that occur in “shaded” places. This is how Finch removes herself from the recurring assembly of old poetic tradition. She also criticizes the overused and exhausted expressions of Renaissance poetic conventions and claims her poetic novelty over the conventional poetry by demonstrating her ability to capture the daydream of
something obscure and dark—night as the sublime. The image of “sedate” darkness is yet awakened and brightened by the magnificent sights of nature’s unbelievable festivity at night, which are also juxtaposed with the piercing brilliance of the morning light. However, it is the night that the poet longs for, as she dreams to retreat from the mundane, repetitive day-to-day conventions of patriarchal society and the reiteration of classical poetic traditions that never fail to intrude into poetic space. This burning sun will find the speaker in Finch’s poetry and burn her poetic inspirations, a trope that is not distinct to Finch. Sidney’s Sonnet 1 from *Astrophil and Stella* employs the metaphor of old poetic conventions as the burning sun: “I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,/ Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain;/ Oft turning others’ leaves, to see if thence would flow/ Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburnt brain” (lines 5-8). Just as Sidney complains about being sunburnt by the unavoidable ray of the Petrarchan poetic conventions that influenced and fashioned sixteenth-century English poetry, Finch in the early eighteenth century also faces a similar conflict. Tradition is unavoidable as it is punctual and recurring like the day, but as the day returns so does the night, and every new generation of poets struggles to find a place to hide away from or negotiate with that burning sun, “Tyrant-Man” (38). Since “Tyrant-Man do’s sleep” during the night and the burning sun of poetic tradition stops shining at night, Finch celebrates night time.

In addition to recording the night’s sensory impressions, Finch seems to commemorate the night’s reverie by giving it a more concrete form. The intricate and consistent grammatical and prosodic structure of “A Nocturnal Reverie” proves the poet’s seriousness in celebrating the night’s sublime energy versus the “lengthen’d Shade” the day “fear[s]” (31). Though the happenings during the night seem less organized, a close reading of the first few lines will show

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284 In “The Consolation,” for example, classical figures such as Phoebus and the Lark represent poetic topos that constantly rise and revisit—inspire—poets.
that there is a certain schedule marked by a repetition of time indicating refrains and the same
sensory impressions—hearing, sight, and smell. As I mentioned earlier, the sentences are
punctuated by closed couplets, with iambic pentameter. The poem’s twenty-five heroic couplets
frequently open with time-indicating words that signify when and where the poet longs to exist,
instead of when and where the poet actually exists. Thus, in reality, the poet exists in the
punctuality of numbers and recurring words—ending in masculine rhyme—rather than the time
of night where all the fantastic festivities of sensory explosions and anthropomorphic
occurrences that she imagines occur. Poetry is, furthermore, both a trap and escape—Finch is
trapped inside the grammatical and prosodic structure of heroic couplets while the heroic
couplets carry the poet closer to her desired, imagined place, when and where she longs to be.
Then we can read the entire poem as an extended/expanded adjective that modifies “such a
night.” Since the object of this extended adjective is outside the poet, the poet’s reverie must
continue until the object comes “before our/her eyes,” until the adjective and the object exist as
one without the difference or distance between the two.  
Making a noun dress up and act like
an adjective is what poetic metaphors can do—whether it is the night or the spleen, these nouns
represent more than an object but a condition or state that suggests a specific action. Finch’s use
of these nouns suggests such specific choice that they simultaneously become connotations of
condition and action.

In addition, nouns such as “the spleen” and “the night” in Finch’s poems signify much
more than depression or the lack of light; they prefigure a noun-to-verb conversion. As the topos
of spleen and night signifies beyond the absence of cheerfulness and light, its metaphorical
dimensions extend out to mean actions that anticipate and emulate the attributes of melancholy,

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285 I’m referring to Aristotle’s praise of Homer’s vivid metaphor, which appears in my “Introduction.”
darkness and solitude. In “The Petition for an Absolute Retreat,” Finch decides to stray away from the clear and obvious path to find “a sweet, but absolute Retreat,/ Mongst Paths so lost, and Trees so high.” It is Finch’s own decision to curb the social and cultural conventions under the bright light to advocate the nocturnal life of a lonely artist. She negates the day light and social life to gain nocturnal freedom and professional solitude working as poet; she vociferously eschews empty ideological conventions while she praises the necessity of an inward and pensive mind that works to challenge and shift hegemonic practices of values devoid of personal and individual desires. Some might argue that Finch’s poetic creativity feeds on antithetical negotiations between opposites such as night and day or darkness and light, yet in Finch’s poetry both sides appear necessary to generate poetic creativity. To conclude this chapter and my somewhat experimental discussion of Finch’s poetic imagination as a movement toward synthesis, not antithesis, ascension rather than declension, or unification rather than fragmentation, I would like to compare Finch’s use of the topos of solitude and shade with Milton’s use of the topos of light and darkness to suggest that solitude and independence constitute the interiority of a poet.

Although both Milton and Finch show their anxiety working under certain disadvantaged circumstances, the presiding poetic tradition propels Milton’s poetic ambition while poetic conventions or professional ambitions are secondary to Finch’s private desire to write.286 Emotion and spirituality guide her eccentric, female, and poetic subjectivity. It is intriguing that both Finch and Milton write about female characters seeking solitude and independence to

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286 Not only was Milton writing his epic poem late in his poetic career, but he also had to emulate the monumental poetic achievement of Virgil, who arrived many centuries before his time. Time seems to be antagonistic to both poets. However, Finch tries to obstruct time’s social regularity and ideological authority by retreating from the visible and communal passage of time. By negating conventional time, Finch can shut out the external noises of doubt and anxiety about her malady and subjectivity.
personify the lonely practice of maintaining the spiritual light. After all, the poet personifies a metaphor for light—the poetic imagination can illuminate the spiritual and intellectual darkness devoid of insight and faith. To climb and achieve the greatness of Virgil, the poet must turn to his or her public and professional ambition, but to sustain in the poetic spirit, the poet must, as Milton writes, turn to “the mind through all her powers/ Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence/ Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell/ Of things invisible to mortal sight” (*PL* III. 51-55). Even in the physical darkness, Milton turns to “the mind” and “there plant[s] eyes”—the blind poet illuminates a world devoid of imperfection and mortality through the mind’s eye.

Time alone is paramount; both the poet in Finch’s “The Petition for an Absolute Retreat” and Eve in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* express how they desire solitude to be able to work independently and efficiently. In Book IX, Eve suggests to Adam:

> Thou therefore now advise
> Or hear what to my mind first thoughts present;
> Let us divide our labour, thou where choice
> Leads thee, or where most needs, whether to wind
> The woodbine round this arbour, or direct
> The clasping ivy where to climb, while I
> In yonder spring of roses intermixed
> With myrtle, find what to redress till noon:
> For while so near each other thus all day
> Our task we choose, what wonder if so near
> Looks intervene and smiles, or object new
> Casual discourse draw on, which intermits
Our day’s work brought to little, though begun

Early, and th’hour of supper comes unearned. (IX. 212-19)

For the first time in *Paradise Lost*, Eve initiates the conversation with Adam, and to introduce her argument, Eve tells Adam the system of their labor isn’t efficient. Nature grows faster than Adam and Eve, and Eve thinks they might benefit greatly from diving the labor: “Adam, well may we labor still to dress/ This garden, still to tend plant, herb and flow’r,/ Our pleasant task enjoined, but till more hands/ Aid us, the work under our labor grows,/ Luxurious by restraint” (IX. 205-209). Calmly but succinctly, Eve points out to Adam that they are not working well together, and that they would work better if they divided the tasks and worked alone. Adam suggests that God didn’t intend the time Adam and Eve spent together solely for working: “For not to irksome toil, but to delight/ He made us, and delight to reason joined” (242-43). They spend time together in socializing and courting as well: “Yet not so strictly hath our Lord imposed/ Labor, as to debar us when we need/ Refreshment, whether food, or talk between, food of the mind, or this sweet intercourse/ Of looks and smiles” (235-39). Adam dismisses Eve’s suggestion that their current work routine might not be sufficient; instead he speculates that Eve might need some time away from the work load and that she might also be tired from the “talk between” and perhaps needs some alone time: “[B]ut if much converse perhaps/ Thee satiate, to short absence I could yield./ For solitude sometimes is best society,/ And short retirement urges sweet return” (247-50). Despite Adam’s persuasion, she prefers to spend the time differently from the way Adam does—Eve introduces the concept of individual time. By addressing her need to be alone to do what she likes to do, Eve tries to inform Adam that her time does define her sense of self, whether she is going to spend her time doing productive work or simply walking in the garden. Just as Eve argues that she needs her time alone to do her own preferred
work, Finch also pleads for the similar kind of freedom and alienation from social ties that take away from her independent experience of time. This is a new way of negating time, especially by using poetry, to deny and stall any obsequious movement toward the epistemology of time. As I pointed out earlier, this is Finch’s special way to antagonize the regularized and domesticated sense of time through her poetry. The time Eve shares with Adam, in other words, is a social time, which in some ways, doesn’t help Eve understand her sole existence, besides the one defined by being Adam’s mate. For Finch, the time spent pondering and meandering alone in nature signifies the time spent being productive; for Milton, Eve’s independent use of time means an opening for potential mutability, a kind of paradigm shift not only in the ontology of time but also the ontology of his verse, for this shift in defining and using time as a private and productive space in Paradise foregrounds a philosophical and structural reason for Satan’s temptation to take place in Paradise, where the Fall hasn’t occurred. However, my point is not about the moral argument that she becomes greedy of work and time or how Eve’s desire for independence leads humanity to the scene of temptation; I am describing something else.

What Eve really wants becomes clear when we read Finch’s argument for solitude and retreat; perhaps Milton couldn’t say it for Eve, but what Eve really seeks is an experience of being alone, time spent by and for herself, time and existence completely reserved for herself—

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287 Imagine any casual conversation regarding time: “what time is it?” “It is four O’clock” (this often signifies it is time for one to do something, like go, leave, eat, sleep, etc.). This simple question about what time (more specifically, it asks “what time is now”) directly addresses the issue of identifying time. Whether we are addressing the concept of kairos or chronos, human beings ultimately identify and understand time by actions; hence the verbal tense: “I did” and “I will do.” But this further signifies that we also try to understand time by materializing it into a space—a passage, line, or an interval—occupied by actions that produce comprehensible, identifiable objects as the evidence of time: “things I did” and “things I will do.” For instance, wrinkles indicate the age—they not only signify that the time has passed, but also embody their being by their doing. Wrinkles signify (their doing) the passage of time (their being). Human beings rely on nature to figure out the passage of time, and it is natural that nature’s passage of time always leaves the fruits of its labor that make its existence comprehensible to us (i.e. vegetation tales, topos of seasonal changes).
“an absolute retreat” as Finch petitions. In addition, we must not miss the fact that Adam’s way of experiencing and identifying time signifies a fundamentally different habit—Adam is hardly alone in Eden. In Book VIII Adam remembers how he came to his existence; soon after he “new waked from soundest sleep,” Adam begins to acknowledge his surroundings. However, while naming all the animals in Eden, Adam feels a “sudden apprehension” (354). God promises Adam all the creatures in Eden belong to him, but he is still wanting more: “but in these/ I found not what methought I wanted still” (354-55). Adam defines this certain lack as the lack of “who partakes” (364) and tells God, who listens to his complaints: “In solitude/ What happiness, who can enjoy alone,/ Or all enjoying, what contentment find?” (364-66). In Paradise Lost, Adam’s time is social and communal. With very few exceptions, Adam is always seen paired with someone--conversing with Raphael or God, or working and conversing with Eve. Adam says he doesn’t want Eve to have any other experience with time except for the time spent together. The point I am trying to make here is not about Adam’s perception of time, but rather that the concept of time spent alone is alien to Adam, which is, ironically, the only way the creator would occupy his time. Thus God says the following to Adam: “A nice and subtle happiness I see/ Thou to thyself proposes, in the choice/ Of thy associates, Adam, and wilt taste/ No pleasure, though in pleasure, solitary./ What think’st thou then of me, and this my state,/ Seem I to thee sufficiently possessed/ Of happiness, or not?” (399-405). Happiness for God, of course, is uninterruptible and, most importantly, incomprehensible to Adam or human beings: “The highth and depth of thy eternal ways/ All human thoughts come short, supreme of things,/ Thou in thyself art perfect, and in thee/ Is no deficience found” (413-16). Because God is complete within himself, Adam argues, “No need that thou/ Shouldst propagate, already infinite,/ And through all numbers absolute, though one” (419-21). Adam argues that God will never experience loneliness or
incompleteness because he is absolute and ubiquitous by himself alone, but that is not Adam’s case.

In addition, it is paramount to emphasize that the lone time is associated with the creator’s time. This is why Eve’s suggestion of abandoning social time signals a beginning of something ominous—if God occupies the self-contained, independent solitary time, what does Eve’s desire for working and being alone foretell? Or, is it because the tragic fall is inevitable and also necessary for the new beginning if the character desires for greatness and aspired to ascend closer to God or truth or celestial perfection? Eve’s desire to test and embrace this novel concept of time reflects what God says about his appreciation of solitude. Many scholars have argued Eve’s separation from Adam foreshadows the ominous seed of trouble in Eden because Eve’s solitude made it more possible for Satan to succeed his plan. However, one should notice a simple fact—Satan can tempt Eve when he is with her, physically in the same place at the same time, conversing with her. The Fall happens when Eve shares her time, not when she is alone. Even when Eve wakes up from a dream and tells Adam about the troublesome dream she had where she was tempted to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, she wasn’t alone—in her dream she was visited by one “with gentle voice” and when she wakes up Adam is right beside her. Roughly put, social time yields nothing but trouble, as God simply said: “in the

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288 For instance, Maurice Kelley in *This Great Argument* suggests that Milton’s depiction of Adam reveals “that his fall is a foregone and inevitable conclusion” (149), and E. M. W. Tillyard believes that Adam and Eve are practically fallen before the actual temptation takes place in *Studies in Milton* (London, 1951). For an earlier essay exploring this topic presenting the similar type of criticism suggesting the fall is an inevitable reflection on human being’s weakness and imperfection, see A. E. Barker, “Structural Pattern in *Paradise Lost*,” *Philological Quarterly*, 28 (1949). However, Diane McColley argues for the necessity for Eve’s freedom and her ability to make choice in “Free Will and Obedience in the Separation Scene of *Paradise Lost*.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 12.1 (Winter 1972): 103-120. She acknowledges that some might perceive the separation scene in Book IX of *Paradise Lost* presents Eve and Adam are “originally flawed and their failure was inevitable, and thus blaming their Maker for sin and woe, a notion Milton consistently repudiates in both poetry and prose. Rather, the scene portrays potentially sufficient beings in the process of healthful growth, facing difficulties and learning the meaning of obedience to God's behests and imitation of God's ways” (103).
choice/ Of thy associates, Adam, and wilt taste/ No pleasure, though in pleasure, solitary” (VIII. 400-402). Yet the solitary time gives much more pleasure to the creator. Since Eve’s solitude was interrupted, Finch demands “an absolute retreat” where she can control or manipulate time and “taste” the “pleasure” from solitude, the pleasure of being able to create something of her own.

Adam is also concerned with creating something of his own—he argues to God that procreation and multiplication of his kind will result in betterment of his kind, “by conversion with his like to help” (VIII. 418). Adam believes that earthly and flawed mortals can ascend closer to the celestial truth through reproduction—through the union of two souls in love, as based on the idea of the Platonic ladder of love—and multiplication of self: “But man by number is to manifest/ His single imperfection, and beget/ Like of his like, his image multiplied,/ In unity defective, which requires/ Collateral love, and dearest amity” (VIII. 422-26). On the contrary, Eve in Paradise Lost and Finch’s poetic persona exhibit a rather spiritual and artistic bent for extending and improving their own existence than Adam’s biological one. Adam pursues biological mimesis while Eve and Finch desire poetic mimesis. As I have argued in the previous chapter on Paradise Lost, Eve’s rhetorical command significantly improves and blossoms as she takes some time alone, away from Adam. Her arguments against Satan’s pernicious speech reveal spiritual depth and insight that she does not readily exhibit when she converses with Adam. The solitude gives her time to think and a sort of shade to illuminate her mind. Without Eve’s independent and unconventional spirit, Paradise Lost will not work—the poem will not exist. Had she not gone into the woods alone and fallen into the temptation, God’s paradise would have never been lost. And this loss is ever more essential and foundational for the existence of art.
However, as Adam says, we do not conceive how God creates, and corporeal creations cannot occur without mutability. Milton’s epic poem needs a fall with an epic magnitude. The routine of antithesis and synthesis sustains and propels the corporeal realm. Both Eve and Finch’s poetic persona know where they need to be to experience the joy of a complete solitude and retreat—thus they both end up in the shaded woods. Finch exclaims about a chance to be alone in the beginning of “The Petition for an Absolute Retreat”: “Give me yet, before I dye,/ A sweet, but absolute Retreat,/ ’Mongst paths so lost, and trees so high,/ That the world may ne’er invade,/ Through such Windings and such shade,/ My unshaken liberty.” Then she further describes how her private time is being lost by participating in the pedestrian chores of daily social life. She eschews those with “listening ears” who let their time be usurped by the expectations of social and ideological conventions: “None who their vain Moments pass,/ Only studious of their Glass,/ News, that charm to listening Ears;/ That false Alarm to Hopes and Fears; That common Theme for every Fop,/ From the statesman to the shop,/ In those Coverts ne’er be spread,/ Of who’s Deceas’d, or who’s to Wed.” Finch declares that a private space undomesticated and untouched by the values of the outside world will result in a pure, true form of art. The “cleanliness” of true art will separate itself from the fake—the artist doesn’t have to forcefully lay out the differences other than simply making art that remains true to the artist’s convictions and desires, free of the “intruders” from the external world: “Courteous Fate! afford me there/ A Table spread without my care,/ With what the neighb’ring Fields impart,/ Whose Cleanliness be all it’s Art.”

In a single description of a common house object such as a table, Finch succinctly condenses the two distinctively opposite images of a woman occupying her working space; Finch’s description of “a table spread without care” challenges the common

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reactions from the reader who would more likely imagine a women’s naturalized, expected working place where she cooks and irons rather than the image of a woman sitting at her table working tirelessly on her poetry. The domestic image of women’s cooking space dissolves into Finch’s idealized creative space where the hard working poet sits at her messy table with all her works spread out “without [her] care.” Finch carries on with the comparison between writing and cooking to develop her argument for the aesthetic and moral wholesomeness of “plain, unstudied” (28) art “unshaken” (7) by affected styles and established conventions. Finch compares the cleanliness of pure art to the least cultivated or manipulated—in a sense, as pure as it is, raw—food:

When, of old, the Calf was drest,
(Tho’ to make an Angel’s feast)
In the plain, unstudied Sauce
Nor *Treufle*, nor *Morilla* was;
Nor cou’d the mighty Patriarch’s Board
One far-fetch’d Ortolane afford.
Courteous Fate, then give me there
Only plain, and wholesome Fare.
Fruits indeed (wou’d Heaven bestow)
All, that did in Eden grow,
All, but the Forbidden Tree,

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280 Imagine—the image of a messy table with the scratched-out or ink-stained papers spread out everywhere in a room is exactly what we are accustomed to envision when we think of a writer’s creative space. More importantly, this space is often associated with men. The ideology of women’s neatness often traps her in a place where the anticipation for domestic labor is inevitable. It is expected that a poet’s working table should be spread out, “without [the poet’s] care,” because the poet—a male figure—should only focus on doing the work of creation, and not the trivial work of cleaning. Only many centuries later, the conventional image of writing has become gender neutral.
Wou’d be coveted by me.  

Notice also how Finch chooses “the calf,” the young of the domestic cattle, to “make an angel’s feast” and that she uses only “the plain, unstudied sauce” to dress the meat. No elaborate or “far-fetched” (31) ingredients and flavors will do—the poet wants to make something fresh and good inside and out by keeping the beginning ingredients untainted by worldly affectations. A feast good enough to feed angels must begin with fundamentally good and pure ingredients, and a good poem should begin with a good foundation as well; a good thought bears a good fruit, “unstudied” and “unshaken” by the pressures or power of the external world, Finch argues, as it is planted in the mind illuminated and nourished by the spiritual light. Neoplatonist overtones permeate this passage as the poet seeks for the marriage of spiritual and physical solace and purity to produce poetry “Whose Cleanliness be all it’s Art.” The poet stresses the importance of the pure ingredients for “an Angel’s feast” even though she also implies there could be nothing as clean or good as angels—hence the parenthesis around the concessive clause “(Tho’ to make an Angel’s Feast).” The poet argues that one must use “unstudied” ingredients to create “only plain, and wholesome Fare” for angels and that she would prefer uncooked, fresh raw food for this “wholesome fare”: “fruits indeed (wou’d Heaven bestow)/ All, that did in Eden grow,/ All, but the Forbidden Tree” would be “coveted” by herself. The innate purity is immanent in a true work of art, and the poet wants to feed her readers an honest work of art.

If spiritual renewal and purification, in Milton’s words a kind of metaphysical renaissance “plant[ed]” in the mind to “purge and disperse,” can only occur through the poet’s

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292 Also note that the line “When, of old, the Calf was drest” can signify both the young animal and the muscle part of an old cow. The latter undoubtedly shows the new comes from the old, and the pure and brilliant can come from the dark and earthly. Finch sets off the “old” from “the calf” with commas and by placing “old” before “the calf.” Finch’s arrangement of the nouns by chronological occurrence—old came first, then the calf, and then the calf was dressed—also shows the artificiality of syntax and time construction in a sentence.
creative meandering in solitude, Eve’s desire to be alone and meander in the garden is essential for the desired fruition of pure and wholesome art. Most importantly, acknowledging one’s desire for solitude as an indication for artistic ambition supports the idea that Finch and Eve’s wandering in solitude generates a mature artistic fruition and enlightenment of the mind, in contrast to the popular condemnation of Eve’s behavior leading us to the unfortunate Fall.

According to Finch’s assertion for the innate purity that determines the merit of one’s work, both abstract and corporeal “cleanliness” in poetry can only come to exist through a private practice and routine of being a poet. A clean and serene spiritual state cannot be achieved through an over-night “absolute retreat” away from any contamination or pressure from the external world. “Retreat” must become a habit, a practice, and this practice should become the poet’s life. This is Finch’s conviction for her poetic career; the space of “absolute retreat” must be domesticated—naturalized—into a poet’s creative space. The “windings” and the “shade,” the private and hidden space where the poet can do her work without any interference or restrictions from the outside world, signifies a kind of pure “heaven” where she creates for spiritual nourishment.

Milton, however, is not in dire need of solitude or darkness; he is usurped of physical light, surrounded by darkness and solitude. Milton begins Book III of Paradise Lost with what is known as “the invocation to light,” which lasts for the next fifty-four lines. While praising God as the eternal source of both spiritual and physical light, Milton also bares is soul, expressing how his blindness pushes him into an utter isolation from the world: “But cloud instead, and ever during dark/ Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men/ Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair/ Presented with a universal blank/ Of Nature’s works to me expunged and razed,/ And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out” (III.45-50). “Since God is light,” Milton says, God is in a sense unapproachable just as the brightness of a light makes approach physically blinding:
“Since God is light,/ And never but in unapproached light/ Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in
thee,/ Bright effluence of bright essence increate” (3-6). Milton’s comparison of God as
“unapproached light” also alludes to the blind poet’s bewildered emotions toward the loss of his
physical sight, as he cannot escape from the feelings of abandonment and isolation from God.
Once again, “unapproached light” represents a light not only too bright to be seen but also
signifies a light unseen. God who obliterated the poet’s sight is the same God who is being
compared to light; yet the poet confesses that he still cannot comprehend—approach—God.
Milton feels isolated from God as he is isolated from physical light. However, even though the
overall tone of these lines might show polarizing emotions toward God and his blindness, Milton
still believes physical blindness will encourage him to find the inward light that will illuminate
the spirit and overcome the lack of physical sight. Rather than spending his time lamenting over
the loss of his physical sight, Milton exclaims that he must turn to “So much rather thou celestial
light/ Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers/ Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist
from thence/ Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell/ Of things invisible to mortal sight” (PL
III. 51-55).293 After all, it consoles Milton that the darkness he endured would be replaced by a
greater spiritual light to come; even though he is blinded from the physical world, the poet can
rely on the spiritual light that “shine[s] inward.” Pushed away from the world visible to mortal
sight, the poet must “plant” his eyes where the mind has endured self-criticism and self-doubt;
the poet believes that the light visible to one’s mortal sight cannot “irradiate” the mind the way
the spiritual light can “shine inward” and “purge and disperse.” If he can open his spiritual eye

293 Although I have already quoted these lines earlier, I can’t stress the significance of lines 51-55 from
Book 3 of Paradise Lost enough. They became the guiding light throughout my dissertation and especially helped
developing my discussion of the importance of the inward light for poetic imagination.
and look inside him, he may see the “celestial light”; he “may see and tell/ Of things invisible to
mortal sight.”

Shades are as important as lights in artistic representations, and Finch’s ardent assertion of the importance of shade, solitude, or melancholy in her poetry always amounts to an argument vouching for the most fundamental element of poetic imagination—mutability. In Finch’s “The Consolation” the poet finds solace in the circle of rise and fall and internalizes the physical law governing mutability by mimicking the routine of mutability in the form of poetry.

See, Phoebus breaking from the willing skies,
See, how the soaring Lark, does with him rise,
And through the air, is such a journey borne
As if she never thought of a return.
Now, to his noon, behold him proudly goe,
And look with scorn, on all that's great below.
A Monark he, and ruler of the day,
A fav'rite She, that in his beams does play.
Glorious, and high, but shall they ever bee,
Glorious, and high, and fixt where now we see?
No, both must fall, nor can their stations keep,
She to the Earth, and he below the Deep,
At night both fall, but the swift hand of time
Renews the morning, and again they climb,
Then lett no cloudy change, create my sorrow,
I'll think 'tis night, and I may rise to-morrow.
The images of mythical creatures and their magnificent ascension toward celestial perfection occupy the first ten lines until the concept of “Glorious, and high” reaches its highest point of escalation and exaltation of Phoebus and the Lark accomplished by the two lines opening with the repeated words, “Glorious, and high” (10). The “high,” brilliantly accented by the rising intonation preceding the question mark that concludes line ten, is depressed by a following turn that swiftly sinks into the sound of resolute decline—“No, both must fall” (11). Any poet who desires to “climb” the ladder of poetic greatness must endure the agonizing feeling of being defeated. Yet the routine of falling and rising continues as long as the poet cannot stop seeking, as Sidney writes in the beginning of his sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, “fit words to paint the blackest face of woe” while “Studying inventions fine” and “Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow/ Some fresh and fruitful showers.” Finch debunks ocular-verbocentric ideology and its perpetuation of the reduction of the topos of falling, darkness, or melancholy into the image of absence and deficiency. Finch emphasizes that the fall must occur—so can “again they climb,” as the ascendant spirit must begin somewhere to propel the poet to move forward and, as Finch’s earlier contemporary Milton insisted, “steer/ right onward.”

7 CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Large projects inevitably feel incomplete to those undertaking them, and mine is no different. Much of my method has been exploratory and suggestive rather than definitive, an

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294 Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, Sonnet 1, lines 5, 6, and 7-8.
295 John Milton, *Sonnet 22*, lines 8-9. This sonnet provides another significant and guiding theme of my dissertation, which I have discussed in the previous chapters. I thought it would be appropriate to end my last chapter (aside from the conclusion) of my dissertation with the image of motioning up and moving forward, especially after my plunging into and navigating through the vast sea of the dissertating abyss.
honest reproduction of my own intellectual bent; therefore, many works that I had intended to include always seemed to remain just outside the scope of my study. Clearly, in the future I hope to expand my examination of the topos of light and inner vision to produce a more comprehensive analysis of the authors in question, as well as incorporate a wider array of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers who share the same intellectual concerns I have traced out in the preceding pages. A clear summary here in my conclusion of what I have accomplished so far should help create a more solid foundation for such future endeavors.

As I have demonstrated, Sidney’s conception of figurative language and the poetic imagination provides a very useful foundation for an exploration of “inward light” represented in the works of Cavendish, Milton, and Finch. I have connected these figures in my study for a variety of reasons. For example, as I stated at the outset, Cavendish, Milton, and Finch all appear aligned in their insistence that accumulated sensory data gathered through scientific devices do not get one closer to “truth.” Because all three lived through the inception and early triumph of modern, experimental science, their varying yet consistent antagonism to the new science definitely provides a useful window through which to observe what they did consider a valid means of locating truth. In my study, Sidney’s reliance on “inward light” represents an alternate source of truth, one championed by all three of the later poets in my study (even Finch, whose inversion of light to darkness doesn’t diminish the interior, introspective nature of the truths she envisioned her poetry as uncovering). Sidney’s phrase opened up several important lines of investigation. For starters, the commonplace of light—or its lack—is ubiquitous in literary descriptions of truth, and, more importantly, serves to impart a sense of certain and absolute clarity to metaphoric representations combining light and truth. Furthermore, Sidney’s argument for inner vision and spiritual energy, the “inward light,” suggests that uncovering truth requires a
turning inward. Truth can be misrepresented to the physical eye, but most importantly, truth can seldom be measured in a dimension capable of going under the actual scrutiny of instruments like the microscope. Inward vision or “inward light,” for the subjects in my study, suggested a spiritual authority distinct from corporeal reality, one that surpasses material temporality.

In the dichotomy of “looking out” and “looking in” that I proposed, Sidney’s works made him an appropriate exemplar of the latter. The “inward light” that he advocates in *The Defence of Poesy* clearly announced the power of the individual imagination to grasp or produce truth in a process that renders the material world subordinate to the spiritual vision of the poet. Although literally looking in—through the microscope—Robert Hooke occupied the opposing pole of my dichotomy, for his influential work championed and popularized reliance upon physical sight and truth constructed from observable physical minutia. I have argued in this dissertation that Hooke’s microscopic seeing—and thus the reductionism inherent in modern science—undermines the autonomy of spiritual sight, which Sidney considers sacred to the poetic imagination and describes as an “inward light each mind hath in itself.” As I showed, these two modes of knowledge-production work in opposing directions. Sidney argued for the primacy of universals and “fore-conceits” that preceded individual representations of truth through metaphoric and figural representation, whereas Hooke and other scientists envisioned more and more accurate representations of truth built from accumulated physical and sensory details. In Hooke’s experiments, light is the external source to reveal and magnify the small, and he claims that his book *Micrographia* illuminates the great and spiritual in the worldly and low. Regardless of the spiritual cast of Hooke’s stated goals, however, light always remained for him an external, mechanical force, whereas the light materialized in poetry—“inward light”—is a spiritual and intellectual source to illuminate the small, the hidden, or even the intangible.
Cavendish, the subject of my second chapter, wrote extensively about the “new” science and is important because she immediately perceived in Hooke’s works what she considered to be the damagingly materialist impetus of the new scientific method. The contrast between Cavendish and Hooke proceeds from my discussion of Sidney and Hooke in that it pits the same two ways of seeing and knowing the world against one another. As I stated in chapter two, Cavendish believed the contemplative mind could uncover legitimate and large truths from very limited or even singular sensory impressions; in contrast, Hooke sought truth through the repetition of careful observation, hypotheses, and testing. Cavendish argues that Hooke’s microscopic view defines the world by subordination, or worse, atomistic misrepresentation, and in a series of scathing and belittling narratives attempted to undermine faith in the veracity of the prosthetic sight of the new scientific instruments. Unlike Sidney, Cavendish stands out as an especially forthright and practical critic and poet because her matter-of-fact, self-reflective criticism of Hooke’s *Micrographia* makes the conflict between the scientific and the poetic search for truth more discernable and the agitated position of poetry—and poets—in the advent of new science more actual and urgent. Cavendish further predicts and details how the microscopic or atomistic view of the world will not only challenge the realm of poetic mutability and imagination but also subcategorize marginalized subjectivities.296

Milton, the subject of chapters three and four, wrote consistently about seeing both physically and spiritually. As I argued, poetic seeing for Milton induces the irradiating light; it enlightens him intellectually and spiritually while exposing him to a spiritual radiation that “purges and disperses” corporeal sights, but leaves him with the sight of “things invisible to

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296 For example, in *The Blazing World*, a remarkably early work of science-fiction, Cavendish chooses a young woman, a conventionally marginalized subject, as a heroine of her story, who leaves her contemporary world to discover a utopian new world in another star, where she becomes the emperor of this new world that she governs using her own free will and reasoning.
mortal sight.” Thus in my analysis he is positioned squarely in line with Sidney, and I introduced Augustine as an additional foundation for my examination of Milton’s spiritual sight. Though the poet is unable to see outwardly, he does not need to look elsewhere anymore; Milton insists in *Paradise Lost* that the “celestial light” will “shine inward,” illuminating and escalating his “mind through all her powers” (III. 51-52). Once one becomes aware of the importance of inward and spiritual sight in Milton’s work, one understands that they comprise a theme that Milton returned to repeatedly and consistently in his major works.

Although most literary representations of light as truth materialize the spiritual authority of truth in a form of illumination and transcendence, my discussion of Finch showed how she sees the lack of physical light as a gateway to access poetic dawn—the poet becomes most independent and fruitful in exploring her poetic imagination and composing her poetry when she is away from both the physical and symbolic presence of the abundant and pervasive light. Finch compares the day light to the homogenous ideology that is everywhere—the ubiquitous day light undermines things devoid of conventional uniformity and normality. As I argued, her affinity for darkness is an esoteric and singular gesture breaking away from homogenous Western poetic conventions, one that even, I believe, undermines the verbo-ocular-ego centric values of the hegemonic social and class structures she attempted to escape in her quest for the less visual and less obvious. Finch emphasizes the role of shade as much as light in her poetic representations and encourages readers to rely on inward vision and intuition. Also, Finch’s explorations of melancholy and the lack of light in her poetry signal the most essential element of poetic imagination—mutability. The poet finds solace in the never-resting routine of rising and falling and advocates the physical law governing mutability in her poems, so that the topos of darkness

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and the nocturnal motif recur and replace the conventional image of light. Above all, Finch reassures the readers that truth can be found in less obvious, less likely places if we do not lose the “inward light.” Thus, I end my dissertation with Finch’s suggestion that enlightenment can occur in the absence of light, hoping that when this extended academic exercise is over, I will find additional thoughts to illuminate under the guidance of my own “inward light.”

I have, of course, uncovered multiple corollary projects I would like to pursue. For example, no discussion of these authors can avoid the obvious fact that they are split into two gendered pairs. As my tentative incorporation of gender in the preceding chapters shows, I am obviously interested in how the regulation of gender shaped the creation and reception of works by these authors. The burgeoning interest in the intersection of gender studies and science continues to create new materials that can profitably be imported into literary studies, particularly in the examination of the works of Cavendish. Furthermore, Milton’s Eve, it must have been obvious, emerged for me a figure of particular interest, for—her conventional role as a villain notwithstanding—she appears to possess a flexibility of mind and wisdom lacking in Adam, another division breaking upon the lines of gender.

Of all the subjects of my study, however, I definitely wound up with a special affinity for and admiration of Finch. I hope to investigate further Finch’s exploration of various sensory experiences through her unconventional use of poetic imagery. I am repeatedly struck by the way she internalizes the lack of sound—quietness—and the lack of light—darkness—to create an esoteric aesthetic combining subjectivity and poetic ambition. The marriage between subjectivity and poetic identity Finch portrays in her poems disrupts the conventional motif of ego-centric and commanding authorship, for she does not hide her psychological downfalls and social unease. Finch’s open and revealing portrayals of her uneven, unconventional inner demons help
her create a unique poetic identity independent from the dominant image of the male author. The
suspense and horror engendered by her psychological, inner monstrosity does not discourage the
poet but rather inspires her to be even more engaged in her inner unknown dark abyss. Finch
develops her own romantic aestheticism that embraces darkness and the sublime over the
conventional sense of the beautiful, far preceding Edmund Burke’s exploration of the sublime in
*A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published
almost half a century later in 1757. Burke’s idea of the sublime focuses on external stimuli and
the effect of astonishment on the readers, but Finch’s internalization of darkness, fear, and the
sublime reveals the poet’s own psychological confrontation and awakening inside her mind
rather than the emotional reaction being roused in the readers, which sets her apart from
nineteenth-century romanticism. 298 Indeed, Finch was ambivalent about the reading public, and
Finch wrote in her poem “The Introduction” that she does not intend her lines “for publick view”
(line 1) because she is afraid that her work might receive “so many censures” (2) and the
conventional critics, clearly implied as male, “all might say, they’re by a woman writ” (8). 299

The idea of growth through inner psychological chaos does require “inward light.” In
Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Milton shows through the description of Satan’s inner hell that the
thought of hell is as horrific as being in hell: “Horror and doubt distract/ His troubled thoughts,
and from the bottom stir/ The Hell within him, for within him Hell/ He brings, and round about

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298 In “Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815” to a collected volume of his poems, Wordsworth
exaggerates and misrepresents Finch’s descriptions of and emotional reactions toward nature as the nascent sign of
the nineteenth-century Romanticism.

299 Finch is aware of the unfortunate fact that the conventional readers and critics who are male will say:
“Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,/ Such an intruder on the rights of men,/ Such a presumptuous creature, is
esteemed./ The fault can by no virtue be redeemed” (9-12). And she also acutely points out how those critics
condemn women who want to think and create things for--and by--themselves: “They tell us we mistake our sex and
way:/ Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play/ Are the accomplishments we should desire./ To write, or
read, or think, or to inquire/ Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,/ And interrupt the conquests of our
prime” (lines 13-18).
him, nor from Hell/ One step no more than from himself can fly/ By change of place” (IV. 18-23). Satan laments that he carries hell within himself, that “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (IV. 75). There is no “inward light” for Satan, nor does he even try to “look in [his] heart” before he confines himself in hell. However, Finch is able to “look in [her] heart and write,” confronting her inner darkness to inspire her poetry. In Sonnet 5 of *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney asserts: “It is most true, that eyes are form’d to serve/ The inward light; and that the heavenly part/ Ought to be king, from whose rules who do swerve,/ Rebels to Nature, strive for their own smart” (lines 1-4). This “inward light” clearly proved extremely illuminating for Sidney, Cavendish, Milton, and Finch.

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300 Sidney, *Astorphil and Stella*, Sonnet 1, line 14.


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