

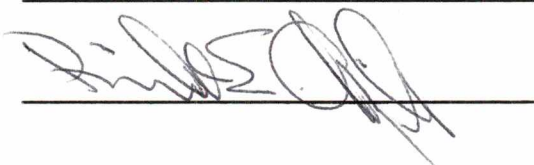
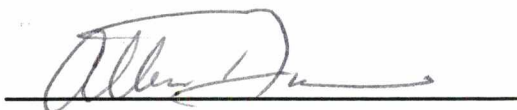
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Mary Frances Moss entitled "Reading as Responsibility: Literary Interpretation and Ethical Articulation." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.



Robert Stillman, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

READING AS RESPONSIBILITY: LITERARY
INTERPRETATION AND ETHICAL
ARTICULATION

A Dissertation
Presented for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Mary Frances Moss
August 1997

In loving memory of my mother

IRENE FRANCES SHELL MOSS

1936-1973

who "moved through dooms of love, through
sames of am through haves of give, singing
each morning out of each night, moving
through depths of height"

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Writing a dissertation is a bit like hunting a snark: just when you think you've made your point, it vanishes softly and suddenly away. That this dissertation was ever completed and its point made owes as much to the encouragement of friends and the patience of mentors as to my own efforts. I am particularly grateful to the members of my dissertation committee—Robert Stillman, Allen Dunn, Norman Sanders, and Richard Aquila—who have read drafts of this dissertation and provided helpful and incisive comments. I would also like to thank Melissa Sprenkle and Abdi Hussein for the intellectual camaraderie and the hours of lively debate that we have shared over the years.

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generously shared love, lincoln logs, legos, and chocolate chip cookies with me whenever I was feeling down. To Tanya Bennett, I owe dinners (too numerous to count) that I would otherwise have forgotten to eat. I would also like to thank Chuck Bennett—although whether I finished this dissertation because of or in spite of his efforts is a question that should provide us with material for lively debate well into the next century.

I owe my greatest debt of thanks, however, to Marty Pryor, who provided healing for the hole that ripped through the living and whose loving kindness served as a beacon that guided me out of my heart of darkness and home again.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the ways in which two Renaissance writers, Thomas Nashe and Francis Bacon, respond to the issues of community and human agency and the ways in which their responses anticipate and inform some of the key dilemmas of ethical modernity. The study demonstrates that the versions of human agency put forth by both Nashe and Bacon emerge as critical responses to a perceived breakdown of communal reciprocity. Nashe's concept of human agency is grounded in an appeal for a reciprocal community and provides a corrective both to the version of community and agency as a false either/or dichotomy and to theories that deny the value of community and agency. Bacon's vision of an instrumentalized world is, likewise, an understandable response to a perceived breakdown in community. Bacon represents the subordination of ethical projects to the service of absolutism as ethically empowering and as a means of more efficiently facilitating the advancement of collective human agency. In his enthusiastic coupling of natural philosophy and absolutism, Bacon fails to preserve an adequate space between ethical and ideological concerns. As this study points out, linking ethics to ideology is attractive, but such a linkage ultimately undercuts the strength of ethical appeals as well as paradoxically diminishes the potential for strong human agency.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: RE-ESTABLISHING CONNECTIONS TO THE WORLD

One doesn't have to be an academic these days to know that the profession of literary studies—English literary studies in particular—is in crisis, that the discipline is either in trouble or causing trouble, that its practitioners don't get no respect and that their students have been unsuccessful in penetrating the mysteries of grammar. From the pages of the politically conservative *Wall Street Journal* to those of that mainstream bastion of "alternativism" the *Utne Reader*, commentators level a barrage of diverse and frequently contradictory criticisms at literary studies, charging that the discipline is insufficiently attuned to cultural heterogeneity, that it has no respect for tradition and cultural continuity, that is over-aestheticized and politically moribund, that it is politically subversive and

morally bankrupt.¹ These criticisms are not limited to the media; increasingly, government officials, voters, and even the university itself look askance and demand that literature departments either demonstrate their use-value or lose funding.

Responses to this demand have varied. A substantial number of academics have merely continued with business as usual. (Indeed for those who are already tenured, business probably will continue as usual, at least for them if not for the profession as a whole.) Others have maintained that the crisis in literary studies, far from being a sign of malaise, is a sign of health, a sign of necessary change and growth in the discipline, a sign

¹Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson, "Introduction: A Report from the Front," *Higher Education under Fire: Politics, Economics, and the Crisis of Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 1995) point out that "[w]ithin the humanities, English is increasingly cited as the part that ruins the whole, the bad apple infecting the rest of the humanities barrel" (18). Bérubé and Nelson, while generally favorable towards recent trends in contemporary critical thought particularly as those trends support multiculturalism in classroom, nevertheless present essays by writers whose reflect a wide range of opinions about what is wrong with English departments in particular and higher education in general. Outright hostile assessments of contemporary critical trends in the university include Martin Anderson, *Imposters in the Temple: The Decline of the American University* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); Lynne V. Cheney, *Telling the Truth: A Report on the State of the Humanities in Higher Education* (Washington: D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1992); Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free, 1991); and Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Higher Education* (New York: Harper, 1990).

that the field is fulfilling its duty to provoke debate.² Still other academics have responded with indignation, accusing their critics of trying to commodify the profession, a move they claim has nothing to do with intrinsic use value and a lot to do with savvy salespersonship.³ And a small minority have embraced the brave new world of commodification and can be seen posing provocatively on the covers of their latest books and dressed in black leather, the obligatory uniform of the hip and avant-

²Patrick Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America* (New York: Routledge, 1990) makes this case. Brantlinger writes: "the crisis in education only reflects the larger crises of American and European world-hegemony. Upheaval in the humanities must and will continue as long as the U.S. and other powerful industrialized nations continue exporting 'misery and violence.' If the humanities offer the profoundest expression of our society's ideals, then social crisis must necessarily be reflected in academic work" (7).

³See, for example, Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), hereafter cited in text by author and page number. Concerning the crisis in literary studies, Wilson notes: "[U]niversities have become large, bureaucratic, disciplinary machines that process human subjects as units of consumption and utility; lecturers have become technicians who programme students with a degree of information or data along with one or two models of analysis, developing a fairly basic level of literacy into a number of 'transferable skills' available for purchase and employment on the job market. The internal rationale of the university is indistinguishable from any other institution in so far as it is subject to the logics of industrial production and market competition and run according to the technology of 'management' (259). Wilson, a lecturer in the Department of English at Lancaster University, is describing the current intellectual malaise of universities in Great Britain. However, his comments are also appropriate to the situation in American universities.

garde—a move that hardly endears them to their increasingly infuriated colleagues.⁴

But whatever their stance, most academics agree that the profession is, for good or ill, in the grip of a crisis—that its credibility and legitimacy are being questioned by those who have opinions about such matters. The question, then, is what has caused the crisis and is there anything that I, as an academic, can do to obviate the situation (assuming that I wish to obviate it)?

Paisley Livingston, in his book *Literary Knowledge*, presents one possible cause for this crisis. He argues that the central weakness plaguing contemporary literary studies is that critics do not ask good questions, that the questions they do ask are messy, inexact and consequently invite sloppy (e.g., incurably relativistic) answers.⁵ According to Livingston, most of the discipline's current disarray hinges on two related questions that typically inform literary criticism no matter what its ilk: (a) what does X work of literature mean, and (b) how can we know that

⁴Camile Paglia is perhaps the most striking example of an academic who has embraced the techniques of Madison Avenue to sell her work. The presentation and marketing of the Paglia image has more in common with the pop music industry than with the marketing techniques usually associated with the academic publishing industry.

⁵Paisley Livingston, *Literary Knowledge: Humanistic Inquiry and the Philosophy of Science* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988); hereafter cited in text by author and page number.

the particular meaning ascribed to it is valid. According to Livingston the first question inevitably leads us to the second question—one which Livingston identifies as a "poorly posed and badly misunderstood" "pseudoquestion" (203, 203) because it warrants only the most skeptical of responses:

We cannot know which interpretation is right, because we cannot know how we could know. We cannot know how we could know because we cannot know . . . [ellipses his] and so on. There is no valid metalanguage, so critical theory is ventriloquism too. (202)

No small wonder then, concludes Livingston, that the entire project of literary criticism is on the brink of capsizing, thereby condemning its purveyors to a purgatory of no respect.

As a curative for the current debacle, Livingston proposes a different set of questions, based on models of inquiry drawn from the natural and social sciences. Rather than asking what a text means, argues Livingston, we are better served if we ask such questions as (a) "what systems of interaction are the proximate conditions of the emergence of the utterance" and (b) "what is the meaning of a text in the context of a particular program of research . . . [and] in what ways can the interpretation of the text contribute to the research program through a refinement of its hypothesis" (255, 260). Asking such questions, Livingston maintains, will force us to clarify our methodological

commitments, will reinstate a much needed epistemological rigor into literary studies, and will enable us to connect literature more effectively to our own lived experience. Furthermore, asking such questions will liberate literary practice from its over-dependence on aesthetic theory—an over-dependence that Livingston argues has forced many literary critics into a stance that is "fundamentally incoherent" because the critic must simultaneously assert a work's "transcendence and closure" while maintaining that "such features can only be the result of [the critic's] own positing" (223-24).

Livingston's project in many ways closely resembles that of new historicism—an interpretative stance that has strongly influenced my own field of Renaissance studies. Since my own work relies heavily on the groundwork laid by the new historicists, I sympathize to a large degree with Livingston's comments. However, I am not convinced that the kind of sociohistorical criticism for which Livingston agitates and which the new historicists in large part practice will, in and of itself, rescue literary studies from the Slough of Cultural Despair in which the discipline currently languishes. To explain why I believe this way demands a closer examination of new historical practice.

For the purposes of the argument that follows, I will make some generalizations that obscure, to a certain extent, the critical heterogeneity of those critics identified as new

historicists (or in England, cultural materialists).⁶ Despite the unity implied by the name, new historicism is a diverse and miscellaneous movement (Aram Veesser describes new historicism as

⁶New historicism along with its English variant cultural materialism has excited a great deal of critical debate both in this country and in England. A comprehensive listing of this criticism would supply material sufficient for a good-sized bibliographic essay (the MLA bibliographical index currently lists over three hundred items on new historicism). Some key texts on this subject include Aram Veesser, ed., *The New Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Patrick Brantlinger, "Cultural Studies versus the New Historicism," *English Studies/Culture Studies: Institutionalizing Dissent*, eds. Isaiah Smithson and Nancy Ruff (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1994) 43-58; Walter Behn Michaels, "The Victims of New Historicism," *The Uses of Literary History*, ed. Marshall Brown (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) 187-96; Louis Adrian Montrose, "Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History" *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 5-12; Jean E. Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 13-43; Don E. Wayne, "Power, Politics and the Shakespearean Text: Recent Criticism in England and in the United States," *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, eds. Jean E. Howard and Marion O'Connor (London: Methuen, 1987) 47-67; Edward Pechter, "The New Historicism and its Discontents: Politicizing Renaissance Drama," *PMLA* 102 (1987): 292-303; Wilson; Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "Culture and Textuality: Debating Cultural Materialism," *Textual Practice* 4.1 (1990): 91-100; Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton, *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama* (London: Longman, 1992); Derek Longhurst, "'Not for all time but for an Age': An Approach to Shakespeare Studies," *Re-Reading English*, ed. Peter Widdowson (London, Methuen, 1982). Representative examples of new historicist and cultural material criticism include, of course, Stephen Greenblatt's seminal *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980), hereafter cited in text by title and page number; Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983), hereafter cited in text by author and page number; Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (Brighton: Harvester, 1985); Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985).

a "phrase without a referent"⁷). Nevertheless, certain common concerns inform new historicist analyses of texts: (1) Like Livingston, new historicists reject wholesale the notion that literary texts are discrete entities that can be understood without reference to the cultural and material conditions in which those texts emerge. (2) In one way or another, new historicists investigate the construction, deployment and maintenance of power within culture. (3) Concomitantly, they interrogate conventional historical and formalist paradigms—of which E.M. Tillyard's *Elizabethan World Picture* is the oft-cited example—that situate texts within a totalizing and teleological version of history, a history which texts passively mirror rather than in which they actively participate.⁸ Such paradigms, new historicists argue,

⁷Aram Veenser, "Introduction," Veenser x.

⁸Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: Vintage, 1948) argues that Renaissance England was characterized by a homogenous world order, which took its basic outline from the medieval idea of the great chain of being. Curiously, although new historicists have in many ways radically refigured English Renaissance studies, their criticism does not depart all that much from Tillyard's Elizabethan world picture; critics have, in some ways, simply replaced one hegemony with another. If it is no longer critically correct to view the literature as woven from the harmonious thread of Tudor unity, a certain unanimity of point-of-view, nevertheless, prevails—one that frequently positions literature vis à vis court culture—a court that, if subject to more tension, disjunction and disruptive activity than of Tillyard's kindly yore, still, very much controls all articulations within that culture. The new historicists, with their Marxist-inclined eclecticism, seek texts which confirm that the nexus of authority is located in the binary opposition of high and low, in the strict demarcations between the enfranchised and the disenfranchised. Consequently, what one finds is a version

obscure the complexities of Renaissance culture and place under erasure vital cultural distinctions, thereby producing a kind of ideological white mythology. To combat this "false" version of history, new historicists call for a refashioning of Renaissance studies that includes, among other things, a reexamination of the canon. (4) Finally, a recuperative vision of literary studies infuses new historicist projects—a belief that literature can and must be rescued from a wasteland of aesthetic isolationism and reconceived as a dynamic socio-political construct.

At its best, new historicism does fulfill many of Livingston's optimistic predictions about what sociohistorical inquiries can contribute to literary knowledge. New historicists have produced thicker descriptions of Renaissance culture that challenge many of the old pieties about that period's literature and that have served to liberate literature from ahistorical formalist and aesthetic analyses. Additionally, new historicism, at least in its theoretical formulations, does attempt to delineate those spaces where the past impacts the present, where we can, in Stephen Greenblatt's words, "speak with the dead."⁹

of the English Renaissance not so much refigured as refurbished: the ontogeny of new historicism recapitulates old-historicist phylogeny—Tudor authoritarianism replaces Tudor harmony.

⁹Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 1.

What new historicists have failed to do, however, is to provide an adequate account of the ethical judgments that underlie their interpretive moves. Although a set of loosely shared ethical commitments implicitly informs much new historicist criticism, new historicists have failed to identify or to defend satisfactorily these commitments. In fact, new historicists seldom invoke the term "ethics" directly, at least not vis à vis their own practices. Even when new historicists invoke the term directly, they demonstrate a marked reluctance to explore in any detail the implications of their ethical assumptions on a particular analysis. As Stephen Greenblatt writes in *Learning to Curse*: "I am certainly not opposed to methodological self-consciousness, but I am less inclined to see overtness—an explicit articulation of one's values and methods—as inherently necessary or virtuous."¹⁰

In part, this unwillingness to acknowledge directly their own ethical commitments rises out of the new historicist dependence on ideological critique as a method of textual elucidation. In the wake of post-structuralism, ideological analyses have tended to collapse everything (value, images, aesthetics, versions of social collectivity, educational practice,

¹⁰Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 167. Hereafter cited in text by title and page number.

religion, etc.) under the rubric of ideology or power.¹¹ Rendering ideology "identical with the lived experience of human existence" serves to evacuate much of the richness and complexity of that experience.¹² As such, ideological critique, while not absolutely foreclosing on the possibility of ethical commitments, does deny that we can consider those commitments outside the realm of ideology.

The work of Michel Foucault provides a good case in point. Although not a new historicist himself, Foucault has significantly

¹¹Some observers of the contemporary critical theory scene draw a distinction between ideological critique and analyses of power discourse. For example Richard Freadman and Seumas Miller, *Re-Thinking Theory: A Critique of Contemporary Literary Theory and an Alternative Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) make this distinction: "whilst ideology derives from Marxism and speculations about the sign from structural and poststructural language theory, the notion of discourse has come largely from a complex amalgam of history, historiography and cultural studies that is associated with the work of Michel Foucault" (166). I prefer Terry Eagleton's more spacious definition of ideology which allows one to consider as critics of ideology writers as diverse as Raymond Williams and Jacques Derrida: "Ideology," Eagleton writes, "is not in the first place a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their roles in society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole" (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* [Berkeley: U of California P, 1976] 16-17).

¹²See, for example, Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left, 1977). "When we speak of ideology," Althusser notes, "we should know that ideology slides into all human activity, that it is identical with the lived experience of human existence itself" (204).

influenced much of new historicist criticism.¹³ His discussion of the ways in which power circulates throughout the social system, of the ways in which socially marginal groups (such as the mentally ill, the criminal, etc.) are normalized, disciplined, and contained, and his arguments about the ways in which often seemingly insignificant practices such as the rules governing handwriting reflect the larger disciplinary forces at work in the culture have all served as models for new historicist critics. In *Madness and Civilization*, for example, Foucault provides a disturbing description of the patient, not as an individual in need of healing or support, but rather as the site of a particular set of disciplinary practices.¹⁴ The implicit assumption in Foucault's analyses (although one that he repeatedly and publicly denied¹⁵) is that such relationships of power and domination are

¹³This debt has, in many cases been explicitly acknowledged. Stephen Greenblatt, who coined the term "new historicism" cites the work of Michel Foucault as an important influence on the shape that his own work has taken. See *Learning to Curse* 3 and 146.

¹⁴Let me emphasize that the representation of the patient as someone in need of healing is a description that comes from within the psychiatric profession and not from Foucault. He merely uses this description to highlight the aporia between what is professed and the affect of actual practice. Foucault himself tends to support a romanticized version of mental illness. In *Madness and Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1965), he reflects nostalgically on madness as "an experience in the adventure of all human reason" (128).

¹⁵"Right," Foucault states, "should be viewed, I believe, not in terms of a legitimacy to be established, but in terms of the methods of subjugation that it instigates" ("Two Lectures," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*,

wrong and abusive. However, he provides us with no means for specifically analyzing what a nonrepressive, compassionate attitude toward the patient ought to be. In fact, he seems to deny the possibility of nonrepressive relationships and to dismiss "humanitarian" projects that invoke ethical claims about compassion, care, and reciprocity as mere manifestations of power. Within such a constellation, ethics are always reducible to the operations of power and domination. Any attempt to assert the justice or goodness of one's ethical judgements is but another example of false totalization. Once emptied of the concepts of justice or goodness, ethics no longer exists as an effective category.¹⁶

ed. Colin Gordon [New York: Pantheon, 1978] 96). Hereafter cited in text by author, title and page number.

¹⁶There are some very serious and real consequences of stopping one's argument at the level of ideological analysis and refusing to conjure with (except as a matter of ideology) the problem of ethical claims. One can see this, for example, in the aftermath of the wholesale deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill in this country. The rhetoric behind this effort was largely supplied by the anti-psychiatric movement—a movement much influenced by the kinds of arguments developed by Foucault in his analysis of the psychiatric profession. Turned out of the institution, many of the mentally ill joined the ranks of the homeless: according to some estimates twice as many mentally ill live on the streets as in state hospitals (statistic cited in Micheal Winerip, *9 Highland Road: Sane Living for the Mentally Ill* [New York: Pantheon, 1994] 74). My point is not to deny that many state hospitals were and still are repressive and abusive warehouses for the mentally ill; however, one could argue that because the antipsychiatric movement simply stopped with the ideological insight that mental institutions embody a certain version of domination and objectification and from this insight concluded that such institutions are therefore *de facto* bad, it

I would not deny that certain ethical goods incorporate in their definitions patterns of social exclusion and domination, nor would I deny that we invoke such goods in a nondisinterested fashion. However, I do agree with Charles Taylor's observation that just because some ethical goods "have been woven into relations of dominance and this against the express pretensions made on their behalf" does not demonstrate "that all claims of this kind are irreceivable."¹⁷ Furthermore, I agree with Taylor that reducing ethics to a mere reflection of ideology does not allow us to make sense of our moral lives in any rich or meaningful way. That ideological critique is, in fact, based (at least implicitly) on some appeal to what Taylor calls hypergoods¹⁸ indicates the truth of this observation. We cannot, for example, mount a coherent Marxist critique of labor unless we appeal (either implicitly or explicitly) to some notion of mutuality and reciprocity—hypergoods which we must be able to imagine as

provided an argument that could easily be appropriated by public officials looking for a cheap way out of an expensive problem. A careful consideration of what the ethical obligations might be to the mentally ill in the event of their deinstitutionalization was clearly needed.

¹⁷Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989) 71. Hereafter cited in text by title and page number.

¹⁸Hypergoods as Taylor defines them are higher-order goods "which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, and decided about" (*Sources of the Self* 63).

nonideologically determined if our critique is to carry any force. If we insist that these hypergoods themselves are merely products of ideology, then we undermine the strength of our critique, because we have deprived ourselves of the means of valuing (in any non-tautological sense) one set of power relations over another.¹⁹ In other words, ideological critique needs access to hypergoods if it wants to show "how we should live" or to help us to understand why we should live that way. Without recourse to these hypergoods, ideological analysis merely shows us how we do live. Clearly then access to a hypergoods perspective is indispensable to our understanding of our moral lives and our moral choices.²⁰

¹⁹From a mathematical perspective, ideology critique is a flawed system because it insists that the principle of noncontradiction is internal to the system itself. That is, I have no way of demonstrating that any part of my lived experience exists outside of ideology because my lived experience is proof of ideology's existence. Christian ideologues use a similar logic to prove the existence of God. However, as mathematician Kurt Gödel demonstrated in his famous proof (1931), a formal system must necessarily appeal to at least one term outside of itself in order to demonstrate its noncontradiction and also in order to make the system intelligible. Thus, we can say that no system is truly self-sufficient since its closure in on itself is logically impossible. I would argue that ethics is one of the necessary outside terms to which ideology critique must appeal in order to make itself understood.

²⁰The fact that such a perspective is indispensable to our understanding constitutes what Charles Taylor calls a "best account" argument. "What we need to explain," Taylor argues, "is people living their lives; the terms in which they cannot avoid living them cannot be removed from the explanandum unless we can propose other terms in which they could live them more clairvoyantly. We cannot just leap outside of these terms altogether, on the grounds that their logic doesn't fit some model of 'science' [Taylor also uses this argument about ideology] and

To be sure, not all new historicists share Foucault's obsession with deconstructing the domain of the ethical. I would argue, however, that they have inherited from the tradition of ideological critique a deep suspicion of ethics, which probably contributes to a certain wariness on their part to make their ethical commitments explicit. This wariness notwithstanding, ethical judgements particularly those concerning questions of justice lie (as I have already indicated) at the heart of much current critical debate, new historical and otherwise. In an essay on new historicism, Louis Adrian Montrose gestures towards some of the ethical stakes of the new historicist project:

Our first task must be to disabuse students of the notion that history is what's over and done with; to convince them that, on the contrary, history is always now. If by the ways in which we construe Renaissance texts, we bring our students—and ourselves—to an apprehension of our own historicity, our own ideological inscription, then we are at the same time exemplifying the possibilities for limited and

that we know a priori that human beings must be explicable in this 'science.'" The terms indispensable to explaining lives "yield the best account we can give at any given time," and we are not justified in jettisoning them (*Sources of the Self* 58 [italics Taylor's]).

localized agency within the regime of power' that at once sustains and constrains us.²¹

From this quotation and from the rest of the essay, we can extrapolate two key features that characterize what might loosely be defined as a new historicist ethics:

1. Localized readings are better, not simply for their rigor but because they incorporate marginalized narratives that might otherwise go unheard. By giving voice to these narratives, critics promote the formation of a more democratic and just society
2. The ideological underpinnings of past practice are implicated in current practice. Just practices depend upon our tracing out these ideological connections and making them plain.

These evaluative judgements require an account if one wishes to avoid the charge of crypto-normativism, one that new historicists vigorously make in their readings of other people's cultures. Furthermore, since radically localized readings of culture are so frequently used to justify a facile relativism, which sidesteps any notion of responsibility, new historicists need to delineate carefully both the purchase and losses entailed in valorizing such readings. Otherwise, they risk falling into a naive version of

²¹Louis Montrose, "Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 12.

relativism, the extreme consequences of which they would probably be unwilling to sanction in practice.

As Montrose's comment clearly indicates, academic rigor separated from purpose and divorced from meaningful connection with our own lived experience leads only to a kind of intellectual mortis. While I agree with Montrose on this count, I do not believe that the explorations of ideology as practiced by new historicists provide, in and of themselves, sufficient recuperative links between the often esoteric field of literary studies and my own everyday lived experience. Although Montrose makes considerable claims for the power of ideological critique, nowhere does he make clear exactly how the our constructions of Renaissance texts "bring us to an apprehension of our own historicity" or how this apprehension "exemplifies the possibilities for limited and localized agency within the regime of power that at once sustains and constrains us." Furthermore, the eloquent claims for the recuperative potential of ideological critique that new historicists make when they are reflecting on the practice of their trade, are not borne out in actual practice (i.e., when these critics are actually analyzing literary texts).

Montrose's essay "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture" provides a good case in point.²²

²²Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," *Representing the English*

In this essay, which originally appeared in *Representations*—an American journal with a strong new historicist bent, Montrose argues that Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provides an illustration of the ways in which fantasies both shape and are shaped by culture. The particular shaping fantasy that Montrose explores here is that of Elizabeth as the Virgin Mother, "part Madonna, part Ephesian Diana" (34). As Montrose points out, this image was a particularly effective one for Elizabeth to exploit because it obscured a whole host of cultural anxieties about gender and power and naturalized Elizabeth's claims to authority—claims that within a patriarchal society were otherwise illegitimate. Montrose argues that *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while ostensibly paying homage to Elizabeth as "Faerie Queen" and generative mother to her people, reinscribes a patriarchal system of valuation. The play, as Montrose reads it,

bodies forth the theatre's poet's contest, not only with the generativity of Elizabethan mothers but with the generativity of the royal virgin; it contests the princely claim to cultural authorship and social authority. *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* is, then, in a double sense, a creation of Elizabethan culture: for it also creates the culture by which it is created, shapes the fantasies by

which it is shaped, begets that by which it is begotten.

(56)

While I do not disagree with Montrose's conclusions about *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, nothing in his essay suggests to me how I will apply this insight to my own cultural dilemmas or whether it even has any relevance to those dilemmas. History may be "always now" as Montrose argues, but try as I will, I find no reference to "now" in his essay. To all intents and purposes, the essay concerns itself only with "what's over and done with" (i.e., Elizabeth's court).

While I admire the elegance of Montrose's analyses of Renaissance culture, I want him to make good the new historicist promise that reading Renaissance literature will illuminate considerations of the present. I want to know, for example, whether Elizabethan anxieties about the power of the maternal tell me anything about the ways in which gender struggles get played out in my own culture. If the answer is "yes," I want Montrose to sketch out that relationship. Additionally, I want to know if the conflation of sexual, familial, political, and economic domains that Montrose sees in Elizabeth culture is analogous to a similar sort of conflation today. If so, is such conflation good or bad? Should I resist the conflation or merely note it? These last two questions demand some articulation of one's ethical stance. I do not mean to pick on Montrose; however, I do feel

that the essay just cited demonstrates the limits of ideological critique as practiced by new historicists.

If I am not to loose myself in academic esoterica, I need something that will not only help me analyze my own immeshment in ideology but will also help me to determine to what uses I might put this knowledge. Otherwise, I risk finding myself in a position not unlike that of the narrator in *Foucault's Pendulum* who notes:

I could spend the morning debating proletarian matters downstairs and the afternoon pursuing aristocratic knowledge upstairs. In these two parallel universes I lived comfortably and felt no contradiction. I firmly believed that an egalitarian society was dawning, but I also thought that the trains, for example, in this better society ought to run better, and the militants around me were not learning how to shovel coal into the furnace, work the switches, or draw up the timetables. Somebody had better be ready to operate the trains.²³

Unlike the narrator, I do not like this dissociative split, which fragments knowledge between the aristocratic cogitations of the upstairs and the gritty, brutality of proletarian matters downstairs. I feel uncomfortable with a discipline for which the

²³Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt, 1989) 52.

doorstep of the university library, where scholars linger to discuss matters of ideology and cultural capital, remains largely disconnected from the doorstep of the public library a half a mile up the road, where every morning the homeless gather in anticipation of opening time and a warm place to sit for a couple of hours.

Squarely acknowledging my own ethical commitments provides one possible way of bridging the gap between these seemingly incommensurate domains. If I make Socrates' question "how I am to live" the starting point for any literary analysis in which I engage, then I cannot comfortably avoid separating my activities as a literary theorist from the other activities in my lifeworld (such as my interactions or lack thereof with homeless in my community). If, however, the starting point of my study is simply ideological analysis, then I can more easily duck the connection without feeling discomfort. This is not to say that in the process of articulating my own ethical practices, I may not draw upon the insights provided by ideological critique. Ideological analysis exposes the complicity between various forms of cultural capital and the operations of power; however, as I have pointed out, I must draw on moral language in order to discuss coherently the life-affirming aspects of that cultural capital. Ethical analysis thus provides me with a vocabulary for talking about why certain operations of power might be preferable to others.

Of course, one might argue that ethics is only theorizing of another kind and that, as such, does not *de facto* bridge the theory/praxis gap. However, I believe that, by definition, ethics cannot exist exclusively in the realm of the theoretical. I base this conclusion on the notion that questions of ethics are inextricably linked to questions of agency, that each provides what Charles Taylor calls an "inescapable framework" for the other.²⁴ Since considerations of agency must inevitably take up the matter of practice, by logical extension ethics must also take up matters of practice.

And it is the issue of practice that concerns me most. Although I study Renaissance literature, the particularities of that culture are not, in and of themselves, what interest me most. Rather, what interest me are the ways in which this literature and the cultural particularities within which it was produced can help me articulate the complexities and nuances of my own condition and that of the people with whom I share space on this planet. In the final instance, I have far more invested in the question "how am

²⁴"I want to defend," says Taylor, "the strong thesis that doing without [ethical] frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations. Moreover, this is not meant just as a contingently true psychological fact about human beings which could perhaps turn out one day not to hold for some exceptional individual or new type, some superman of disengaged objectification. Rather the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency" (*Sources of the Self* 27).

I/are we to live and practice in this world" than in the question "how did they live and practice in that world." I do not mean to suggest that literary studies should only concern itself with matters ethical or that issues of aesthetics or historicism are not legitimate areas of inquiry. Nor do I wish to proscribe reading for the pleasures of the text; indeed, to do so would mean cutting myself off from much that delights and provides me with relief in times of stress. However if questions about history, aesthetics, or linguistic play are the only questions that we ask, if we do not regularly use such inquiries to illuminate considerations of our own cultural predicaments and to come to clearer understandings of our own ethical commitments, then we do the profession, ourselves, and our students a disservice. "No respect" is the fair price we pay when we drop the human out of the humanities, when we fetishize the past at the expense of the present and privilege close readings of texts over a rigorous understanding of ourselves. Ultimately, how we negotiate our own history is a far more pressing question than, for example, whether or not Shakespeare's plays challenged the dominant court ideology. To return, then, to Livingston's diagnosis of the current literary crisis, I would argue that the problem does not arise from our asking messy questions but rather from our failing to conjure with this messiest of questions—"how shall we live?"

"But," one might ask, "why, then, study Renaissance literature (or for that matter the literature of any other period) at all? Why not instead study philosophy or, better yet, embark on whatever course of public good works (or private pleasures) that satisfies one's notion of the good life?" Such an argument might be valid if ethics were the only issue of human existence worth taking up or if it subsumed all other categories of inquiry and practice. Ethics, in fact, satisfies neither of these conditions. We would not, for example, argue that the statement " $E=mc^2$ " has any ethical content. Nor would it make much sense to argue that because this knowledge has no explicitly ethical content, it consequently has no value. What we can argue, however, is that some of the uses to which we put such knowledge do have ethical ramifications. Thus, while ethics does not provide some all-encompassing or category for organizing knowledge, neither does it occur in isolation from other disciplines. A meaningful engagement with the ethical dilemmas facing us requires dialogue coming from a variety of perspectives, including those of literary studies. Indeed, literary studies potentially *could* offer (I do not say *does* offer) not only a perspective on ethics, but models for how certain ethical dilemmas might be resolved or at least avoided. For example, when I examine Renaissance efforts to come to terms with and contain the new science, I hear resonances of my own culture's attempts to

deal with scientific breakthroughs that have outpaced our ability to deal with responsibly. If at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the new science had "put all in doubt,"²⁵ at the end of the twentieth century, many scientific "advances" have put our very lives in doubt. Thus, it is well worth examining what sorts of ethical purchase were gained and lost as people developed new strategies for coping with the burgeoning power of science. Hindsight may provide us with some insight into charting new courses vis à vis new scientific developments.

I do not mean to suggest that I can save the world by reading and analyzing Renaissance literature; indeed, I am not sure that I would want to live in a world that could be saved by such means. Nor do I want to adequate falsely the particularities of English Renaissance culture and my own culture. Several worlds of difference exist, after all, between a culture shaped by the Copernican revolution and one shaped by the developments of quantum physics. Nevertheless, I do believe that a sufficient

²⁵In his poem "An Anatomy of the World," John Donne writes thus about the new developments in science:

the new philosophy calls all in doubt
 The element of fire is quite put out;
 The sun is lost, and th' earth, and no man's wit
 Can well direct him where to look for it.
 And freely men confess that this world's spent,
 When in the planets and firmament
 They seek so man new; they see that this
 Is crumbled out again to his atomies.
 'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone.

See John Donne: *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (London: Penguin, 1987) 276.

correspondence exists between Renaissance culture and my own to enable me to benefit from that culture's responses to its dilemmas and to apply that knowledge to my working through of current cultural tension.²⁶ Furthermore I believe that the points of difference can be instructive because difference and defamiliarization allow us to see our dilemmas anew.

Privileged Domains

Thus far, I have described the aporia that exists between much of literary studies and ethics. I would now like to comment briefly on an argument that has been used to connect the two, an argument that I call the appeal to privileged domain. This argument, which has many variants, identifies literature with the marginal and oppositional. "By virtue of this oppositionality," so the argument goes, "literature (and by extension the study of literature) offers the only path out of repressive totalitarianism into a truly ethical existence."²⁷

²⁶If, in fact, it were the case (as some contemporary critical theorists have posited), that between one culture and another there can only be radical incommensurability, then I do not think that literature departments would long be able to justify their existence. Assuming that we were even able to recognize the fact of radical incommensurability (of which I am doubtful that we could), I am not sure what purpose (ethical, aesthetic, or otherwise) would be served by pointing it out.

²⁷Tolbin Siebers, *The Ethics of Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) offers a concise overview of the various articulations of this argument. Hereafter cited in text by author and page number.

I see several problems with this line of argumentation, some of which are recapitulated in less explicitly ethical terms by literary theorists of many different persuasions. In the first place, not all literature is oppositional, nor does oppositionality, *ipso facto*, equal ethical behavior. An unreflective opposition of culture is as dangerous as a blind affirmation of it. In any case, we at least ought to leave open the possibility that culture has elements worth affirming. By closing down on the possibility of affirmation, the privileged domain argument can lead to a debilitating prescriptivism, whereby texts must fit into a narrow formula in order to qualify as literature. Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* provides an excellent example of this problem. In Adorno's version of the privileged domain (which extends beyond literature to include all forms of art), art reaches its apotheosis in high modernism. Adorno dismisses, as heteronomous and debased, artistic attempts at cultural reconciliation or affirmation. For Adorno, the only art works that deserve serious consideration as art are the ones that refuse "the use of those communicative means that would make them palatable to a larger public."²⁸ By definition then, he excludes all forms of popular culture from the pantheon of "true" art. Not only does Adorno deny that the masses can produce "good"

²⁸Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Routledge, 1984) 344.

art; he denies that they can have a meaningful engagement with art since any art they affirm, even "good" art, is debased by their affirmation.

Another weakness of the privileged domain argument lies in its configuration of the notion of marginality. The debate about questions of marginality and the related issue of cultural diversity is one of the most important and exciting problems currently facing the profession. Marginality is also one of the most poorly defined terms in the current critical lexicon. The willingness of many contemporary theorists to argue for and to support a more inclusive canon is heartening. However, their tendency to make a virtue out of marginality is problematic. Marginality does not in and of itself confer ethical superiority on the persons or objects marginalized. Practically everyone can claim marginal status on some count (which raises questions about how useful the term "marginality" is as a descriptor). Practically no one can claim that all her actions are ethical even by her own definition of what constitutes the ethical. If we truly wish to conjure responsibly with the problem of marginality, then we can ill afford to substitute blind acceptance for responsible critique. Sensitivity to the conditions of economic and/or social disenfranchisement of marginalized people should not mean that we have to abdicate the right to evaluate and judge either ourselves or others.

Evaluation, however, requires an ethical framework (that is some sense of shared meaning and value be it religious or philosophical) within which we can orient ourselves and make sense of our evaluations. Evaluation also requires some notion of ourselves as agents who actually have the power to evaluate. But as Charles Taylor points out, in the modern world the very notion of frameworks has become problematic. The trajectory of much contemporary theory has been to destabilize the notion of meaning, to relegate it to the level of a fiction, to reduce it to an artifact of some amorphous concept of power that is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. In a meaningless universe, life possibilities can no longer be seen as good or bad, just or unjust. The meaning of "all possibilities is unfixed, labile, or undetermined" (*Sources of the Self* 28).

Concomitant with contemporary theory's destabilization of meaning and value is its evacuation of the concept of human agency. As I have already noted ethics and agency have a symbiotic relationship (see n24 above). Without an ethical framework, the concept of a coherent self sooner or later collapses.²⁹ In much postmodern theory we find increasingly strong

²⁹A dramatic demonstration of this phenomena can be observed in the development of Nietzschean thought over the last century. Nietzsche deconstructs the concept of ethics. Subsequent appropriations of Nietzsche (such as those done by Foucault and Derrida) build upon this deconstructive turn and collapse the concept of self as well.

exhortations to abandon the notion of self; to grant agency to the text, to the letter, to language, to anything but to human beings. This abandonment of human agency is depicted as utopian—a portent of a braver, better new world. As Michel Foucault writes at the conclusion of *The Order of Things*:

If . . . language is now emerging with greater and greater insistence in a unity that we ought to think but cannot as yet do so, is this not the sign that the whole configuration is now about to topple, and that man is in the process of perishing as the being of language continues to shine ever brighter upon our horizon? Since man was constituted at a time when language was doomed to dispersion, will he not be dispersed when language regains its unity? Ought we not . . . to give up thinking of man, or, to be more strict, to think of the disappearance of man—and the ground of possibility of all the sciences of man—as closely as possible in correlation with our concern with language? Ought we not to admit that, since language is here once more, man will return to that serene non-existence in which he was formerly maintained by the imperious unity of Discourse [*italics mine*]?³⁰

³⁰Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage-Random, 1973) 386. Elsewhere, Foucault hedges somewhat on the issues of how completely we are products of discourse, rather than agents who use discourse. In *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans.

As the denial of ethical frameworks affects our ability to fashion a meaningful version of self, so does the negation of self affect our ability to articulate coherent ethical projects.

Stephen Greenblatt's work is a good case in point. Greenblatt, as I have already noted above, feels that an explicit articulation of one's ethical commitments is unnecessary. Given the radically attenuated version of human agency to which Greenblatt subscribes, his reticence to explore his own commitments is not surprising. His version of human agency, although it appears to have undergone some slight alterations over time, is still basically the one described at the end of his highly influential book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*:

When I first conceived this book several years ago, I intended to explore the ways in which major English writers of the sixteenth century created their own performances, to analyze the choices they made in representing themselves and in fashioning characters, to understand the role of human autonomy in the construction of identity. It seemed to me

A. M. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1972), he writes: "I have not denied—far from it—the possibility of changing discourse: I have deprived the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instantaneous right to it" (209). Two pages later, however, he gently castigates those who "prefer to deny that discourse is a complex, differentiated practice . . . rather than be deprived of that tender consoling certainty of being able to change, if not the world, if not life, at least their 'meaning', simply with a fresh word that can come only from themselves, and remain forever close to the source" (211). Both works are hereafter cited in text by title and page number.

the very hallmark of the Renaissance that middle-class and aristocratic males began to feel that they possessed such shaping power over their lives, and I saw this power and the freedom it implied as an important element in my own sense of myself. But as my work progressed, I perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions—family, religion, state—were inseparably intertwined. In all my texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure unfettered subjectivity; indeed the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. Whenever I focused sharply upon a moment of apparently autonomous self-fashioning, I found not an epiphany of identity freely chosen but a cultural artifact. (256)

The principle difficulty with Greenblatt's version of human agency is that it depends on an all or nothing premise: if the self is not atomistic and unencumbered by culture, then the self cannot properly be said to exist at all. In fact, as Owen Flanagan points out in *Varieties of Moral Personality*, describing human agency as an act of pure self-creation flies in the face of most psychological accounts of how humans flourish and understand

themselves.³¹ Drawing on an Eriksonian analysis of human psychology, Flanagan argues that "effective agency" depends upon "a firm and invigorating sense of identity," which we gain through the affirmation of others and of our culture. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of mental illness is the human agent's being unable to see herself in relational terms. Thus, encumberedness far from restricting human agency is actually constitutive of human agency.

The other difficulty with Greenblatt's version of human agency is that it is at odds with the ethical framework that implicitly informs his work—an ethical framework in which heterogeneity and the empowerment of all persons, even the most marginal, are valued. He particularly concerns himself with tracing out the voices of the marginalized "other," whose voices have been written over. However, if personal identity is in fact no more than a cultural artifact, then it is not clear (1) what heterogeneity could even mean and (2) why it would it should matter whether all voices are heard. The erasure of the subject ultimately undercuts any appeal that we might make for the dignity of the other or for the other's right to self-actualization. For if the self is ephemeral, merely an inscription of some deterministic and subjectless will to power, what kind of meaning

³¹Owen Flanagan, *The Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991) 141.

can otherness have and why be so concerned about what can only be yet another inscription among so many?³²

I believe that, in fact, the possibilities for human agency are much richer than much contemporary critical theory allows. Further, I believe that we can examine the historical record—examine Renaissance literature for example—and find ample evidence for the existence of human agency. In the next several chapters of this dissertation, I examine some Renaissance responses to the problem of human agency.

I believe that we are currently conjuring with some ethical dilemmas and social pressures not unlike those faced by the English at the end of the sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth century. Like them, we are in the process of renegotiating what our positions as subjects are in relationship to the community as well as to the natural world. Further, our conceptions of the range of possibilities for human agency that might be available within community and the world are, in part, a legacy of Renaissance responses to similar issues; therefore, it is perhaps worth examining why they formulated the responses they did.

In the remainder of this work, I focus on two writers—Thomas Nashe and Francis Bacon—who utilized methods to

³²It might be objected that such a logical gap by no means proves the existence of human agency. To such objections, I would again offer Taylor's best account argument cited in n20 above.

carve out a place for the human agent which are still employed in current debates on human agency. I have chosen to focus on these two writers because the dilemmas both answered and raised by their versions of human agency anticipate many of the problems of ethical modernity. In particular, I am interested in the methods that Nashe and Bacon employ to carve out a place for the human agent (self-ironization and transgression in Nashe and an instrumentalized relation between subject and object in Bacon) because these methods figure prominently in twentieth-century attempts to resolve the intertwined predicaments of agency and ethics. In discussing the ethical goods obtained by their versions of subjectivity, I hope to provide material against which we may better articulate an account of our own subjectivity and to evaluate both the ethical goods possible within that account as well as ethical goods that we desire (but which may be occluded in current versions of subjectivity).

In Chapter Two, I attempt to provide an ethical framework within which the versions of subjectivity being posited by Nashe and Bacon can be discussed and evaluated relative to the particular ethical goods purchased by each. I have chosen to make ethical practice rather than ethical theory the locus of this chapter. Like Aristotle, I believe that the proper starting point

for a consideration of ethics lies in the realm of practice.³³ Rather than survey the full panoply of ethical practices manifested in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, I have chosen to focus on ethical practice as it is expressed in Renaissance concepts of reciprocity. I have narrowed my focus to the concept of reciprocity for two reasons. (1) I think that a culture's versions of reciprocity are revealing of the bigger ethical picture in that culture. I agree with journalist William Greider that "[o]ur values are defined by what we will tolerate when it is done to others."³⁴ (2) I believe that in many ways the versions of subjectivity posited by Nashe and Bacon respond to a certain weakening of the ideal of reciprocity. Since reciprocity is a broad topic, I have narrowed my focus to the point where that concept is likely to receive the greatest pressure—that is in the representation and treatment of the poor. Consequently, much of this chapter concerns itself with the evolution of poor laws in

³³For Aristotle, ethics lies in the realm of phronesis because ethics is by definition a temporal issue based on specific contexts rather than unchanging verities. "Matters of practical conduct," he notes, "have nothing invariable about them, any more than matters of health. This is true of ethics in general, and it is true even more of moral issues arising in particular cases. These are not a scientific or professional matters: rather, as in medicine or navigation, they require human beings to consider what is appropriate to specific circumstances (tos prattontas) and to the specific occasion (pros ton kairon)" (*Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, rev. J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980] 57).

³⁴William Greider, "Planet of Pirates: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism," *Utne Reader* May-June 1997: 72.

Renaissance England and with contemporary representations of the poor.

In Chapter Three, I focus on Thomas Nashe, examining the ways in which his narratives open up new possibilities for human agency and the kinds of ethical purchase enabled by those possibilities. I am particularly interested in the way that Nashe, while reacting against communal strictures, still leaves open the place for community. I am also interested in the ways in which Nashe links human agency to oppositionality and in the impact that this linkage has on the relations between the human agent and the community. I conclude this chapter by foregrounding a consideration of agency and community in Nashe's work against a certain strand of neo-Nietzschean thought (most notably evinced in the writings of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida), which has greatly influenced contemporary critical debates about the possibilities for both human agency and community.³⁵

³⁵Although in Chapter Three, I emphasize a series of key similarities between the philosophies of Foucault and Derrida, I do not mean to suggest that their projects are identical. Crucial differences exist between the two. François Wahl (qtd. in Alan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* [Berkeley: U of California P, 1985], hereafter cited in text by author and page number) summarizes the difference as follows: "the schema of structuralism that Derrida attacks is more or less the same as the one to which Foucault adheres" (219). Megill himself summarizes the difference in Nietzschean terminology as the difference between the Apollonian stance (Foucault) and the Dionysian stance (Derrida). He also characterizes the difference as one of "positions." "The problem with Foucault," Megill writes, "is not the absence of positions but their rapid succession. With Derrida, on the other hand, one

In Chapter Four, I examine the way in which Bacon constructs a version of human agency that depends on an instrumentalized relationship with the natural world. I argue that instrumentalizing our relationship to the world has profound ethical consequences, consequences that we can see most clearly in twentieth-century appropriations of the Baconian project. In this chapter I also return to the vexed relationship between ethics and ideology. Bacon represents the subordination of ethical projects to the service of absolutism as ethically empowering. I argue that the representation of an instrumentalized ethics is seductive and continues to exercise considerable allure for us, even though we no longer subscribe to the particular absolutist ideology embraced by Bacon. However, I also point out that while linking ethics to ideology is attractive, such a linkage ultimately undercuts the strength of ethical appeals as well as diminishes our own potential for strong agency.

I do not believe that we should be so quick to abandon strong versions of human agency because to do so is either simultaneously to lose our ability to articulate and examine the values we hold or to abandon an ethical framework altogether. If

finds an anti-ocular, antispacial stance so radical that all positions seem to be wiped out as soon as they become visible" (260). Despite their differences, I would argue that the ethical endpoints of Foucault and Derrida's projects vis à vis the individual within community are essentially the same.

we cannot clearly articulate our values then we risk falling into dogmatism. If we abandon an attempt to live ethically, then we abandon all hope, we consign ourselves to the abyss. I am not willing to abandon hope, and I will not go gently into the abyss.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DECLINE OF RECIPROCITY

That there are no times in which it is good to be poor is hardly an earth-shattering observation. With the possible exceptions of the saints, dedicated ascetics, and the occasional madman, few people if provided the choice will voluntarily chose a life of poverty over that of comfort. However, if we cannot argue that there are good times to be poor, we can argue that certain junctures in history are better than others for being poor. Such times may be better because the actual material conditions of the poor relative to the rest of the population are better, or such times may be better because the dominant representation of the poor is kinder than at other points in history. For example, we could argue that from an experiential point-of-view the condition of poverty during the 1930s depression

years was preferable to that of the late 1990s, principally because of the differences in the ways that the poor themselves have been represented in each period. Contemporary accounts from the 1930s, such as James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, all attest to the virtue and honesty of the poor in the face of debilitating economic deprivation.¹ Poverty, far from being viewed as a vice, is seen as a condition that actually ennobles its sufferers. Later twentieth-century interpretations of that period such as the popular 1970s television series *The Waltons* as well as reminiscences like Russell Baker's *Growing Up* and Studs Terkel's collection of oral histories about the depression entitled *Hard Times* all share a common vision of the poor as virtuous, honest, and imbued with a strong sense of responsibility to their fellow humans. This vision of the poor stands in sharp contrast to descriptions of the poor currently living amongst us. With few exceptions, much of the current mainstream rhetoric (both conservative and liberal) in this country depicts poverty as a condition that has principally arisen through deficits in the poor

¹My point here is not to romanticize or to dismiss the painful material conditions of poverty during the depression. As the pictures and texts of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* attest, depression-era poverty in this country was not pretty. However, I would argue that in a period in which a popular theme song was "Buddy, Can You Spare a Dime," poverty was not stigmatized to the same degree that it is today—a situation that might very well alter the psychological experience of poverty.

themselves rather than through deficits in opportunity or deficits in the economy. The media's repeated coupling of poverty and other issues such as criminality, drug abuse, moral ennui, and social irresponsibility has contributed to what has become an increasingly one-dimensional portrait of the poor in this country. Given the pervasiveness of this representation, the Draconian edge to current reforms in welfare legislation is hardly surprising. In general, we appear to have succumbed to a blame-the-victim mentality. In this respect, our attitudes have much in common with English attitudes during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Like us, the English faced a crisis of poverty, with the ranks of the impoverished increasing yearly. Like us, as England sought to cope with the issue of poverty, it employed an increasingly harsh rhetoric. Like our solutions, the solutions they proposed were all too frequently of a disciplinary and punitive nature.

I am interested in the late Tudor/early Stuart attitudes towards the poor because I believe that the manner in which a society represents and fulfills its obligations to the poor and indigent is particularly revealing of the ethical goods that the society values. If a society generally represents its poor as virtuous and if charity to the poor is generally perceived as a mutually beneficial exchange, then such a society is more likely to place a high value on the ethical goods embodied in strong

versions of community and reciprocity than a society that demonizes its poor. Where a society principally represents its poor as criminal, shiftless, and lazy, one frequently finds that the values of community and reciprocity no longer act as powerful goads on actual behavior although the general population may still continue to pay lip service to the value of such goods. Under such circumstances, the nature of charity itself changes.

Such a change occurred over the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in England. Accompanying the increasingly harsh depictions of the poor in Tudor-Stuart England was the instrumentalization of charity. During this period, traditional neighborly benevolence was "formalized and made compulsory." As utilitarian and pragmatic attitudes replaced the old ideas of traditional obligation, charity came to be viewed as an institutionalized method for disciplining, controlling, and containing the poor, for subjecting them, as Jean-Christophe Agnew writes "to the workhouse calculus of labor exchange."²

To say that depictions of the poor became increasingly harsh during the Tudor-Stuart period is not to argue that such depictions were universally accepted. We can find numerous exceptions to this general trend. Paul Slack points out in his

²Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 70. Hereafter Agnew will be cited in text by author and page number.

study of poverty and policy in Tudor and Stuart England, that three distinct views of the poor co-exist in any given period: (1) as recipients of charity and "targets for pity, sympathy . . . and sometimes admiration of their betters," (2) as threats, and (3) as potential resources who might be put to productive use. Examples of all three viewpoints could be found throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but as Slack points out, we can see a decided movement from the first to the second to the third viewpoints occurring between the beginning of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth century.³ The shift from the first to the second and third viewpoints paralleled a perceived decline in the practices of hospitality, mutuality, and reciprocity.

For the remainder of this chapter, I would like to explore in more detail the decline of the ideal of hospitality as a reference point for charitable behavior, particularly as that decline intertwines with the worsening economic conditions of the poor during this period, the increasingly harsh depiction of the poor, and the accompanying transformation of the nature of charity. My point in all of this is not to argue that one or the other of these social phenomena caused the others. Most historians currently working in period agree that the attribution

³Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988) 17-18. My account of poverty in England during the Tudor and Stuart periods draws heavily upon Slack. Hereafter Slack is cited in text by author, title and page number.

of causes and the determination of affects are notoriously difficult to pin down or substantiate. In all probability, the relationship between the social phenomena that I have identified was a synergistic and symbiotic one. In any case, a discussion of the deterioration of the hospitable ideal makes little sense unless we locate it in a more general description of poverty, contemporary perceptions of the poor, and changes in the administration of charity and poor relief.

The Economic Context of Poverty in Tudor-Stuart England

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, the economic condition of the poor markedly worsened.⁴ Over the course of the sixteenth century, the standard of living for laborers (i.e., those dependent on wages for their livelihoods) steadily declined. After 1620, the purchasing power of wages (after adjustments for inflation) picked up somewhat. However even by the end of the seventeenth century, the purchasing power of wages was thirty percent less than it had been at the beginning

⁴Slack, *Poverty and Policy*; D. G. A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500-1700*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) esp. 214-22, hereafter cited in text by author and page number; A. L. Beier, *The Problem of the Poor in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Methuen, 1983). For a more sanguine appraisal of England's poverty crisis, see D. M. Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth: England under the Later Tudors 1547-1603* (London: Longman, 1983) and John Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England* (London: Longman, 1977).

of the sixteenth century (Slack, *Poverty and Policy* 47).⁵ Not only did the economic conditions of the poor worsen, the gap between rich and poor, between merchants and wage laborers, and between the middling sorts and their poorer neighbors (particularly in the areas of textile manufacture, mining, and the crafts) widened.⁶ Furthermore, the ranks of the poor enlarged: the period between 1520 and 1620 witnessed the "downward social mobility for many of the children of the middling sort" as well as "obvious deprivation in urban tenements and rural cottages" (Slack, *Poverty and Policy* 46).

Historians have identified a number of potential causes for the crisis in poverty faced by England in the Tudor-Stuart period. Changing demographics undoubtedly contributed greatly both to the material increase in the numbers of people living in poverty as well as the economic stress experienced by those people. During this period, England experienced a population explosion, with the number of inhabitants more than doubling from 2.3 million persons in 1524 to 5.3 million persons in 1656 (Wrigley and Schofield 558). The increased population meant greater demand for

⁵Clay's discussion of real wages corroborates Slack's figures (216-218). For comparisons of real wages from 1500-1700, see E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 558. Hereafter cited in text by author and page number.

⁶Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper, 1980) 177. Hereafter cited in text by author, title and page number.

foodstuffs, which in turn forced food prices up. Population increases also meant a larger labor pool, a situation that contributed to the continued depression of wages during the period. The failure of wage rates to rise correspondingly with the rise in food prices, meant that those who were already living on the economic margins slipped deeper into poverty. Expanding populations also meant greater population mobility as people moved away from their own villages in search of jobs and food.⁷ As more people took to the roads, the problem of vagrants, masterless men, and rogues increased—a phenomena contemporary observers viewed with alarm.⁸ Robert Gray, writing in 1609 noted:

Our multitudes, like too much blood in the body, do infect
our country with plague and poverty. Our land hath brought

⁷Slack points out that population mobility during this period cannot be entirely attributed to rapid population growth. Enclosure also exacerbated the problem in parts of England, for example, Leicestershire. Slack, however, dismisses the idea that the dissolution of the monasteries contributed to population migration (*Poverty and Policy* 44).

⁸The problem of vagrancy was one that much exercised minds and imaginations in Tudor and Stuart England. Agnew notes that the increase in vagabondage in late sixteenth-century England closely correlated with a "proliferation of rogue pamphlets." Agnew argues that "rogue literature served as a figurative act of settlement: exposing, dissecting, and classifying all that threatened to confuse the social relations of Elizabethan England" (65). For other discussions of vagrancy and vagabondage, see A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985); Frank Aydelotte, *Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1913); Paul Slack, "Vagrants and Vagrancy in England 1598-1164," *Economic History Review* 2nd ser. 27 (1974): 360-79; Pound cited above; Frank Wadleigh Chandler, *The Literature of Roguery*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, 1907).

forth but it hath not milk sufficient in the breast thereof to nourish all those children which it hath brought forth. It affordeth neither employment nor preferment for those that depend upon it. And hereupon it is that many serviceable men give themselves to lewd courses, as to the robbing by the highway, theft, cozening, sharking upon the land, piracy upon the sea . . . Others live profanely, riotously, and idly, to the great dishonour of Almighty God, the detriment of the commonwealth.⁹

The demographic shift from the country to the larger towns and cities also helped to erode community cohesiveness. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, English society was "overwhelmingly" rural and agricultural (Clay 60). Although England was still predominantly rural at the end of the seventeenth century, considerable portions of the population were now concentrated in the cities. According to E. A. Wrigley, by the early decades of the eighteenth century, London alone may have absorbed as much as half of the country's population increase.¹⁰ Overall, the percentage of people living in the larger towns and

⁹Robert Gray, *A Good Speed to Virginia* (London, 1609) rpt. in *Seventeenth-Century Economic Documents*, eds. Joan Thirsk and J. P. Cooper (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 758.

¹⁰E. A. Wrigley, "A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society, 1650-1750," *Past and Present* 37 (1967): 44-70.

cities roughly doubled between 1500 and 1700 (Clay 165).¹¹ The shift of population to the cities and the transformation of agricultural practice from primarily subsistence level farming to commercial farming disrupted traditional communal relationships.¹² As Clay points out, in the subsistence-oriented agrarian culture of pre-sixteenth-century England, survival depended on the close cooperation of all members of a community. The most efficient uses of commons areas demanded the cooperation of everyone in a village. Thus a strong sense of interdependence bound communities together. The shift to commercialized farming demanded the consolidation of large tracts of farmland, and the engrossing and enclosing of other tracts of land. The existence of large commons areas constituted an inefficient use of land as far as commercialized farming was concerned. For the farmer, this shift meant that an individual's prosperity increasingly depended less on efficient communal cooperation and more on the farmer's individual efforts. The engrossing of land meant that fewer tracts of land were available for the poorest members of a village

¹¹Clay bases his figures on research done by C. W. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England* (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 1974) and Peter Clark and Paul Slack, *English Towns in Transition 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976).

¹²For discussions of changes in agricultural practice, see Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), hereafter cited in text by author and page number. Also see Clay, esp. 53-141; Joan Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* vol. 4 and vol. 5 pts. 1 and 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985).

society. With no land to farm, these individuals frequently had to leave the village and even their districts in search of employment. The communities to which they removed more often than not viewed them with suspicion since they were strangers and constituted a potential drain on the resources of those communities.

In addition to transitions in the agrarian economy, changes in other economic practices also contributed (at least in the short term) to the increased misery experienced by the poor. As numerous commentators have pointed out, the period spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England was one of tremendous economic change.¹³ This period witnessed great expansions in trade, a shift to an increasingly commercialized marketplace, sharp increases in inflation, the establishment of new industries, and the diversification of old industries.¹⁴ Joyce

¹³See, for example, Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), hereafter cited in text by author and page number; Peter Clark and Paul Slack, eds., *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 1972), hereafter cited in text by authors and page number; Clay; D. C. Coleman, *The Economy of England 1450-1750* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), hereafter cited in text by author and page number. A now somewhat dated but still useful guide to research on English economic history is W. H. Chaloner and R. C. Richardson's *Bibliography of British Economic and Social History*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984).

¹⁴For those critics used to referring to sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England as "pre-industrial," the term

Oldham Appleby comments that so tremendous was the change as the country shifted from a feudal economy to early capitalism that by comparison the "turbulent" Middle Ages appeared "part of a timeless order" (3).

The economic changes that England experienced as it made the transition to a period of nascent capitalism were reflected in the alteration of people's ideas about social order and communal obligation. The increasingly utilitarian demands of commodification provided justification for practices like enclosure—practices, which destroyed old relationships to the land, disrupted old obligations between the peasantry and the aristocracy, and resulted in the transformation of people's relations to their work and to the community. Social relationships that had once been conceived of (if not necessarily always practiced) in terms of mutuality, reciprocity, and hospitality, were increasingly seen in commodified terms. By the middle of the seventeenth century, Thomas Jacomb, a Puritan divine would write, "charity to the poor 'tis your bill of exchange; pay down your money here, and you shall receive it again in glory."¹⁵ It was against the backdrop of increasing

"industry" may sound like a misnomer. Coleman refers to the period as "pre-industrialized" rather than "pre-industrial." Palliser following his lead argues for the use of the term industry to describe developments in manufacturing and mining.

¹⁵Thomas Jacomb, *Gods Mercy for Mans Mercy* (London, 1657) qtd. in W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England 1480-1660* (London:

commodification that laments about the loss of hospitality emerged.

The Decline of Reciprocity

Before moving to a discussion of hospitality, it is perhaps important to draw a distinction between the idea of hospitality and the actual practice of hospitality. George Wheler's *The Protestant Monastery: or Christian Oeconomicks* written at the end of the seventeenth century provides a succinct description of the hospitable ideal that had dominated encomiums and jeremiads of the preceding two centuries:

Hospitality is a Liberal Entertainment of all sorts of Men, at ones House, whether Neighbors or Strangers, with kindness, especially with Meat, Drink and Lodgings.

Hospitality is an excellent Christian Practice."¹⁶

Hospitality, as Wheler and others described it, belonged to world-view in which reciprocity and mutuality functioned as dominant modes of ethical behavior. In such a world, neighbors looked after one another and the fortunate (whether mighty lords or

Allen, 1959) 201. Hereafter Jordan's work will be cited in text by author and page number.

¹⁶Qtd. in Felicity Heal, "The Idea of Hospitality in Early Modern England," *Past and Present* 102 (1984) 66, hereafter cited in text by author and page number. Heal refers to Wheler's text as "one of the last of those manuals of advice to householders . . . which had been so popular in the preceding two centuries" (66).

humble yeoman farmers) were conscious of their obligations not only to their equals but to their less fortunate neighbors. Whether such a world actually existed is doubtful, however. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century representations of the world the English had lost—a world powered by the force of hospitality and bound together as an organic whole—belonged largely to a romanticized and idealized narrative about the past, a past for which "confirmatory evidence" is, as Appleby points out, "disconcertingly hard to find" (19).¹⁷ In practice, life in medieval communities could be just as "beastly, brutish, and short" as life in the distressed and topsy-turvy period of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England.

Nevertheless, even if the practice of hospitality itself was something of a fiction, the perception that hospitality had turned "into a dumbe shew" was real enough.¹⁸ William Camden writing in 1574 noted "a great Decay of the glorious Hospitality of the

¹⁷Heal maintains that the practice of hospitality belonged to a "paradigmatic account of a golden past" (92). However, she argues that "the mismatch between ideal and reality was . . . of little significance: the image of the good host was internally consistent, based on a compelling range of scriptural and classical precept, and subject to verification in the biographies of some individuals" (92). For other discussions of hospitality see Slack, *Poverty and Policy* 19; Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 83. Hereafter Bristol will be cited in text by author and page number.

¹⁸Qtd. in Jordan 193.

Nation."¹⁹ John Taylor, in *The Complaint of Christmas* (1620) also bemoaned hospitality's loss—a phenomenon that he attributed to the introduction of new labor-saving devices such as the smoke-jack. "It was never a bountiful time," he writes, "since a Dogge in the wheele and the Iacke in the Mantletree began to turne the spit, for they began first to turne hospitality out of doors" (qtd. in Bristol 85). Elsewhere, Thomas Nashe, writing under the nom de plume Adam Fouleweather student in Asse-tronomy, noted that "diuerse poor men . . . die at riche mennes doores; pittie . . . bee exiled, good woorkes truste ouer the sea with Iacke a lent, and Hospitalitie banisht."²⁰ Another anonymous writer despairingly wrote:

[Those gentrie] that ancientlie did entertaine hospitalitie, their servants and retainers, welcomed their friends, and were helpful to such of them as stood in neede, are now come into cities, where . . . they spend that formerly did maintained so many. . . . From such devourers of estates,

¹⁹William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth Containing All the Most Important and Remarkable Passages of State, Both at Home and Abroad (So Far as They Were Linked with English Affairs) during Her Long and Prosperous Reign* (London, 1675, STC C362) 206.

²⁰Thomas Nashe, *A Wonderfull Strange and Miracvlov's Astrologicall Prognostication, The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) 389. Hereafter, Nashe's works will be cited in the text by title, volume and page number. McKerrow notes that the attribution of this text to Nashe is uncertain.

doth arise the improving of Lands, racking of Rents, destruction of ancient hospitalitie, and oppression of poor Farmers and tenants . . . the Gentry having ever thought it their greatest treasure, to have their Farmers and Tenants able at home and abroad, in good fashion to attend their service: but now if a Farmer, by multitude of Children, great charge, death of Cattel, or other accidents (to which human affaires are subject) become poore, straight comes some rich Grazier, or remorseless Usurer, offers more for his Farme then it is worth; and being no sooner accepted, the poore tenant is thrust out of doors.²¹

Such appeals to hospitable and reciprocal behavior gradually ceased to carry the same moral weight in shaping the ethical imagination of the culture. Increasingly, such appeals were overshadowed by a more pragmatic ethics that urged against the kind of "carelesse hospitalitie" that leaves houses "in worse case then common Innes or ostelries."²² I do not mean to imply that people ceased to value these goods altogether (clearly they did not). What I do mean is that the idea of these goods ceased to operate with the same force, as they were replaced by the more utilitarian goods engendered by the emergence of new market

²¹Muld Sacke, or the Apologie of *Hic Mulier* (London, 1620) qtd. in Bristol 83.

²²O. B., *Questions of Profitable and Pleasant Concernings* (London, 1594) qtd. in Heal 87.

relations. Reciprocity is a communal ideal—an ideal both enabled by and necessary to the smooth functioning of a community. As communities themselves began to break apart in response to economic and population pressures, the ideal of hospitality and reciprocity could not carry the same force.

Representations and Treatment of the Poor

Within the context of reciprocity, the experience of charity (both for the giver and the receiver) carried a rather different valence than when such charity was instrumentalized. Reciprocity naturalized charity and turned it into an expression of mutuality between rich and poor. If as Francis Rogers remarked "the rich men by their almes vphold the poore," the poor, in their turn "ouer-shadow the rich men with their prayers."²³ This view of the mutually advantageous benefits of charity was gradually displaced by a harsher view of the poor and a more disciplinarian depiction of charity.²⁴ Increasingly, the poor were seen not as "God's anointed" but as rogues and vagabonds, as "a monstrous and sottish

²³Qtd. in Jordan 183.

²⁴For a discussion of changing attitudes towards the poor, see, for example, A. L. Beier, "The Social Problems of an Elizabethan Country Town: Warwick, 1580-90" in *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. Peter Clark (New York: St. Martin's, 1981) 46-85; Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, esp. 17-36; McRae, esp. 58-79; Clay 214-36.

multitude."²⁵ Although references to the deserving poor still appeared with regularity in pamphlets and sermons of the period, these references were overshadowed by those depicting the "heinous deeds, detestable sins, crimes, and offences of the poor" (qtd. in Slack, *English Poor Law* 15). William Hext, in a letter to Lord Burghley, observed with some concern the increasing dereliction of the poor whose

zinowes are so benumbed and styff throwghe Idlenesse that as theyr lyms beyng putt to any hard labor, will greve them above measure, So as they will rather hazard ther lyves than work.²⁶

Some contemporary observers noted the increasing demonization of the poor with alarm. Arthur Warren, in his poem *The Poor Mans Passions* (1605) complained that the rich,

Degrading vs with contumelious spelles,
They touch, attach, and summon us shames,
To our discredit ring reprochfull bells,
Vagabonds, varlets, villaines, vassalls, slaues
Rogues, catepillers, runnagates, and knaues.²⁷

²⁵Robert Allen, *Treatise of Christian Beneficence* (London, 1600, STC 367) n. pag.

²⁶William Hext, Letter, *Tudor Economic Documents*, eds. R. H. Tawney and Eileen Power, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, 1924) 340.

²⁷Arthur Warren, *The Poor Mans Passions* (London, 1605, STC 25093) n. pag.

Increasingly, however, the charge was made that if the poor were poor, they were so through their own offices and no special obligation was owed to them. Such charges provided the justification for a wide range of callous and disciplinary practices towards the poor. Actions like enclosure, which threatened the livelihoods of those on society's margins were rationalized on the grounds that commons areas are "nurseries of beggars."²⁸ "Commons grounds," John Smyth wrote

draw many poor people from other places, burden the township with beggarly cottages, inmates, and alehouses and idle people; where the great part spend most of their days in a lazy idleness and petite thieveries and few or none in profitable labor.²⁹

The representation of the poor as willfully improvident was also used to justify actions like increasing rents. In *The Holy State*, for example, Thomas Fuller noted complacently, that increasing rents would "quicken" the "[t]enant rather than "gall him." "Indeed," Fuller wrote,

'tis observed, that where Landlords are very easy, the Tenants . . . seldome thrive, contenting themselves to make

²⁸"A Consideration of the Cause in Question before the Lords Touching Depopulation" (1607), Thirsk and Cooper 107.

²⁹John Smyth, *A Description of the Hundred of Berkeley in the County of Gloucester and of its Inhabitants* (1639), Thirsk and Cooper 122.

up the just measure of their rent, and not labouring for any surplusage of estate. (qtd. in McRae 79)³⁰

Fuller's text provides a grim example of the age's "endorsement of the prosperous acquisitive role of the individual in morality as opposed to social vision" (McRae 57). The comforting ideal of communal support was being replaced by an every-man-for-himself mentality.

Although contemporary commentators recognized the existence of a class of deserving poor, the linguistic stratification of the poor into the "deserving" and the vagrant "undeserving," was used to justify charitable practices which aimed as much at discipline as at relief. Charity increasingly was depicted not only as an obligation but also as a method of social control.³¹ Puritan

³⁰As McRae points out, this representation of a landlord's responsibility starkly contrasts to that presented in *A Prymmer or Boke of Private Prayer Nedeful to Be Used of Al Faythfull Christianes*: "We heartlye pray thee to sende thy holye spirite into the heartes of theym that possesse the groundes, pastures, and dwellynge places of the earthe, that they remembryng them selves to be thy tenauntes, may not racke and stretche oute the rentes of their houses and landes . . . but so lette theym oute to other, that the inhabitauntes thereof maye bothe be able to paye the rentes, and also honestly to lyve, to nourishe their familie, and to relief the poore" (39).

³¹The most comprehensive examination of charity is W. K. Jordan's *Philanthropy in England 1480-1660: A Study of the Changing Pattern of English Social Aspirations*. Most of Jordan's optimistic conclusions about philanthropy of the period have been discounted because he did not allow for inflation. For criticisms of Jordan's methods, see William G. Bittle and R. Todd Lane, "Inflation and Philanthropy in England: A Re-Assessment of W. K. Jordan's Data," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 29 (1976): 203-10; and J. F. Hadwin, "Deflating Philanthropy," *Economic History*

reformers in particular picked up on this notion as Sir Francis Walshingham had occasion to observe:

Because the multitude of rogues and poverty was an eyesore and dislike to every man, therefore they [Puritans] put it into the people's head that, if discipline were planted, there should be no beggars nor vagabonds: a thing very plausible.³²

The notion that charity could be used as form of social control fueled the developments in English poor law and provided the impetus for re-visioning charity as a form of social engineering.³³ As Slack notes, over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

Review, 2nd ser. 31 (1978): 105-17. Another useful, though more localized study of charitable practice in the period is Susan Brigden's "Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth-Century London," *Past and Present* 103 (1984): 67-112.

³²Qtd. in Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (New York: Norton, 1980) 70. Slack points out that although the Puritans were a prominent force on this front, they were not the only innovators of new schemes for poor relief (*Poverty and Policy* 150).

³³For a succinct discussion of English poor law from 1531-1782, see Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law* (London: Macmillan, 1990). See also Slack, *Poverty and Policy*; and Beier, *The Problem of the Poor in Tudor and Stuart England*, both cited above. E. M. Leonard's, *The Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1900) contains a compendious account of poor relief before 1640 but her arguments have largely been replaced. Appleby provides a discussion of the economic context surrounding the implementation of poor laws. Another discussion of the economic and political contexts of English poor relief is Joan Thirsk's *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

broad notions of hospitality gave way to narrower and more precisely defined responses—to hospitals and workhouses. Charity to "Christ in the streets" was replaced by discriminatory doles and the social controls of settlement and removal. (*Poverty and Policy* 205)

If such laws responded to erosions in traditional community structure, they also reinforced those erosions:

The simple fact of paying the poor rate made one half of all householders members of respectable society and distanced them from the destitute and disorderly . . . gave rate-payers a sense of group identity and a consciousness of social superiority. (Slack, *Poverty and Policy* 208).

Conclusion

The multiple economic and social tensions in Tudor and Stuart England demanded new strategies on the part human agents. Increasingly, human agents looked to themselves for guidance to the question "how should one live" rather than to a community.³⁴

³⁴As numerous critics and historians have pointed out, the twentieth-century notion of what constitutes human agency and selfhood is not the one that has always been operable. For the premoderns the self was conceived in the form of a communal obligation to the whole. No distinct self existed outside the community, or as one critic has put it "Homer's man does not yet regard himself as the source of his own decisions" (Bruno, Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature* [New York, 1953], qtd., in Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* [Berkeley: U of California P, 1993] 22). Most standard accounts about the evolution of human agency and the concept of the self

This new reliance on self made available different kinds of ethical purchase—a situation certain to result if the old answers to the question how shall one live no longer obtained in quite the same way. At the same time, these new strategies served to attenuate the possibilities for other kinds of ethical purchase in the community (which had been taken for granted in theory if not always realized in practice). As the gaze sifted from the community, from the well-ordered cosmos to the individual agent, the answer to the question how shall one live became more pragmatic and more brutal in its formulation. Increasingly influential (though simultaneously reviled) were the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli whose work had impact on writers such as Francis Bacon, who writes:

we are much beholden to Machiavel and others, that write what men do and not what they ought to do. For it is not possible to join serpentine wisdom with the columbine innocency, except men know exactly all the conditions of the serpent; his baseness and going upon his belly, his

follow the basic outline that Frank B. Farrell (*Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy* [New York: Cambridge UP, 1994]) sketches out: Agency (as we know it) comes into to being through a series of displacements: the natural world displaced and dedivinized as it were by God, who is himself dedivinized and replaced by man, who by the sheer weight of his own cleverness in dedivinizing the world succeeds in undermining and dedivinizing his own agency. For a dissenting viewpoint, see Bernard Williams, who takes issue with this progressivist narrative of human agency.

volubility and lubricity, his envy and sting, and the rest; that is, all forms and natures of evil. For without this, virtue lieth open and unfenced. Nay an honest man can do no good upon those that are wicked to reclaim them, without the help of the knowledge of evil.³⁵

A key element of the new pragmatism reflected in work of writers like Bacon was an increased emphasis on rationality and an emphasis on neutralizing and demystifying the cosmos, reducing it to a mechanistic order. By resorting to a mechanistic view of the world, the stage was set for an instrumentalized relationship between the world and the human agent. However, the shift to an instrumentalized world did not occur without protest as I shall argue in the next chapter.

³⁵Francis Bacon, *Of the Advancement of Learning, The Works of Francis Bacon*, eds. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, vol. 3 (1857-74; Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1989) 430-31. For a discussion of the impact of Machiavelli's thought on Bacon, Hobbes and others, see Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994). The work of Machiavelli exercised considerable influence on the literature and thought of Renaissance England. Machiavelli himself frequently appeared as a potent symbol of evil. Cardinal Pole writing in 1539 said that Machiavelli works "malitiam Satanae redolent." Renaissance texts repeatedly associated Machiavelli with hypocrisy, dissembling, and political, religious, and rhetorical abuse. As Kahn writes, he was a "convenient symbol of a range of cultural anxieties about threats to the social, political, religious, and linguistic status quo" (89). Nevertheless, despite his reputation as a devil, many writers found much that was attractive Machiavelli's emphasis on rationality. For another extended discussion of Machiavelli's influence on English Renaissance thought, see Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 1964).

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSGRESSION AND AGENCY: NASHEAN IRONY AND THE

PREDICAMENT OF COMMUNITY

As I argued in the previous chapter, the ethical purchase provided by the traditional values of hospitality and communal reciprocity proved increasingly insufficient in the face of newly emerging social pressures in Tudor-Stuart culture. These pressures demanded new strategies of subjectivity, which in turn enabled versions of ethics that were increasingly pragmatic in their trajectories. In this chapter, I want to examine these strategies as they are developed in the texts of Thomas Nashe. In particular, I am interested in the methods of self-ironization and transgression that Nashe employs to carve out a place for the human agent because these methods figure prominently in twentieth-century attempts to resolve the intertwined predicaments of agency and culture. More important, however, I am interested in the

agonistic relationship that Nashe posits between the human agent and the community.

This agonistic characterization of the individual's relationship to the community is an idea whose development is frequently traced to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹ As Alasdair MacIntyre argues, during this period we see a shift away from an Aristotelian ethic in which the good of the individual agent is seen as synonymous with the good of other individuals with whom that agent is bound in community. Rather, good comes to be seen as radically particular to each individual. By the mid-seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes, for example, has redefined the concept of "common good" as an artificial construct (a social contract as it were) that we devise as a way of inhibiting the socially destructive self-interests of individual

¹See, for example, McRae. Based on his reading of nearly a thousand primary documents, McRae (*God-Speed the Plough*) offers a comprehensive analysis of the shift in Tudor-Stuart England from a communal to an individualist ethic. McRae, who analyzes this issue from an agrarian perspective, argues that the economic developments taking place in the Tudor-Stuart countryside required a more aggressive individualism. "The legal logic of 'meum and tuum' effectively shatter[ed]" traditional notions of community because such logic favored "the rights of individuals to develop and expand their own resources, free of the social duties and restraints that dominate[d] the traditional order" (10-11). Lawrence Manley notes that shifts in market practice rendered impossible the notion of "a shared ethos" and contributed to the escalating sense of "moral isolation" on the part of the individual (*Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995] 380). Hereafter Manley's work will be cited in text by author and page number.

agents. Thus a conflicted relationship between individual and community replaces the old ideal of mutuality.²

I would be reluctant to say that the agon between the individual (who realizes her individuality precisely as a result of this agon) and the community originates during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; however, I do think that this conflict becomes an increasingly conspicuous marker in texts of the period and that we can see the concept of human agency that we recognize when we invoke that term beginning to develop.³ Although a full-fledged vocabulary of rationalized self-interests does not emerge until the mid to late seventeenth century, we can see early versions of this vocabulary developing

²Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1984). Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (1944; New York, Continuum, 1987) offer a similar description of pre-industrial societies as closely bound by a shared communal ethos. Hereafter cited in text by authors and page number. See also McCrae.

³It has become a theoretical commonplace that we can never posit beginnings or origins with any degree of accuracy. As Hans Blumenberg (*The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace [Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1983]) has noted "That at some particular time, here and now, a 'new epoch' of world history begins, and one could have been present at the event . . . is never a secure historical fact" (457). In his influential book *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), Edward Said argues that the act of positing a beginning "is a consciously intentional, productive activity" that is "not necessarily confined to the beginning" (372). "A beginning" he goes on to say, "methodologically unites a practical need with a theory, an intention with a method" (380). In some sense, then a beginning is more of a heuristic than an actual material fact.

as early as the mid-sixteenth century in texts like Sir Thomas Smith's *Discourse of the Commonweal of this Realm of England*—an economic analysis, which as Andrew McRae points out "anticipates the competitive environment of possessive individualism" (54).⁴ In the *Discourse*, Smith provides rationalistic model of economic progress to combat what he sees as England's economic woes. He argues that what motivates progress in the society is not communal interest but economic self-interest:

can we devise that all covetousness may be taken from men? No, no more than we can make men to be without ire, without gladness, without fear, and without all affections . . . For every man, as Plato says is naturally covetous of lucre and that wherein they see most lucre they will most gladly exercise. (118)

By treating covetousness as a natural condition of mankind rather than as an aberration, Smith not only acknowledges that self-interest motivates men, he tacitly sanctions it.

The shift away from a concept of human agency as defined within community to one in which human agency is realized against community, interests me because I live at a juncture in history

⁴Although Smith's discourse was not published until 1581, four years after Smith's death, Mary Dewar places its composition date at 1549 (Introduction, *A Discourse of the Commonweal of This Realm of England*, by Thomas Smith [Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1969]). Subsequent reference's to Smith's text are from Dewar's edition.

when the popular cry seems to be for a return to community. Although, I am generally sympathetic to calls for stronger versions of community, I think we would be well-advised to examine carefully why earlier articulations of strong community were challenged in the first place.

As I have already discussed in Chapter Two, England during this period experienced a series of cultural dislocations that put pressure on existing notions of reciprocity, which in turn brought pressure to bear on Renaissance concepts of self particularly as that self might be conceived vis à vis the community. Economic tensions, enclosure of commons areas, and massive demographic shifts all challenged the traditional ties that bound the individual to community.⁵ Increasingly, individual interests were seen as independent of community interests, although this shift did not occur unopposed.⁶ It is beyond the scope of my

⁵As I point out in Chapter Two, we need to be careful when making observations like this that we do not suggest an overly idealized portrait of "traditional" (in this case pre-Renaissance) communities. This does mean that we cannot see actual quantitative differences in the culture as community ties break down. We can see distinct differences such as, for examples, in changing attitudes about the poor and the community's obligations to them. By the end of the sixteenth century, poor laws had become increasingly harsh. Likewise, the decline in monies available from charity had declined necessitating the institution of special taxes for the relief of the poor.

⁶We can find ample evidence from sermons as well as from some of the more radical reformers attesting to the longing for community. As Gerrard Winstanley (a key Digger pamphleteer) wrote in 1649: "True freedom lies in the community in spirit and community in the earthly treasury, and this is Christ the true

dissertation to examine every subject position articulated during this period; instead, I want to focus on the version of human agency developed in the texts of Thomas Nashe, particularly as the agent is conceived within and against community. In the next three sections of this chapter, I argue that the Nashean agent emerges in response to a perceived breakdown in reciprocal communal relationships—a breakdown that results in a corrupt community lacking a moral center. Even the traditional purveyors of morality in the culture—the ministers and pastors—are corrupt. As Nashe notes

Those Preachers please best, which can fit vs with a cheape Religion . . . Ministers and Preachers . . . tis you that haue brought downe the price of religion; being couetous your selues, you preach nothing but couetous doctrine: your followers, seeing you giue no almes, take example (by you) to holde in their handes to, & will giue no almes. (*Christs Teares* 2:107)

For Nashe, the ubiquity of corruption precludes the possibility that an ethical critique can be mounted from within the community. Such a critique must be mounted from the margins of that community, where the rogues, the knaves, and the poor congregate.

manchild spread abroad in the creation, restoring all things unto himself" ("A Watch-Word to the City of London," 1649, *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, ed. G. H. Sabine [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1941] 317).

What we see in Nashe's work is the transformation of the culturally marginal agent (in the person of the rogue or knave) to the ethical center of the community. As Lawrence Manley notes, Nashe and other Elizabethan pamphleteers

empowered themselves through pariahhood and heterodoxy, parleying the status of placeless, degraded urbanites into the uninventoried forms of gentleness, creating distinctly experiential modes of authority and authorship. (302)

The effectiveness of Nashe's cultural critique depends upon his exploitation of his own marginal status—a status that allows him to stand over against the community he so stringently decries. In his texts, the self-ironizing gaze of the unrepentant rogue pierces the hypocrisies of the Elizabethan community, while the rogues's indecorous linguistic play destabilizes that community's appeals to authority.

De-Centering words/Recentering Word: Linguistic

Indecorum and Agency

At first glance (but only at first glance) Nashe's use of irony and transgressive play seems uncannily postmodern. Like many postmodernists (I am here thinking specifically of Foucault and Derrida), he enjoys playing with the concept of textuality, upending his readers' attempts to impose their own interpretive structures on his work, and seemingly denying that his texts

"mean" anything in particular. "Let the interpreter beware," he cautions his readers in *Pierce Penilesse* (1:155). Elsewhere he writes:

My readers peradventure may see more into it [Nashe's text] then I can; for, in comparison of them, in whatsoeuer I set forth, I am . . . as blinde as blinde Bayard, and haue the eyes of a beetle; nothing from them [the readers] is obscure, they being quicker sighted then the sunne, to spie in his beames the moates that are not, and to transforme the lightest murmuring gnat to an Elephant. (*Lenten Stuffe* 3:220)

Of course, readers being readers will interpret (as will literary critics), which drives Nashe to declare in mock despair, "[t]he onely refuge which for my abused innocencie is left me, is to take vnto me the Academicks opinion, who absolutely conclude that nothing is to be affirmed" (*The Unfortunate Traveller* 2:179).⁷ His playful refusal to stand in one spot for any length of time and his obvious enjoyment at the thought of vexing readers, who will, he knows, be unable to resist subjecting his work to their

⁷A strong anti-academicism informs all of Nashe's work. He misses no opportunity to twit "reuerend Academians": "In all other things *English* men are the stoutest of all others, but beeing Schollers and lyuing in their owne natiue soyle, theyr braines are so pesterd with full platters, that they haue no roome to bestirre them. . . . So many Dunces in Cambridge and Oxford are entertayned as chiefe members into societies, vnder pretence, though they have no great learning" (*Christs Teares* 2:123, 122 [italics Nashe's]).

own interpretive glares call to mind the acrobatic maneuvers employed by postmodernists to avoid the imposition of method or meaning on their work. Foucault's playful metadescription of himself as seen through the eyes of an imagined interlocutor provides a good point of comparison:

Are you going to change yet again, shift your position according to the questions that are put to you, and say that the objections are not really directed at the place from which you are speaking? Are you going to declare yet again that you have never been what you have been reproached with being? Are you already preparing the way out that will enable you in your next book to spring up somewhere else and declare as you're now doing: no, no, I'm not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here laughing at you? (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 17)⁸

Critical responses to Nashe's works also sound uncannily like responses to postmodernism (particularly of the Derridean variety)—with the critics assessing Nashe's texts as collages of free-floating signifiers, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing.⁹ Thus Jonathan Crewe declares that Nashe's works "are

⁸In a similar vein, Foucault states: "I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions" (*Power/Knowledge*, 193).

⁹Megill observes this same reaction to Derrida: "Often, he provokes sheer puzzlement in his readers, leading to his quick

characterized by narrative 'blockage,' a frenzied stasis of pure performance," and C. S. Lewis maintains that "[i]n a certain sense of the word 'say,' if asked what Nashe 'says,' we should have to reply Nothing." Richard Lanham argues that "[a]n inexplicable themelessness has been the real problem in almost all Nashe's writing." And Lorna Hutson writing about *Lenten Stuffe* says "reading it for fun is exhilarating, but only in short bursts; at length the extraordinary resistance of Nashe's language to any sustained interpretation becomes exasperating, even intolerable."¹⁰

However, although Nashe's strategic uses of irony, metafictional narrative, and play anticipate in many ways postmodernism's deployment of those same techniques for the purposes of critique, Nashe is not, and should not be read as, a postmodernist. In the first place, while postmodern writers use

rejection as someone utterly nonsensical and therefore not worth considering" (262).

¹⁰Jonathan V. Crewe, *Unredeemed Rhetoric: Thomas Nashe and the Scandal of Authorship* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982) 91; C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954) 416; Richard A. Lanham, "Thomas Nashe and Jack Wilton: Personality as Structure in *The Unfortunate Traveller*," *Studies in Short Fiction* 4.3 (1967): 202; Lorna Hutson, *Thomas Nashe in Context* (London: Routledge, 1989) 56. Of course, with the exception of Crewe, none of the critics attempts to place Nashe within a specifically postmodern configuration. Indeed, Lewis writes well before postmodern theory has made an entry into literary studies. Nevertheless, I would argue that all of these writers are working against the backdrop of twentieth-century literature, which over the course of the century increasingly emphasizes the performative and the metafictional techniques that we now associate with the term "postmodern." Crewe and Hutson's books are hereafter cited in text by author and page number.

these techniques to deconstruct the foundations of identity and to deny human agency any actual phenomenological status, Nashe uses these techniques as a means of triumphantly asserting his agency. Thus in *Lenten Stuffe*, Nashe proudly proclaims his ability to undertake the impossible (to write an epic in praise of red herring):

I scorne it, that my workes should turne taile to any man.
 Head, body, taile and all of a redde Herring you shall have
 of me . . . Take me at my woord, for I am the man that will
 doo it. . . . Every man can say Bee to a Battledore, and
 write in prayse of Vertue and the seuen Liberall Sciences,
 thresh corne out of the full sheaues and fetch water out of
 the Thames; but out of drie stubbble to make an after
 haruest and a plentifull croppe without sowing, and wring
 iuice out of a flint, thats *Pierce a Gods name*. (*Lenten
 Stuffe* 3:151-52 [italics Nashe's]).

His playful shifts from persona to persona, from a Jack Wilton to a Pierce Penillesse to a Will Summers and back again to Nashe, solidify his identity as the knave who is not knave but cultural metacritic. His position as deconstructor of words enables him to anatomize cultural absurdity and to identify more clearly those who are not deconstructors but destructors of meaning (i.e., those authors who "sette before vs nought but a confused masse of wordes

without matter" [*Anatomie of Absurditie* 1:10]). As for Nashe himself, he writes:

For my part, as I haue no portion in any mans opinion, so am I the Prorex of my priuate thought: which makes me terme poyson poyson, as well in a siluer peece, as in an earthen dish, and *Protaeus Protaeus*, though girt in the apparrell of *Pactolus*. (*Anatomie of Absurditie* 1:5-6 [italics Nashe's])

Nashe does not deny that meaning and value exist in the world (although he frequently does suggest that neither readers nor academics are reliable purveyors of meaning). While he is perfectly willing to play with and subvert words for the purposes of critique, transgression, or simply for the sake of annoying his adversaries, he clearly subscribes to the power of the Word—a Word that, while it may be deliberately misread (as Nashe is fond of having the churchmen in his works do) or misinterpreted, does not change with shifting contexts. "The Word of God," he writes in *Christs Teares over Ierusalem*, "be it preacht by Hipocrite or Saint, is the Worde of God, and not to be dispised or disanuld" (2:20). Mere words can be appropriated and subverted by knaves (Nashe included) for their own self-serving ends; however, the Word stands ontologically firm outside the confusion and babel of languages. That man has put aside "[t]he Law [that] commaundeth, Loue thy neighbour as thy selfe" and instead "fulfilleth the Lawe by hating his neighbour as himselfe" (*Christs Teares* 2:34 [italics

Nashe's]) in no way diminishes the integrity or authority of that law. In fact, the ideal of reciprocity contained in the divine injunction to love one's neighbor as one's self serves as the major informing principle in most of his major texts.

For modern readers who automatically equate the undoing of words with the undoing of the Word, Nashe's insistence on the sanctity of the Word seems oddly dissonant when viewed against his manic and virtuoso performances with words. This dissonance (which, I would argue, is more an artifact of twentieth-century expectations than an actual incongruity in Nashe's texts) probably accounts for the contemporary assessment of Nashe as a conservative or even reactionary writer—an assessment often incongruously rendered by the same critics who assert that Nashe writes beautifully about nothing.¹¹ Although I would agree that Nashe's texts contain both conservative and reactionary elements, I would argue that the overall trajectory of his work is radical and subversive and that to suggest otherwise is to fundamentally misread not only Nashe but the historical record. Raymond

¹¹Nashean critics tend to fall into one of two opposing camps: the one declaring that Nashe is conservative or reactionary and the other maintaining that Nashe is radical and subversive. The former camp includes McKerrow; Lanham; Peter Holbrook, *Literature and Degree in Renaissance England: Nashe, Bourgeois Tragedy, Shakespeare* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1994), base their claim about Nashe as supportive of the status quo. The latter camp includes Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Stephen Hilliard, *The Singularity of Thomas Nashe* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986).

Williams's tripartite division of cultural expression into residual, dominant, and emergent elements provides a more balanced way of understanding the "conservative" aspects of Nashe's thought.¹² As Williams points out, these three elements always exist simultaneously in our cultural practices. Thus emerging oppositional forms of social life may draw upon residual values and practices to critique dominant cultural forms. However, since I wish to argue that Nashe carves out a new space for human agency by subverting the claims to moral authority of those who possess political power in the community, I believe that the characterization of Nashe as a conservative (i.e., as a defender of the status quo) should be examined carefully.

The evidence marshaled to support the view of Nashe as a conservative supporter of the status quo clusters around his rabid anti-Puritanism, particularly his involvement in the Marprelate controversy, his support of humanist values (which certain critics align unilaterally with the court) and his alleged commercialism. As regards Nashe's anti-Puritanism, it seems to me an

¹²Williams defines "residual" as "those experiences, meanings, values, which cannot be verified or expressed in terms of the dominant culture" but which "are nevertheless practised on the basis of the residue . . . of some previous cultural formation." Williams defines the "emergent" as those "new practices, new significances, and experiences [that] are continually being created. . . We have then to see, first as it were a temporal relation between a dominant culture and on the one hand a residual and on the other hand an emergent culture" (*Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* [London: Verso, 1980] 40-41).

oversimplification to configure Puritanism as the radical stance in Elizabethan culture and every other position as conservative. Elizabethan culture was hardly so hegemonic that it only allowed for one version of subversion. In any case, Puritanism, for all that it radically challenged monarchical authority particularly in matters of religion and conscience, was not without its own conservatisms. Furthermore, while Nashe's lamentations about the moral decline of this "yron age" may sound conventional and conservative to twentieth-century readers, good evidence suggests that Nashe's contemporaries found his work quite threatening (and anything but conventional and conservative). In 1593, Nashe was summoned by the aldermen of the City of London to appear "at the next Sessions of Gaiole delyvrye of Newgate to be houlden for the Citty of London . . . Read ye to make answere to all such matters as shal be objected against him on her Majesties behalf" (qtd. in Hutson 200). The matters objected against Nashe were the criticisms leveled against city officials in *Christs Teares over Ierusalem*.¹³ Nashe was also implicated in the Isle of Dogs scandal and forced to flee to Yarmouth to avoid the imprisonment. And in 1599, two years before his death, the authorities authorized the

¹³See also Hutson, "Thomas Nashe's 'Persecution' by the Aldermen in 1593," *Notes and Queries* ns 232 (1987): 199-200; and C. G. Harlow, "Nashe's Visit to the Isle of Wight and his Publications of 1592-4," *Review of English Studies* ns 12 (1961): 7-23.

seizure of all his work and ordered that none "bee euer printed hereafter" (qtd. in Hutson xiii).

If Nashe's anti-Puritanism proves inadequate as evidence of conservatism, Nashe's role in the Marprelate controversy bears closer inspection since Nashe in all probability was directly employed by the state to respond to a series of highly seditious, not to mention illegal, Puritan pamphlets (published under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate) satirizing the Anglican church.¹⁴ The Marprelate pamphlets enjoyed popular success in part because of their novel style, which was as Neil Rhodes describes it "a mixture of evangelism and buffoonery, rude colloquialism and caustic personal satire."¹⁵ Initially the church responded with its own pamphlet *A Defence of the Government Established in the Church of England*, written by Dr. John Bridges, Dean of Sarum. The decidedly dull and measured verbosity of this piece, far from squelching Martin's popular credibility, merely provided the miscreant pamphleteer (or pamphleteers)¹⁶ with more material for

¹⁴For a discussion of Nashe's role in the Marprelate controversy, see McKerrow's comments in his addition of the *Works* (5:65-109); Leland H. Carlson, "Research on Martin Marprelate," *English Satire*, ed. Ronald Paulson and Leland H. Carlson (Los Angeles: Clark Library, 1972) 3-48; and Travis Summersgill, "The Influence of the Marprelate Controversy on the Style of Thomas Nashe," *Studies in Philology* 48 (1951): 140-60.

¹⁵Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge, 1980) 4.

¹⁶We do not know for certain whether more than one author was involved in writing the Marprelate pamphlets. A Welshman named

his satirical campaign. Recognizing the need to fight satire with satire, the church authorities turned to Nashe and some of the other University wits to write responses. With the entry of Nashe and his fellow writers into the fray, the debate turned into a verbal free-for-all; all pretenses of decorum were dispelled—a circumstance that provoked concerned responses on the part of onlookers, who were not amused by the antics of either Martin or his opponents. Francis Bacon wrote:

It is more than time that there were an end and surseance made of this immodest and deformed manner of writing lately entertained, whereby matters of religion are handled in the style of the stage. . . to turn religion into a comedy or satire, to search and rip up wounds with a laughing countenance; to intermix Scripture and scurrility sometime in one sentence; is a thing far from the devout reverence of a Christian, and scant beseeming the honest regard of a sober man.¹⁷

John Penry was widely believed to have written the pamphlets and was hanged in 1593. Penry denied the charge.

¹⁷*An Advertisment Touching the Controversies of the Church of England* in *Works* 8:76-77. Bacon was not the only person disturbed by this unauthorized levity with the word. Henry Cupper (1592) decried those "manie priuate persons" who "bold in the pride of their wittes vppon the reading of a few bookes, or the hearing of a few Sermons, to thrust foorth a Pamphlette vnto the worlde, neuer reverencing the graue censure of learned men, . . . and venturing vppon those things whereunto neither their skill,

In an *Almond for a Parrot* (the anti-Marprelate document most solidly attributed to Nashe), we can easily observe how Nashe loses sight of the purpose for which he has been hired and instead gives himself over to a heady exchange of wild whirling words and wit—an exchange in which the successful delivery of the punch line outweighs issues of decorum. Thus, he gleefully satirizes the pastor who

tumbled his wife naked into the earth at high noone, without sheete or shroude to couer her shame, breathing ouer her in an audible voice: Naked I came out of my mothers wombe, and naked I shall return againe. (1:344)

It would appear that pastors and poets, like the devil, frequently quote scripture for their own ends (or punchlines)—a practice that, while it cannot "disanull" the Word of God, most certainly does disconcert church authorities, perhaps because its implied criticism of clerical hypocrisy and abuse of God's word can be applied equally to both Anglicans and Puritans.

The license taken by Nashe in the Marprelate controversy at length threatened to overwhelm the very system that Nashe had been called upon to defend.¹⁸ As Crewe argues,

nor calling, will giue anie warrant to their consciences" (*Certaine Sermons Concerning Gods Late Visitation in the Citie of London* [1592] qtd. in Manley 310).

¹⁸In *On the Controversies of the Church*, Bacon writes of the pamphlets that the Church has commissioned: "But in plain truth I do find (to my understanding) these pamphlets as meet to be

the role played by Nashe in this controversy expanded beyond the bounds of the occasion. . . . Having acquired a relatively autonomous power in the conflict with Marprelate, Nashe did not relinquish it once the conflict ended, and he finally became a serious nuisance to his erstwhile patrons, in whose hands their "instrument" turned. (34)

In any case, I think it is hard to conclude that Nashe's involvement in the Marprelate controversy reveals any deep and abiding love for the powers that be. Nashe's alignment with state interests on this matter seems to have been less a matter of any profound respect for government than a happy coincidence of anti-Puritan sentiment—a coincidence from which Nashe might wrest a few pounds and some fame.

Does this mean that Nashe was simply an opportunist, ready to serve the richest master?¹⁹ I don't think so. However, as Nashe's bitter satires about patronage indicate, he was well aware

suppressed as the other. First, because as the former sort doth deface the government of the church in the persons of the bishops and prelates, so the other doth lead into contempt the exercises of religion in the persons of sundry preachers; so as it disgraceth an higher matter though in the meaner person" (*Works* 8:78)

¹⁹It has become a commonplace in Nashe studies to assume, on the basis of certain comments that Nashe makes about commercial writers, that he is speaking biographically. Hutson questions this kind of biographical reading and argues that we cannot assume that Nashe wrote strictly as a hack writer. On the whole, I am inclined to agree with her. If Nashe wrote strictly for commercial purposes, then he seems to have been, for a writer of his talents, singularly unsuccessful.

of the problematizing shadow that the commercial cast on the writer.²⁰ For writers, the exigencies of the commercial marketplace in Elizabethan England were quite daunting. With no laws in place to protect or even acknowledge the writer's investment in his productions, writing could not function, in itself, as a means to economic success. In those instances where men did earn an income by their pens (as in the case of Shakespeare), the written text was secondary, a pretext for some other function of the word. For the most part, writing occupied an intermediary position—as means to preferment, to position, to patronage, under the protection of which the writer's activities would be legitimated.²¹

Nashe, like most other writers of the period, prefaces his texts with appeals (mostly mock serious) to a patron. Although

²⁰For discussions on the writer's profession in Elizabethan England, see Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1987); Edwin Haviland Miller, *The Professional Writer in Elizabethan England: A Study of Nondramatic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1959); Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1984); Sandra Clark, *The Elizabethan Pamphleteers: Popular Moralistic Pamphlets, 1580-1640* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1983); Phoebe Sheavyn, *The Literary Profession in Elizabethan England*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Barnes, 1967).

²¹Lorna Hutson points out that an extreme anxiety on the part of the state about the seditious potential of writing characterizes the 1590s in England. Because of this anxiety, writers needed patrons not simply for matters of preferment but to allay any fears that they (the writers) might be nonconformist or subversive.

Nashe expends some ink flattering his sometime patrons—John Whitgift (*Summers Last Will and Testament*) and various members of the Carey family (*The Terrors of the Night* and *Christs Teares over Ierusalem*); cajoling potential patrons—Charles Blount (*Anatomie of Absurditie*); and bemoaning his lack of a patron, such activity seems for the most part a fulfillment of convention—a convention that Nashe clearly believes is morally bankrupt. In his two extended expositions on patronage—*Pierce Penillesse His Supplication to the Divell* and *Summers Last Will and Testament*—Nashe challenges the official fiction that patronage is a virtuous and profitable exchange between enlightened patron and deserving poet. Far from it, says Nashe:

cap and thanks is all our Courtiers payment: wherefore, I will counsell my frends to be more considerate in their Dedications, and not cast away so many months labour on a clown that knowes not how to vse a Scholer. . . . Alas, it is easie for a goodlie tall fellow that shineth in his silkes, to come and out face a poore simple Pedant in a thred bare cloake, and tell him his booke is prety, but at this time he is not prouided for him: marrie, about two or three daies hence if he come that waie, his Page shall say he is not within, or else he is so busie with my L. How-call-ye-him, and my L. What call ye-him, that he may not be spoken withall. . . . giue an Ape but a nut, & he will look

your head for it; or a dog a bone, and hele wag his taile;
 but guie me one of my yoong Maisters a booke, and he will
 put of his hat & blush, and so go his waie. (Pierce
 Penillesse 1:241-42)

The official moral fictions about the virtues of the patron, he argues, merely mask parasitic and usurious exchanges in which the values of the marketplace have been substituted for true virtue. In the place of an enlightened humanist aristocracy, we find sharp businessmen doing a brisk trade in patents and monopolies; we find "English Peacockes" who pretend virtue (and demand that the poet memorialize them as virtuous men) while "painting themselues with church spoils" (Pierce Penillesse 1:242).²² The system of patronage also deforms the poet, who in order to survive, must obsessively grub for the goods of a brazen world rather than figuring forth golden worlds that move men to goodness by delightful example.²³

Patronage, Nashe argues, is a socially sanctioned form of thievery, which violates the true bonds of mutuality and

²²As Hutson points out, the marketplace and the court were closely connected at this time through the granting of monopolies to favored courtiers. For a discussion about the changing face of the marketplace in Renaissance, see Agnew, cited above in Chapter Two. See also Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1991).

²³On the role of the poet, see for example Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Forrest G. Robinson (Indianapolis: Bobbs, 1970). The poet should, Sidney argues, take the world and "with his imitation make[s] his own [world], beautifying it both for further teaching and more delighting" (34).

reciprocity that ideally should tie men together in community. As such, patronage should be shunned. "[I]f my vunable pen euer enterprise such a continuate taske of praise," Nashe writes,

I woulde embowell a number of those wind pufte bladders [patrons], and disfurnish their bald-pates of the periwigs Poets haue lent them, that so I might restore glorie to his right inheritance, and these stoln Titles to their true owners. (*Pierce Penilesse* 1:243)

In the highly commercialized city and court, the ties that bind men in community break down. Gluttony abounds and the wealthy (who might serve as both patrons and moral example) prefer to "put vp a Supplication to the Parliament house, that they might haue a yard of pudding for a penie, than desire (with the Baker) that there might be three ounces of bread sold for a halfe a penny" (*Pierce Penilesse* 1:202). With patrons who have turned businessmen and who now look to their own personal enrichment rather than the enrichment of the community, the only route left for the poet is either to despair, or to play the toady. Pierce, the narrator of Nashe's book by the same name describes the situation thus:

Hauing spent many yeeres in studying how to liue, and liu'de a long time without mony . . . I began at length to looke backe to repentaunce, & addresse my endeours to prosperitie: But all in vaine, I sate vp late, and rose early, contended

with the colde and conuersed with scarcitie: for all my labours turned to losse, my vulgar Muse was despised & neglected, my paines not regarded, or slightly rewarded, and I my selfe (in prime of my best wit) laid open to pouertie. Whereupon (in a malecontent humor) I accused my fortune, raild on my patrones, bit my pen, rent my papers, and ragde in all points like a mad man. (1:157)

In desperation, Pierce turns to the devil for patronage. What follows is a mock (or, perhaps, considering the circumstances, serious) encomium of the devil, in which Pierce praises his antipatron's virtues and lauds the accomplishments (niggardliness, pride, riot, whoredom, envy, idleness) of the devil's good government. In the transgressive play of Pierce's supplication to the devil, which is at once both servile and abusive, Nashe exposes the fallen nature of system that pretends to rest on moral probity but is actually fueled by purely self-serving opportunism. It is also a piece in which Nashe declares his independence from patronage. The piece, after all, is not dedicated to a real patron but to the Devil. By eschewing the patron, Nashe proclaims his right to say what he will—to speak with the independent authority of the author who is not bound to flatter anyone. Nashe's unrepentant embrace of sin reveals the true location of sin itself, which lies not in hell, not in knavish writers like

Pierce, but in the community with its "vnder-hand cloaking of bad actions with Commonwealth pretences" (*Pierce Penilesse* 1:220).

A similar sort of transgressive play informs *Summers Last Will and Testament*.²⁴ In this play, Nashe presents patronage as a deformed imitation of traditional reciprocity—an imitation that can only be exposed by the knave (in the person of Will Summers) who through his critique of King Summer's court displaces the monarch as arbiter of justice and assumes the position of ethical authority.

Summers Last Will and Testament and the Perils of Patronage

Sometime during the Fall of 1592, John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury commissioned Thomas Nashe to write a play for the entertainment of guests who had been delayed at Croydon (the Archbishop's home) because of the plague then raging in London. The play Nashe produced, *Summers Last Will and Testament*, is a production trapped between two incommensurate demands—on the one hand the demands of its sponsor to represent certain political and cultural interests, on the other the need of the artist to

²⁴In his bibliographical study of Nashe, Robert F. Fehrenbach, "Recent Studies in Nashe," *English Literary Renaissance* 11 (1981) 344-350, remarks that little has been written on *Summers Last Will and Testament*. This state of affairs has not changed significantly in the intervening years. It is interesting that no one has commented on Nashe's treatment of patronage in this piece. Barber sees it as a kindly example of festive comedy. Hutson and Bristol both treat it as a discourse on hospitality.

represent and advertise himself. It is a play whose voice at crucial intervals pierces the discourse of privilege and power assumed as a matter of course by the coterie audience for which it is written and turns that discourse inside out. Because the play is an occasional piece, commissioned for a specific reason, its meaning as a literary and theatrical event depends upon an understanding of its location in the particular historical situation of 1592, its location vis à vis its probable audience at Croydon, and its author's location within the social and economic exigencies that shaped Elizabethan culture. In order to understand the piece, we must see it as part of a larger discursive structure that it seeks to penetrate and to manipulate for its own ends. The larger discursive structure, within which this drama operates, is, of course, the elaborate system of patronage in place within Elizabethan culture. For a young man like Thomas Nashe with no money, no family connections, and barely even the right to style himself Thomas Nashe, gent., the options were limited.²⁵ Having nothing to commend him except a university education and a remarkable facility with words, Nashe needed a

²⁵For discussions about the term "gentleman" in Elizabethan culture, see David Cressy, "Describing the Social Order of Elizabethan and Stuart England," *Literature and History* 3 (1976): 29-45; Hugh F. Kearney, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Universities and Society in Pre-Industrial Britain: 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 1970).

patron.²⁶ Whitgift was an intelligent choice. Archbishop of Canterbury, affectionately referred to by the Queen as her "little black husband," Whitgift was a testament to what a person might accomplish within a heavily politicized system of patronage. Although he might alarm powerful factions at court with his zealous Puritan-hunting, Whitgift demonstrated a marked talent for keeping his nose clean insofar as his principal patron, the Queen was concerned. When Elizabeth came out in strong opposition to the movement to divest the clergy of their vestments—an issue over which Whitgift had urged moderation as opposed to any rigid ruling—he deftly and politicly changed course, urging errant clergy to revest:

when vestments were a sign of the popish priesthood, then they were evil, even as the thing was which they signified; but now they be the tokens and the signs of the ministers of the word of God which are good, and therefore also they be good. . . . The Church of England abandoned great numbers of papistical rites and ceremonies; but because it refuseth some may it therefore retain none?²⁷

²⁶Biographical information on Nashe is scarce. McKerrow makes a bare sketch of Nashe's life in his edition of Nashe's works. Charles Nicholl, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe* (London: Routledge, 1984) attempts a biography, but his work is based more on extrapolations from Nashe's literary texts than on any additional biographical information.

²⁷John Strype, *The Life and Acts of John Whitgift, D. D.*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1822).

Clearly, Whitgift's moral investment in divestment extended only so far as did his political self-interests. Further, Whitgift picked his servants well. Strong evidence suggests that he had already employed Nashe in the Marprelate controversy, a pamphlet war in which the archbishop's propagandists distinguished themselves well—perhaps too well. At any rate, the Fall of 1592 once again found Nashe in Whitgift's employ, probably as a retainer in the archbishop's house, writing *Summers Last Will and Testament*—an ideal opportunity for an up-and-coming young writer to ingratiate himself with a powerful man and possibly gain a permanent patron.

We do not know how the Archbishop received the play; indeed, we do not even know whether the piece was actually performed (although McKerrow indicates that it was possibly performed before the Queen the following Spring).²⁸ We do know, however, that Nashe did not succeed in gaining Whitgift's permanent patronage. Although Nashe had at least one other "bout" with patronage, success eluded him. For the remainder of the 1590s the authorities were more likely to prefer him in jail than to offer him preferment.²⁹ Given the vigorous critique of patronage offered

²⁸McKerrow enters into a lengthy discussion about the possible early production history of this play.

²⁹Although there are no indications that Nashe ever ended up in jail, he had several close brushes with the law. See my discussion on p. 79 above.

in *Summers Last Will and Testament*, Nashe's failure to find permanent preferment is hardly surprising. In this drama, Nashe exposes the compromised nature of a patronage system which renders the grounds of self-construction questionable and the notion of self-interest suspect—how, after all, can we even begin to define as self, interests irreparably intertwined with and dependent upon those of the patron. As Summer comments "Oh, he is mard, that is for others made'" (3:238); yet, as Will Summers notes—those who look not to their cues are "put besides all [their] parts" (3:236). Elsewhere, Solstitium the only faithful and honest courtier present in play remarks:

Such is the state of men in honour plac'd;
They are gold vessels made for servile uses,
High trees that keepe the weather from low houses,
But cannot sheild the tempest from themselves. (3:245)

What results from these two not necessarily complementary demands of sponsor interest and self-interest is a play that blends the decorous and highly artificial tradition of courtly pastoral with the brash and potentially subversive tradition of the carnival. Nashe ties the two traditions together through the character of Will Summers, whom Nashe uses as a means of self-advertisement, as a means of negotiating the boundaries that separate him, a clergyman's son from the affluent, courtly audience at Croydon. Nashe gives his audience a pastoral pageant,

but it is a pastoral with a twist; by introducing the spirit of carnival into the play, he endows the pastoral with new potential. Nashe's pastoral is no closed hermeneutic system, operating only for the benefit of a courtly elite; rather, the play breaks open the hermeneutic circle, disrupts social hierarchies and generally destabilizes the entire proceedings.

In light of this, Nashe's choice of Will Summers (fool at Henry VIII's court) is no accident. The jester occupied a socially ambiguous position in the culture, being at once outside the hereditary channels to privilege and power enjoyed by the aristocrat and yet, in his own way, enjoying far more freedom than any courtier. Protected by his patron, a fool could voice with impunity sentiments that might cost others, who made the same comments, their careers (or their lives). At once at the center and on the margin, the fool's body was the site of social disruption: metaphorically at the farthestmost remove from the monarch—fool's were classified in household inventories with the falcons and dogs—and yet frequently, the person physically and emotionally nearest to the king.³⁰ Such was the case with the historical Will Summers, who according to commentators was the person closest to Henry VIII in the last ten years of his reign.

³⁰For an analysis of the fool's role in Renaissance culture, see Anton C. Zijderfeld, *Reality in a Looking-Glass: Rationality through an Analysis of Traditional Folly* (London: Routledge, 1982) 92-130. See also, Enid Welsford, *The Fool, His Social and Literary History* (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1988).

As Neville Williams remarks in *Henry VIII and His Court*, "wives changed, ministers fell, palace officials incurred the royal displeasure, but Will Summers went on forever."³¹ Both parasite and mirror, the jester simultaneously embodied the worst abuses of patronage and provided its critique. What better figure, then, for Nashe to choose as commentator on a monarch and his court?

Structurally, we can divide Nashe's play into two sections—the pageant, concerning the death of King Summer, and the commentary on this production provided by Will Summers. The narrative movement of the play follows the progression of the seasons: Summer, king of the seasons, symbol of bounty, justice and good husbandry (and appropriately associated with Queen Elizabeth) lies dying. As his last official act, he must bequeath his kingdom into the care of his court—for the most part a prodigal, avaricious, and contentious lot.

Nashe's play is disconcertingly aware of the means of its own production: Will Summers' raucous asides to the audience on everything from the way the actors say their lines to the quality of Nashe's verse continually disrupt the orderly progression of action, upending decorum, at every opportunity. To be sure, the metadramatical element is not unique to Nashe's play; however, no other Renaissance drama until Francis Beaumont's *Knight of the*

³¹Neville Williams, *Henry VIII and His Court* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 182.

Burning Pestle so persistently foregrounds the metadramatical and makes it central to the action of the play rather than a peripheral display of technical expertise. Will Summers' side-line critiques function as tropes of authoritative discourse; they delegitimize various courtly epistemologies. No word is stable and no man gets the last word. "Nownes and Pronounes" are "traitors," grammar is "the deuils Pater noster," "confusion of languages" is the curse of God, "[w]ords haue their course, the winde blows where it lists" (3:279-80). Throughout, Nashe employs the rhetoric of excess to transgress bounds, to challenge our ways of knowing, and to rearrange the order of things. The spirit of carnival prevails; the world is turned upside down: honesty becomes an ass; characters turn against their makers ("Ile be reueng'd on him [the playwright] to the vttermost. . . Ile sit as a *Chorus*, and flowte the Actors and him at the end of euey Sceane," comments Will Summers [3:236, italics Nashe's]); no authority continues safe, not even that of the author.

This profound sense of unease about the state of authority is not confined to Will Summers' interjections, but pervades the Summer's pastoral pageant as well. We find no golden world here but instead a miniature court marred by distemper, malcontent, and dissension—a mirror, perhaps, of the little court gathered at Croydon. "Ile call my officers to count" (3:238) says Summer, but the accounting provides small consolation, and the loyalties of

the courtiers to their monarch make but a meager show when measured against their own self-interests.

First, Summer summons Ver (Spring) to the accounting: "Ver, call to mind," he says "I am thy soueraign Lord, / And what thou hast, of me thou hadst and hold'st" (3:239 [italics Nashe's]) Thus, Summer reminds Ver, none too gently, of the system of patronage which binds them together, and of the responsibilities such a system entails on those patronized. Ver, however, responds fecklessly when taxed further about his duties:

What talke you to me of liuing within thy bounds? I tell you, none but Asses liue within their bounds. . . . This world is transitory; it was made of nothing, and it must to nothing: wherefore . . . wee must helpe consume it to nothing. (3:241)

If Ver proves to be a disappointing servant, Sol (the Sun) is an outrage. Where Ver refuses to live within his bounds, Sol steps out of bounds, setting himself up as an equal to the king:

Why, t'is a credit for your excellence
To haue so great a subject as I am:
This is your glorie and magnificence,
That, without stouping of your mightnesse,
Or taking any whit from your high state,
You can make one as mightie as your selfe. (3:248)

Needless to say, Sol does not make favorable show; Summer, in his response, laments this failure of patronage: "Hypocrisie, how it can change his shape! / How base is pride from his owne dunghill put! / How I haue rais'd thee, Sol, I list not tell, / To be the eye-sore of aspiring eyes" (3:247). Summer banishes the usurper, but he cannot silence the threats to his sovereignty that recur throughout. Repeatedly the play returns to the theme of usurpation, in Autumn's over-eager grasping for Summer's crown—"looke, how he graspes for it! / Thou shalt not haue it yet" (3:273)—in Backwinter's threats of regicide—"I will peepe foorth, thy kingdome to supplant: / My father I will quickly freeze to death, / And then sole Monarch will I sit" (3:290).

One after another, Summer summons his servants forth, and one after another, they reveal how poorly they have served him who has preferred them: "Alas," Summer remarks, "A broken staffe, a lame right hand I had, / If thou wert all the stay that held me vp" (3:257). Yet if patronage hardly redounds favorably on the monarch, neither does it promise much reward for faithful servants like Solstitium. Of all the characters in the play, Solstitium is the only one who adheres to the pastoral ideals of good husbandry and moderation:

I loue to dwell betwixt the hilles and dales;

Neither to be so great to be enuide,

Nor yet so poore the world should pitie me. (3:245)

As the one faithful servitor in King Summer's court, Solstitium, has labored long for little reward: "a few dayes eyes in my prime of youth" (2:245. When Summer questions him—"But say, Solstitium, hadst thou nought besides? / Nought but dayes eyes and faire looks gaue I thee?" (3:246)—Solstitium replies "Nothing, my Lord" (3:246). Summer's response is somewhat cavalier, derogating all blame for this oversight to Solstitium and disavowing any necessity for amending the situation now:

. . . hadst thou alwayes kept thee in my sight,
Thy good deserts, though silent, would haue askt.

. . .

I grieue no more regard was had of thee:

A little sooner hadst thou spoke to me,

Thou hadst bene heard, but now the time is past:

Death wayteth at the dore for thee and me;

Let vs goe measure out our beds in clay:

Nought but good deedes hence shall we beare away. (3:246)

Though hardly a reassuring advertisement for faithful servants, the comment provides an insightful examination of the way patronage actually works, as does Solstitium's laconic rejoinder: "Deserts, my lord, of ancient seruitours / Are like old sores, which may not be ript vp" (3:246).

And from the side-lines comes Will Summers' mocking laughter—"Fye, fye, of honesty, fye! Solstitium is an asse,

perdy" (3:246)—reinforcing the message, lest we still have missed it, that patronage represents the deformation rather than the fulfillment of communal relationships. King Summer's court where "all is turned to consumption" belies the rich plenitude of the golden worlds invoked by court poets. Even Christmas the traditional symbol of hospitality and goodwill is turned "snudge" (3:287). In a celebration of miserliness, he notes,

I am afraid to keepe past one or two seruants, least, hungry knaues, they should rob me: and those I keepe, I warrant I do not pamper vp too lusty; I keepe them vnder with red Herring and poor Iohn all the yeare long. I haue dambd vp my chimnies for feare (though I burne nothing but small cole) my house should be set on fire with the smoake. I will not deny, but once in a great dozen yeare, when there is a great rot of sheepe, and I knowe not what to do with them, I keepe open house for all the beggars, in some of my out-yardes; marry, they must bring bread with them, I am no Baker. (3:287)

Given the seriousness of the accusations that Nashe levels against patronage, he must hedge his bets lest he be held accountable for this critique (disreputable courts being chancy matters to discuss in the 1590s). Thus, he has his alter-ego Will Summers remark:

Deepe reaching wits, heere is no deepe streame for you to
 angle in. Moralizers, you that wrest a neuer meant meaning
 out of euery thing . . . here are no quips in Character for
 you to reade. As the Parthians fight, flying away, so will
 wee prate and talke, but stand to nothing that we say.

(3:233 [italics Nashe's])

In fact, no one stands to anything he says, not king, not
 courtier, not servant, not actor. In a community based on
 sycophancy and lying, in a system where the communal ties of the
 pastoral have broken down, words lose their authority to bind men
 together.

Throughout *Summers Last Will and Testament*, Nashe maintains
 a highly critical stance towards patronage, which he treats as
 deformed version of reciprocity that in turn deforms the courtly
 community. Through his use of the pastoral form, Nashe invokes
 a version of the ideal community bound together by hospitality,
 generosity, and charity. This version of community provides the
 yardstick against which Nashe measures not only the ethical
 deficiencies of patronage and the court but also the deficiencies
 of the city—a topic that he takes up in *Christs Teares over
 Ierusalem*.

Excoriating the Community: *Christs Teares over Ierusalem*

Like *Summers Last Will and Testament*, *Christs Teares over Ierusalem*, presents a strong critique of community—only in this text the community in question is the city of London. "Since these be dayes of dolor and heauiness," Nashe writes, "I suppose it shal not be amisse to write something of mourning, for London to harken counsaile of her great Grand-mother Ierusalem (2:15 [*italics Nashe's*]).³² The London that Nashe describes is one in which "all charitie and compassion is cleane banished out" (2:108). Reciprocity exists only in the most debased of forms—that of envy mutually tendered by all to their fellow humans:

Euery man heere in London is discontent with the state wherein hee liues. Euery one seeketh to vndermine another. No two of one trade, but as they are of one trade, enuy one another. Not two conioyned in one office, but ouerwhart & emulate one another, and one of them vndoes what the other hath done. (*Christs Teares* 2:131-32 [*italics Nashe's*])

In this London, as Manley notes, we find "vice in its latest and most modern forms, at the interface or boundaries of contact,

³²The use of the destruction of Jerusalem was a popular trope used by Elizabethan writers to criticize the social woes evident in their own culture. See, for example, *A Newe Ballad of the Destrucion of Ierusalem* (1586) and *A Warninge or Lamentation to London of the Dolefull Destrucion of Fayre Ierusalem* (1603).

exchange, and domination that define an agonistic and competitive society" (336).

In *Christs Teares over Ierusalem*, Nashe unlooses all the old verities from their moorings; he appropriates the traditional religious narratives of authority and power, and uses them to foreground what is marginal in the culture—in this case those suffering from the abuses engendered by extreme poverty, poverty with which Nashe—writing against the backdrop of the 1590s, a period during which England experienced rapid inflation, plague, and two of the worst harvests in its history—would have been well acquainted.³³ As historian Peter Clark argues, from the mid-1580s until about 1604 England "faced a tidal wave of difficulties" which included:

commercial depression due to foreign wars and privateering; large-scale and repeated attacks of epidemic disease; heavy financial, military and other levies by the Crown; and a high number of bad harvests, which boosted grain prices, caused severe malnutrition, suffocated demand, and sent floods of poor migrants into the towns . . . [causing] economic decay, disruption, and shortages. . . .³⁴

³³For a discussion of the effects of these bad harvests, see Andrew B. Appleby, *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1978) esp. 95-154.

³⁴Peter Clark, ed. *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England*, *Themes in Urban History* 14. For additional discussions of the economic and social dislocations faced by England in the late

The twin themes of excessive consumption and extreme lack motivate the narrative and drive it forward. Against every image of consumption, Nashe balances the image of extreme deprivation. On the one hand, Nashe paints a picture of men who consume their way to death:

Great men shew their state and magnificance in nothing so much as gluttony. . . . How many Cookes, Apothecaries, Confectioners, and Vintners in London grow pursie by gluttonie? Vnder Gluttony, I shrowde not onely excesse in meate, but in drink also. Our full platters and our plentiful cuppes vnapt vs to any exercise of Christianitie or prayer. We doe nothing but fatten our soules to Hell-fire. Our bodies we bumbast and balist with engorging diseases. Diseases shorten our daies; therefore whosoeuer englutteth himselfe is guilty of hys own death & damnation.

(*Christs Teares* 2:147)

Against this image of wealthy men's excessive gluttony, Nashe juxtaposes an image of their extreme lack of charity:

There is no Male of any kind hath appearances of breastes but man, and hee, hauing them, giues no sucke with them at all. Such dry-nurses are our English Cormogeons; they haue

sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see Derek Hirst, *Authority and Conflict: England, 1603-1658* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986); Clark and Slack, eds. *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700*; Coleman; and Clay.

breasts, but giue no suck with them. They haue treasure innumerable, but doe no good with it. All the Abbey-lands that were the abstracts from impertinent almes, nowe scarce afforde a meales meate of almes. (*Christs Teares* 2:162)

So miserly have become the wealthy that even their dogs fair better than the poor:

Our dogges are fedde with the crumbs that fal from our Tables. Our Christian bretheren are famisht for want of the crumbes that fall from our Tables. (*Christs Teares* 2:161)

As Nashe sardonically notes, "[i]f Christ were now naked and visited, naked and visited should he be, for none wold come neere him" (2:160).

Nashe foregrounds his description of London's depravities against those of ancient Jerusalem—a city in which cannibalism has been substituted for charity. The particular tale on which Nashe focuses is that of Miriam who is forced by the vicissitudes of plague, war and hunger to consume the flesh of her flesh—her son:

[A]fter shee had sustained her lyfe a large space by scraping in chaffe and muck-hils for beastes dung, and that means forsaking her, she had no other refuge of fosterment, she was constrained, hauing but one onely sonne, to kill him and rost him. (*Christs Teares* 2:71)

Having killed her only begotten son, Miriam then serves him up to the citizens of Jerusalem in a brilliant, if gruesome, parody of the Last Supper:

Eate of my sonne one morsel yet, that it may memorize
against you, ye are accessory to his dismembring. Let that
morsell be his hart if you will, that the greater may be
your conuictment. (*Christs Teares* 2:76)

Sacrament is thus transformed into sacrilege, the better to demonstrate the lack of sanctity in the community. Nashe appropriates the redemptive narrative of Christ's death and uses it to reveal the impoverishment of Elizabethan culture. As Nashe's troping of the biblical narrative reveals, the community is literally consuming itself: "The Snake eateth the Toode, and the Toode the Snaile. The Merchant eates vp the Yeoman, and all three do nothing but exclaime one vppon another" (*Christs Teares* 2:159). In the pursuit of wealth, parents sacrifice their children to "couetous Cittie blood-suckers," who like "Serpents and stinging Extortioners . . . neuer flye from them, but with their tayle winde them in, and sucke out their soules" (*Christs Teares* 2:96).

Nashe asserts himself as the ethical center of this depraved community by transgressing against the boundaries that separate authorized users of the Word from unauthorized scoundrels like himself. In so doing, Nashe de-authorizes the powers that be in

the community and re-authorizes himself as agent and cultural critic at large. At one point in the narrative, he even goes so far as to "trans-forme my selfe from my selfe" into the person of Christ (*Christs Teares* 2:16). In assuming the identity of Christ, Nashe usurps the place not only of such traditional authorities as ministers but also of the Queen who, according to official mythologies of divine right, is the direct conduit of God's word to the people—a move that further undermines the traditional underpinnings of authority. Through the medium of language, Nashe metamorphoses himself from a marginal, Grub street writer into the central ethical actor in the cultural game. By revealing the corrupt foundation of an authority that consumes all to lack, Nashe undermines that authority, substituting for its lacks the endless plenitude and agency of the author.³⁵

Nashe's version of human agency is an emergent one that prefigures radical individualism. Like the radical individual, the Nashean agent realizes his agency through opposition to the community. However, if Nashe's version of agency depends upon a disruption of one version of community, it nevertheless harkens back to the residual concept of an idealized traditional community such as the one Nashe portrays in *Lenten Stuffe*. Of all Nashe's

³⁵Nashe's undermining of authority is not simply a sleight of text. Clearly his threat to the powers that be extended beyond the confines of the page, as Nashe was summoned by the aldermen of the city of London to answer charges made against him as result of the publication of *Christs Teares* (see n13 above).

works, *Lenten Stuffe* is the only one in which we find the true joyous carnivalesque of festive comedy, an expressive form that, as Mikhail Bakhtin notes, celebrates "the people's immortal, indestructible character."³⁶ Yarmouth, the subject of Nashe's encomium is a community thoroughly infused with a sense of reciprocity and hospitality:

All Common wealths assume their prenominations of their common diuided weale, as where one man hath not too many riches, and another man too much pouertie: Such was Platos communitie, and Licurgus and the olde Romans lawes of measuring out their fields, their meads, their pastures & houses, and meating out to euery one his childes portion. To this *Commune bonum* (or euery horse his loafe) Yarmouth in propinquity is as the buckle to the thong, and the next finger to the thumbe. (*Lenten Stuffe* 3:168 [italics Nashe's])

Unlike the corrupt and fallen communities of London or King Summer's court, Yarmouth has a "curteous compassionate clime" (3: 156). Its citizens scorn the exigencies of the newly emerging capitalistic marketplace and eschew profit in favor of fair dealing. During their ten-week trading season, when folk from all over Europe gather to buy fish,

³⁶Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (1968; Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 256.

the rate of no kinde of food is raised, nor the plenty of their markets one pinte of butter rebated, and at the ten weekes end . . . no impression of any dearth left, but rather more store then before. (*Lenten Stuffe* 3:158)

The source of Yarmouth's prosperity and the symbol of its enduring hospitality is the red herring, which is "euery mans money." The red herring functions as form of utopian currency that levels rather than intensifies distinctions between King and Courtier, householder and goodman, poor man and Spanish Duke. (*Lenten Stuffe* 3:179). Around this lowly Lenten food, Nashe constructs a joyous mock-epic that embodies the carnivalesque logic of inversion. Like Nashe himself, the red herring is a lowly, marginal figure who is in the course of the narrative assumes a central role as "king of the fishes." Through the figure of the red herring, Nashe celebrates the possibilities of a communal economy based on fellowship and goodwill rather than on social distinction and rapacious accumulation of wealth. In the idealized community imagined by Nashe in *Lenten Stuffe*, a system of ethical checks and balances spontaneously arises from within the community itself. This vision of communal flourishing stands in direction opposition to the manic logic of the marketplace that has erased the old values of reciprocity and hospitality and has treated them as if they were no more than red

herrings (i.e., diversions from the important business of capital accrual and exchange).³⁷

As McRae and others have noted, the gradual shift to a more distinctly capitalistic mode of exchange undercut the strength of communal values. Consequently, the locus of moral responsibility shifted from the community to the individual. In order to reinvigorate ethical discourse, individuals had to re-imagine themselves in direct and often linguistically violent opposition to their community. What interests me about Nashe is that although his version of agency depends upon an oppositional stance to the community, he, nevertheless, preserves a space for a positive concept of community (based on notions of communal obligation and reciprocity). In fact, his strong claims on behalf of his own agency are ultimately rooted in an appeal to traditional communal values.

As I noted in Chapter One, the study of Tudor-Stuart culture interests me because of the striking similarities that I see between it and my own culture. Like that culture, my culture is struggling with its own crisis in poverty, is facing anew the problems occasioned by shifting practices in the marketplace (this time in the form of global capitalism), and is searching for ways

³⁷The definition of a red herring as something which draws away or diverts attention from the main issue was not current in Nashe's time. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this particular usage did not emerge until the latter part of the seventeenth century.

of handling rapid developments in the scientific disciplines—developments that seem to have outpaced our ability to control adequately. However, I would argue that in comparison to that culture, our moral imaginations are severely impoverished both because we have theorized any meaningful versions of human agency out of existence and because we no longer have any strong residue of communal values on which to draw. As a result, we have left ourselves with fewer resources for combatting the ethical crises that currently confront us.

For the remainder of this chapter, I wish to focus on that particular strand of critical thought running from Nietzsche through Foucault and Derrida, which has greatly influenced contemporary debates in the field of literary studies about the possibilities for both human agency and community. Nietzsche's deconstruction of the ethical value embodied in community has provided the grounds for the subsequent deconstruction of the concept of human agency—a deconstruction that, I would argue, should be resisted because it leaves us with no place from which to formulate coherent ethical responses to our own cultural dilemmas.

Nietzsche is a particularly salient figure to consider vis à vis Nashe for several reasons. Both Nashe and Nietzsche employ

irony as a strategy for achieving agency;³⁸ both engage in a stringent critique of culture, which they portray as threatening human agency, but which also provides a necessary construct against which they can define human agency. Finally, while I do not wish to deny that significant differences exist between the late sixteenth-century English Renaissance community and our own (or for that matter Nietzsche's) community, I do think that Nashe, by holding open the possibility³⁹ for a meaningful version of human agency experienced within a meaningful version of community offers a potential corrective to the Nietzschean stance that is worth examining in light on our own vexed struggle with this issue.

Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida and the
Destruction of Human Agency

For Nietzsche as well as his postmodern successors, a necessary link exists between the concepts of agency and violence, a link which they use to deconstruct positive versions of

³⁸Some critics would argue that the concept of human agency collapses under the weight of Nietzsche's irony (see, for example, John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991] 70-88). While this is certainly the consequence of Foucault and Derrida's appropriations of Nietzsche, I do not think that it accurately reflects Nietzsche's own stance. Nietzsche's project clearly depends on a strong version of human agency against which he can posit a critique of the herd.

³⁹Let me emphasize that, in Nashe's work, the concept of human agency enacted within rather than against community is a possibility only and is not fully realized.

community. As Nietzsche, whose overman provides a model of the quintessential (if thoroughly unpleasant) human agent, argues, the process of being an authentic agent in the world, of establishing oneself as a self, as independent from the herd, is a ferocious business, violent in its enactment and offering only the grimmest of satisfactions: "the affirmation of passing away and destroying . . . saying yes to opposition and war."⁴⁰ In Nietzsche's formulation, the agency/domination narrative goes something like this: human agency (our potential for self-determination and autonomous behavior) realizes itself always in opposition to the community which, because of its status as repository and support for ontological claims about truth and value, aggressively threatens the free unconstrained play of human agency. The community functions as a constraint that must be undermined, subjugated, dominated, mastered in order for the individual to realize her own agency and to lay bare a braver, better, deontologized new world. Although Nietzsche is somewhat ambiguous about whether or not mastery over the community is achieved through actual physical violence, the metaphors used to describe the agent's process of self-actualization are invariably violent ones. Nietzsche finds the prototype for his fully self-actualized

⁴⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, *Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969) 273. Hereafter cited in text by title and page number.

human agent in "the splendid blond beast" of past great-hearted "barbarian" races (the Vikings and Homeric heroes), a beast who "savor[s] a freedom from all social constraints," who "go[es] back to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey, as triumphant monster" (*Genealogy of Morals* 40).

In postmodern appropriations of Nietzsche (of whom I am using Foucault and Derrida as representative examples), we also find agency and violence linked (and once again for the purposes of deconstructing truth/value claims); however, here the linkage occurs in a paradoxical fashion. To summarize arguments put forth by Derrida and Foucault, the mistaken belief in human agency is at the root of much of the violence found in the world. Human agency becomes just another one of the dangerous metaphysical truths from which we need to escape. For both of these philosophers, human agency is an illusion, albeit a dangerous one, which intensifies rather than mitigates violence in the world.

For Foucault, the modern obsession with human agency gives rise to technologies of control and domination (the prison, the asylum, the factory, the school). In turning our gaze inward and hypothesizing ourselves as free self-defining subjects rather than as beings constitutive of a totalizing order of things, we deliver ourselves up to a force that seeks to "normalize" and "contain" us. The attempt to understand this "interior" self leads to its objectification and its domination through the production of new

knowledges/new disciplines (psychoanalysis is one of the new human sciences particularly targeted by Foucault for adverse criticism) designed to impose discipline on what might otherwise be unruly bodies. As Charles Taylor describes Foucault's argument, "the very notion of ourselves as having a true identity to express [is] part of the *dispositif* of control, rather than what . . . defines our liberation."⁴¹

Like Foucault, Derrida disavows any belief in human agency *per se* opting instead for a portrait of the individual as entrenched in "logos"—a position reminiscent of the "serene non-existence" in which, Foucault argues, man is "maintained by the imperious unity of Discourse" (*Order of Things* 386):

The subject (in its identity with itself, or eventually in its consciousness of its identity with itself, its self-consciousness) is inscribed in language, is a "function" of language, becomes a *speaking* subject only by making its speech conform—even in so-called "creation" or in so-called "transgression"—to the system of the rules of language as a system of differences, or at very least by conforming to the general law of *différance*.⁴²

⁴¹Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 80.

⁴²Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 15.

However, although Derrida excises human agency from his project, the concept of human agency nevertheless figures forcefully and negatively in his work. Like Foucault, Derrida views the attempt to realize human agency as a reinscription of violence. The pursuit of human agency, as defined by Derrida, is our attempt to construct unified, stable self-identities, to become self-willing subjects—a project that Derrida contends is always doomed to failure since subjectivity itself "is an effect of *différance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*."⁴³ Unfortunately, we do not recognize that our subjectivity is mere effect and so persist in our attempts to master *différance*. This process involves a confrontation with the "other" from whom we derive our "essence," "definition," and "production."⁴⁴ Our encounter with this "other" leads us to attempt to control it to erase its difference and to subjugate, bleach, and transform it into a reflection of ourselves. We do so because the "other," while providing us with a means of stabilizing our self-identity, also threatens to undermine that identity and hence must be contained. As Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*:

⁴³Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans, Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 28.

⁴⁴Derrida (*Margins of Philosophy*) makes this argument in reference to philosophy; however, the process by which philosophy becomes known to itself—that is to say through its binary opposition to the other—is also applicable to human self-becoming.

Absolute fear would then be the first encounter of the other as other: as other than I and as other than itself. I can answer the threat of the other as other (than I) by transforming it into another (than itself), through altering it in my imagination, my fear, or my desire.⁴⁵

Thus, contends Derrida, the project of human agency (which is for Derrida always already a failed project) is actually only a thinly disguised excuse for totalization, colonization, and violence towards the "other."

The coupling of agency (both human and agentless) with violence has profound consequences on the ethical goods that can be realized in systems where this linkage figures prominently. In the first place, if human agency is, in fact, defined primarily in terms of domination and violence, then this fact limits (often severely) the possibilities for community and negates the value of shared ethical goods, since both the community and the supposed "goods" shared by this community figure, at best, as potential constraints on human agency. At worst, however, community functions in a far more malignant fashion, serving to instrumentalize relations among individuals and to empty the concept of ethical goods of any content. In short, community offers no place for the human agent; it is merely a convenient

⁴⁵Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) 277.

term that masks the brute operations of power. As Nietzsche (whose diatribes against community have heavily influenced postmodern criticism) characterizes community:

The highest and strongest drives when they break out passionately and drive the individual far above the average and the flats of the herd conscience, wreck the self-confidence of the community, its faith in itself, and it is as if its spine snapped. Hence just these drives are branded and slandered most. High and independent spirituality, the will to stand alone, even a powerful reason are experienced as dangers; everything that elevates an individual above the herd and intimidates the neighbor is henceforth called evil; and the fair, modest submissive, conforming mentality, the mediocrity of desires attains moral designations and honors.⁴⁶

Nor does the rejection of human agency as a desirable (or even achievable) good necessarily purchase us entrance into community. If anything, the possibility for community is even more severely attenuated. At least, in Nietzsche's formulation, community exists albeit in a negative form. In reformulating Nietzsche's arguments, his successors not only dispense with human agency,

⁴⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966) 113-14. Hereafter cited in the text by title and page number.

they also dispense with the concept of community, substituting in its place "discourse," "system," "logos."⁴⁷

When the anonymous circulation and reproduction of power is substituted for some notion of social collectivity, we no longer have any grounds on which we might base models of obligation, care and concern for others. Indeed, the concepts of obligation and care become merely manifestations of power circulating in the system. Not even in Foucault and Derrida's valorization of alterity can we find a location from which we might fashion an ethic of care or concern for the other because in the very demonstration of that care and concern we interrupt the other's otherness, so to speak. In fact, any action (even gazing) that we take vis à vis the other threatens to interrupt its integrity as other and to assimilate it to ourselves.

Unloosed from the moorings of community, deprived of agency, and denied the possibility of any ethical interaction with others, how are we to live? According to Nietzsche (as well as to Foucault and Derrida), we should live by embracing the negative freedom of self-overcoming (or self-dissolution for Foucault and Derrida). Of course, if we embrace the somewhat dubious joys of this negative freedom, our answer to that other important ethical question "what constitutes the good life" is necessarily pallid.

⁴⁷Of course, in a certain sense, you can't have a community unless you have selves to inhabit it.

For Nietzsche, the answer to this question is pallid because all desire is subordinated to the discipline of the will; the will becomes "precisely that which treats cravings as their master and appoints to them their way and measure."⁴⁸ As Tolbin Siebers puts it "the will economizes desire" (137). In this economy of desire, we put aside notions of well-being or of pleasure and instead embrace pain and suffering:

Well-being as you understand it—that is no goal, that seems to us an end, a state that soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible. . . . The discipline of suffering, of great suffering—do you not know that only this discipline has created all enhancements of man so far? The tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, its shudders face to face with great ruin, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, persevering, interpreting, and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness—was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering. (*Beyond Good and Evil* 154)

For Nietzsche, the ultimate expression of affirmative suffering and self-overcoming is death. "All great things," he argues, "bring about their own destruction through an act of self-

⁴⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968) 52.

overcoming" (*Genealogy* 161). In the self-overcoming unto death, man finds redemption and paradoxically life⁴⁹:

The No he says to life brings to light, as if by magic, an abundance of tender Yeses; even when he wounds himself, this master of destruction, of self-destruction—the very wound itself afterwards compels him to live (*Genealogy* 121).

For Nietzsche, man's embrace of self-destruction is the ultimate expression of the human agent's will to power.

In their rereadings of Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida hold on to this romanticized and utopian view of negative freedom.⁵⁰ However in their reinterpretation of Nietzsche, the will to power no longer resides in the human agent but instead becomes a disembodied force circulating through the system of connections that bind us to world and the world to us. Self-overcoming is transmuted into self-dissolution, which for Foucault and Derrida is the only response possible in the face of the brute violent operations of power. As Foucault notes,

⁴⁹In this respect, the agency of Nietzsche and the nonagency to which his successors subscribe bears a curious resemblance to certain versions of Christian agency, of violent redemption realized in the achievement of our own deaths. See, for example, René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1965).

⁵⁰McGowan refers to this as one of the peculiarities and weaknesses of postmodernism critiques of Western culture: "The oddity of postmodern thought is that it has clung to a liberal image of negative freedom even while deconstructing the self who could embody that freedom" (211).

It is in death, that the individual becomes at one with himself, escaping from monotonous lives and their levelling effect; in the slow, half-subterranean, but already visible approach of death, the dull, common life at last becomes an individuality; a black border isolates it, and gives it the style of its truth.⁵¹

The way out of violence, then, is through a return to violence, to the violence of the deconstructive turn, to the annihilation of self and the embrace of death. Paradoxically, then, the pursuit of the "good" life becomes the pursuit of what Derrida calls "the gay affirmation of death."⁵²

Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida are often hailed as transformative thinkers who have liberated us from the blind dogmatisms of Western metaphysics. Certainly, the theories of the latter two thinkers have been appropriated with great affect by a significant portion of the literary left in English departments. I would include myself in this number; their work has provided me with powerful tools for interrogating texts and thinking about relationships of power and domination within and between cultures. However, I am concerned that when I deploy the insights of

⁵¹Michel Foucault, "Dream, Imagination and Existence," trans. Forrest Williams and Jacob Needleman, *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* 19 (1984-85): 54.

⁵²Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978) 274.

postmodern critical theory in my own work, I make a Faustian bargain. That is to say, that in order to gain a high-powered tool for cultural critique, I have to jettison the very goods (subjectivity, community, ethical frameworks) that would enable me to transform my culture for the better. This exchange does not strike me as a particularly viable means for ensuring our own survival given the cultural pressures we currently face nor does it seem to me particularly viable in terms of the critiques mounted by postmodern critical theorists themselves. In the first place, without a reference point to some normative beliefs about reciprocity and ethical obligation, the arguments of a Nietzsche, Foucault or Derrida lose the power to disconcert and disturb. Their critiques of social systems disturb us because those critiques unearth injustices—injustices, which we understand as such precisely because we measure them (either explicitly or implicitly) against some normative notion of justice. In the absence of some shared ethical framework, these critiques cannot be said to "matter" in any meaningful sense of that word, and yet the vehemence with which these critiques are mounted clearly indicates that they matter very much indeed to their authors. Further, this vehemence calls into question one of the basic premises of postmodernism—the premise that we are inevitably and hopelessly (or nearly hopelessly) trapped in the violence of monolithic metanarratives. If indeed we are hopelessly trapped

in some totalizing discursive structure and if our experience of ourselves as free human agents capable of dissenting or choosing alternate narratives is chimerical, then the vigorous (and sometimes rancorous) fervor with which postmodern theorists attack more capacious theories of human agency can only be just so much ado about nothing since such theories can, by definition, only be inevitable affects of the systemic operations of agentless power.

If Foucault or Derrida want (as they clearly do) their theories to carry weight as transformative critique, then they need to allow some space for self-determination that is not death. However, granting this space is clearly problematic for them given the direct link that they draw between human agency and violence. As I have already noted, Foucault and Derrida argue that human agency is merely an illusion, but one to which they nevertheless grant a fair amount of power to engender violence. In part, their elision of agency and violence can be traced to their influential precursor Nietzsche (in whose works the account of strong, violent human agency may be said to reach its apotheosis). However, this linkage of agency and violence does not originate in Nietzsche (although he puts the extreme touches on it); it is also part of a classical liberal tradition (within and against which Foucault and Derrida write) that defines human agency as essentially and centrally in conflict with the community. For classical liberalism, the realization of human agency is an either/or

proposition. Either one asserts one's agency through an act of domination or separation, or one cedes one's agency by submitting to domination.⁵³ To be a strong human agent is in some sense to be isolated and divided from the community.⁵⁴

Conclusion

The second half of the twentieth century is not noted for the strong versions of human agency that it has produced. The most sophisticated analyses of human agency have undercut, if not outright dissolved the possibility for the strong human agent. In part, they have been able to accomplish this because the

⁵³One might, of course, argue that domination does not necessarily equal violence. While I would agree that relationships characterized by domination and submission are not necessarily violent in the physical sense nor perhaps consciously perceived as violent in the psychological sense, I would argue that any relationship involving the domination of one party by another, even a so-called benevolent relationship of domination such as that of parent and child, in some sense does "violence" to that person. This is not to say that I believe that parents should never exercise force on a child. Clearly, domination is in some instances (for example when a child is trying to stick her finger in an electrical socket) a good thing. However, I do not believe that a parent/child relationship characterized predominantly in terms of domination and submission is a healthy relationship. I would argue that our extensive focus on the agonistic aspect of human interactions, at the expense of the many positive elements of those relationships, has resulted in lopsided theory and has blinded us to other possibilities.

⁵⁴I am not suggesting here that classical liberals denigrate the notion of community. They do not. What classical liberalism does do is to separate out human existence into public and private spheres and to render the private sphere (which is presented as the inviolate space of the autonomous individual) incommensurate with the public sphere.

tradition of strong human agency on which we draw has by and large depicted the human agent in a violent relation with his surroundings. Contemporary critiques of human agency have used negative versions of agency (both human and non-human) to undercut both the possibility for the human agent and for community. Nevertheless, demands for ethical goods which can only be purchased via strong versions of human agency or community continue to surface often as implicit markers in the very critiques that ridicule such notions. Foucault's analyses of discipline and power would not have the power to horrify and disturb us without the subtext of alternatives that can only be realized if we have recourse to meaningful versions of human agency and community. The disciplinary practices that he unmasks disconcert us precisely because we do not wish to live that way.

I do not wish to argue that we can return to the version of community whose loss Nashe so clearly laments. For one thing our sense of our own agency and individuality has altered radically (not least of all because of the efforts of Nashe and a whole host of intervening human agents). Nor do I wish to endorse naively the idealism of the "it takes a village to raise a child" kind—a stance that while placing a high value on community leaves no room to critique the village's methods for rearing that child. Of course "it takes a village to raise a child," as we are discovering in dealing with the children raised in our own

dysfunctional, fragmented and uncohesive communities. If we simply stop with that iteration, if we don't explore carefully what our expectations of community are and how these expectations mesh with our own individual needs and desires, then we really have nothing to say to communities like that of the Branch Davidians, which raised it little girls to satisfy the sexual appetites of its leader, David Koresh. Nor for that matter, do we have anything to say to the "community" that decided it was in the best interests of those children to firebomb the compound where they lived (thereby razing those children to the ground). Clearly community can be problematic.

What I think that Nashe's texts highlight is the importance of some positive version of community if human agency is to provide us with any satisfaction. While I would be naive to deny the existence of violence in the world, I believe that as long as we cling to the description of human agency as essentially violent, we undercut the possibilities for envisioning ourselves as ethical subjects. All too often in the postmodern world, our options are either to claim agency through embracing violence and or to negate self and to acquiesce to the violence of ideology. I would argue that what we need is a strong version of the human agency operating within (not against) a positive version of community. As agents we draw our definition from the community, from exchanges with it. These exchanges need not be theorized as

a repressive or constraining relationships but as active and free ones that strengthen both community and agent. In fact such a mutually reinforcing notion is necessary if the ethical goods that we seem to be calling for are to be realized.

CHAPTER FOUR

INSTRUMENTALIZING AGENCY AND ETHICS: FRANCIS BACON'S

NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

Critical differences exist between Nashe's version of agency and that of Bacon. If the Nashean protagonist achieves agency by transgressing against oppressive structures of power within the community, the Baconian subject attains agency through the instrumentalization of relationships between men¹ and the objects of nature. Unlike Nashe, whose fiction celebrates the individual human agent who, through chicanery and sheer linguistic chutzpa, triumphantly subverts the dominant discursive structures of his

¹My use of the term men and of the masculine pronouns throughout most of this chapter is deliberate. English culture of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century did not, for the most part, figure women as active participants in socio-political life (Queen Elizabeth notwithstanding). More germane to my argument is Bacon's own gendering of Nature as feminine (a force to be led, wed, or enslaved) and natural philosophy as "masculine." "Men," will be *men* in Bacon's texts.

community, Bacon focuses on strategies for enhancing collective human agency and strengthening the dominant discursive structure. Agency, in Bacon's texts, is frankly a matter of rigid control—rigid control of nature, of language, and of men. Where the Nashean agent transgresses against social domination, the Baconian agent seeks to dominate, to stand over against nature, and in so doing to contain not only nature but the transgressive forces operating in the realm of the social. Thus, Bacon's version of human agency is at once much stronger than earlier versions of agency, and paradoxically weaker because in the Baconian project, the human agent, like nature, assumes the role of instrument. Since for Bacon, the chief impediment to happiness is not due (as Nashe would argue) to failed reciprocal relationships between men, but is rather due to man's misapprehension of the natural world, Bacon has little use for the individual human agent per se. Bacon may see himself as a lone "buccinator" who has "taken all knowledge to be his province" (*Works, Letters* 8:109); however, he is no champion of individual autonomy. Although Bacon's project provides new strategies for enlarging the scope of human agency in the natural world, for extending, as he says "the bounds of human empire, as far as God Almighty in his goodness may permit" (*Works, Advancement* 4:373), the "human empire" he seeks to extend is not that of the

individual human agent but rather that of a highly centralized absolutist state.²

Bacon also differs radically from Nashe in his attitude toward language. Words, Bacon tells us, "are the idols of the Market-place. . . . [they] "plainly force and overrule the understanding and throw all into confusion" (*Works, Novum Organum* 4:55).³ Bacon views with deep suspicion loose linguistic cannons like Nashe who use language in a perverse fashion and has little use for the kind of linguistic *tour de force* they exhibit in their writing.⁴ Agency of the kind achieved by Nashe potentially

²For a discussion of Bacon as a politically conservative and thoroughgoing royalist, who sees in the natural world a mirror and justification for a strong centralized monarchy, see Robert E. Stillman, *The New Philosophy and Universal Languages in Seventeenth-Century England: Bacon, Hobbes, and Wilkins* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1995), hereafter cited in text as Stillman followed by the page number. See also, Julian Martin, *Francis Bacon, the State, and the Reform of Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992); Jonathan Marwil, *The Trials of Counsel: Francis Bacon in 1621* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1976), hereafter cited in text as Martin followed by the page number; Theodore K. Rabb, "Francis Bacon and the Reform of Society," in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Theodore K. Rabb and Jerrold E. Siegel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969) 169-93.

³Despite Bacon's distrust of language, he is thoroughly bound to it. His whole concept of nature is grounded in language. The very metaphors that he uses to describe the natural world take language as a dominant image. He describes nature as a book, a language that can be broken down grammatically into manageable parts. Consequently, Bacon can find no way of legitimating his observations about the world except through a discursive practice that is by his definition flawed with its own literariness and metaphoricity.

⁴Stillman argues, "Bacon may begin by rejecting the 'mimic and fabulous worlds' of lawless poets [to whose number a Nashe

poses a huge threat to a stable order of things precisely because such agency is secured through linguistic impropriety, "through the ill and unfit choice of words" that "wonderfully obstructs the understanding" (*Works, Novum Organum* 4:55). Unlike Bacon, Nashe wants to throw all into confusion. By violating linguistic decorum, by exploiting the malleability of the word, the Nashean text exposes the bankruptcy of the existing order and creates a new space (on the margins of culture) in which ethical critique can occur. Nashe's linguistic improprieties are anti-elitist in their trajectory and potentially pose a rather large threat to a project like Bacon's—a project whose realization (in Bacon's formulation at any rate) depends upon the existence and perpetuation of an elitist and hierarchical society. Extending collective human agency demands a society structured thus the better to control the capricious impulses of the individual whose mind as Bacon notes is "rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture" (*Works, Advancement* 3:394). And a rigorous control of language better ensures the maintenance of order (of which an elite hierarchial social structure is one manifestation).⁵

would certainly belong] and false philosophers, but he ends by creating out of the metonymic logic of induction a saving fiction" (105).

⁵A particularly interesting solution that Bacon proposes for the problems of language is the institution of a universal language. For a discussion of Bacon's role in the seventeenth-

Although Bacon's version of human agency differs markedly from that of "a lawless poet" like Nashe, their versions of agency do share a common feature: for both men, the achievement of agency is marked by violence—in Nashe a linguistic violence enacted against a corrupt community; in Bacon a violence enacted against nature through the instrumentalizing of nature.⁶ As with Nashe, Bacon's revisioning of human agency has profound ethical consequences. By reshaping the world to produce the most efficient outcomes—a reshaping that extends human agency—Bacon also contributes to a reshaping of our notions of what constitutes the good. The Baconian project reduces the concept of the good to what Jean François Lyotard calls "the best possible input/output equation"—an equation in which means are rigorously

century universal language movement, see Stillman cited above. For other discussions of the universal language movement see M. M. Slaughter, *Universal Languages and Scientific Taxonomy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982); James Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes in England and France, 1600-1800* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1975); Vivian Salmon, *The Study of Language in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1979).

⁶The respective cultural locations that Nashe and Bacon occupied do much to explain the strategies of human agency developed by each. Nashe could exploit the margin because he never occupied any position but a marginal one. Bacon, on the other hand, was to all intents and purposes an insider. Although Bacon spent much of his career complaining about his lack of preferment and exclusion from the inner circles of power, he was hardly marginal relative to the majority of England's population. Consequently, he had little to gain by developing a version of human agency that transgressed against the forces that sustained him as an insider, as a member of the elite.

separated from ends.⁷ The human agent need not consider the other (be the other nature or other men) except as a means of extending power. As Val Plumwood argues,

When means and ends are seen as of radically different kinds . . . there are no threatening ambiguities or confusions about which item belongs where, no risk for the master consciousness of finding itself on the wrong side of the boundary, as the eaten instead of the eater, the used instead of the user. A sharp boundary instils necessary confidence about who is the other, and who is the master for whose wants and needs the universe is conveniently

⁷Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988) 36. Hereafter cited in text by author and page number. Lyotard proposes a model of scientific knowledge based on performativity. Drawing on the linguistic theory of Wittgenstein, Lyotard suggests that scientific discourse, far from having some a fortiori access to truth, is arbitrary, based on consensus. Scientific language games function by the following rules: All statements must carry a truth value. A statement's truth value is determined on the basis of whether or not the "truth" of that statement can be reduplicated or verified. No statement is true in and of itself. Instead, its truth value emerges only in the moment of dialogue, in the moment when Person A makes the statement and Person B either refutes or provides proof of its truth. This process has no end. An important corollary to Lyotard's description of scientific knowledge as a language game is that game's relation to power. According to Lyotard, power is based on performativity. Performativity increases the ability to produce proof and consequently the ability to be true—a necessary criterion for scientific knowledge. Hence scientific knowledge falls under the aegis of power. Science augments power; science does not function independently of power.

available. It erases too the possibility of identification or sympathy.⁸

The erasure of identification and sympathy also contributes to a refashioning of the idea of community—a refashioning in which rationality and mechanization replace reciprocity and mutuality as the key elements that bind the members of a community together. What need, after all, do we have for such goods as reciprocity and mutuality in a community of efficiently functioning instruments wielded by rational managers—in short a community very much like that described by Bacon in his *New Atlantis*? As I have already indicated in the previous chapter, the Nashean agent develops largely in response to a deterioration in the traditional communal ideal of reciprocity. Although Bacon has nothing to say specifically about communal notions of reciprocity, I would argue that, on some level, his project to promote collective human agency responds to (and ultimately exacerbates) the pressures occasioned by the weakening of communal ties that I have described in Chapter Two.

In the following section, I explore this argument in more detail by foregrounding Bacon's instrumentalized vision of the world—particularly as it is expressed in Bacon's monumental, but fragmentary, work *The Great Instauration*—against the disruptions

⁸Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993) 145-46. Hereafter cited in text by author and page number.

of community that I have laid out in Chapter Two.⁹ I argue that Bacon's vision of an instrumentalized world was not an unreasonable response to the particular cultural circumstances in which he found himself. I argue that in periods of cultural disruption, the need to assert rigid controls appears both seductive and desirable.

Instrumentality and the Loss of Reciprocity

If we can identify one consistent characteristic in the Baconian corpus, which critics otherwise refer to as inconsistent and "discontinuous," that characteristic would probably be Bacon's overriding desire to see the world brought under rigid and tight control.¹⁰ To this end, Bacon flirts with the idea of a universal

⁹The *Great Instauration* as Bacon conceived it was to be a multi-volume work that would lay forth all knowledge in a way "entirely different from any hitherto known . . . in order that the mind may exercise over the nature of things the authority which properly belongs to it." Key works to be included in *The Great Instauration* were *The New Organon*, *The Advancement of Learning*, and the *Natural and Experimental History*. In 1605, Bacon published an English edition of the first two books of *The Advancement of Learning* (printed in volume 3 of *Works*). In 1623, he published a more complete Latin version of *The Advancement*, which Spedding has translated in volumes 4 and 5 of the *Works*. To distinguish between the two, I refer parenthetically to Bacon's English edition as *Advancement* and Spedding's translation as *De Augmentis*.

¹⁰The Bacon corpus is riddled with inconsistencies. The idealism of his philosophical writings conflicts with the pragmatic practices of accommodation demanded by the court. His call for a collective endeavor in scientific research stands in direct contradiction to his depiction of himself as the lone "buccinator" who denounces the collective wisdom of the ancients

language that would "diligently inquire . . . the analogy between words and things, or reason" (*Works, De Augmentis* 4:441); he proposes a review of common law whereby the law books "may be reduced to fewer volumes and clearer resolutions" (*Works, Letters* 12:85); and he agitates for a program of learning (his great instauration) that will correct the badly woven "fabric of human reason" and put it together again "upon a better plan" by commencing "a total reconstruction of sciences, arts, and all human knowledge, raised upon the proper foundations" (*Works, Great Instauration* 4:8). No matter whether his subject is wind or the law, language or nature, men or knowledge, Bacon constantly searches for ways to force his subjects into more orderly patterns, to render those subjects more amenable to control. Bacon's typical solution for rendering a subject more amenable to control is to subject it to rigorous investigation, painstakingly accumulating knowledge about the subject, carefully weeding out

in favor of his own version of knowledge. As a scientist, he finds himself in an uneasy relationship with the alchemists whom he decries but whose methods he uses. Any attempt to deal adequately with Bacon must acknowledge these disjunctures. In this respect, most criticism on Bacon fails. Although specific facets of Bacon's philosophy and of Bacon the man have been explored thoroughly, these explorations have depended upon highly selective, and ultimately reductive readings of the Bacon canon, readings which focus on one aspect of Bacon while blindly ignoring any textual evidence that does not support the particular thematic concerns of the critic. The best analysis of "Bacon's discontinuous vision" can be found in Charles Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986).

"received errors" from that body of knowledge, and compiling the remaining knowledge for future reference.

The language and imagery of mastery and control figure prominently throughout Bacon's work, particularly where control concerns either men or nature. Where men are concerned, he notes that "the great multiplication of virtues upon human nature resteth upon societies well ordained and disciplined" (*Works, Essays* 6:472). In *Aphorismi de Jure*, Bacon argues for the value of the king's sovereign control since "most often people will be brought together by power."¹¹ Bacon's description of his natural philosophy contains even more striking images of control, particularly regarding the investigations of nature's secrets: "For you have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able, when you like, to lead and drive her afterwards to the same place again" (*Works, De Augmentis*, 4:296). As Carolyn Merchant points out, controlling nature frequently takes the form of torture, bondage, and rape. In *De Augmentis*, Bacon argues that

as a man's disposition is never well known or proved till he
be crossed, nor Proteus ever changed shapes till he was

¹¹*Aphorismi de Jure* is not included in Spedding, Ellis, and Heath's edition of Bacon's works. This citation comes from Daniel R. Coquillette's *Francis Bacon* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992) 240. Coquillette cites a translation included in the appendix of Mark Neustadt, "The Making of the Instauration: Science, Politics and Law in the Career of Francis Bacon," diss., Johns Hopkins, 1987.

straitened and held fast; so nature exhibits herself more clearly under the trials and vexations of art than when left to herself. (*Works* 4:298)

In the same text, Bacon frequently refers to nature as a woman "whose holes and corners" must be "enter[ed] and penetrat[ed]"; from whose "womb" secrets must be forced; and who must be "put in constraint, molded, and as it were made new" (*Works* 4:296, 294). "Without any human agency," nature like the winds would "cause strong and violent motion" (*Works, History of the Winds* 5:139).¹² Reducing nature to the status of woman, to the status of passive instrument that serves the will of mankind renders nature more malleable and controllable

In *The Flight to Objectivity*, Susan Bordo notes that "in periods of cultural upheaval and environmental stress," the impulse to dominance especially "male social dominance" is "at its most extreme."¹³ Her observation is congruent with the insights provided by practitioners working in the field of psychotherapy who note that persons with extremely controlling personalities are

¹²Bacon designated *The History of the Winds* as the first title in *The Natural and Experimental History*, which itself was intended to be the third part of *The Great Instauration*.

¹³Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1987) 111. Bordo bases her claim on a cross-cultural study done by anthropologist Peggy Reeve Sanday entitled *Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981).

not infrequently those who fear themselves in danger of losing control altogether. If an obsession with control is a manifestation of cultural upheaval and societal breakdown, then Bacon certainly had good reasons for his fascination with and desire for a natural philosophy that, when wedded to an elitist political program, promised a perfectly rational control of the world. The first half of the seventeenth century in England was marked by pervasive challenges to authority on every front (political, social, religious, "scientific"). The seventeenth century in England saw two revolutions, the deposition of two monarchs, economic and religious crisis, and class conflict. It was period when, as historian Derek Hirst has commented, "in every area authorities were being called into question" (1).

I would argue that a particularly crucial element of the cultural upheaval experienced in early seventeenth-century England was the perception that the glue that had traditionally bound communities together—reciprocity and mutuality—was no longer adhering. Although economic or environmental depredations or "scientific" or philosophical innovations can certainly contribute to the stress felt by a community, these phenomena are less likely to be viewed as catastrophic (in the sense that they are destroying the whole fabric of a community) in communities that are strongly bound together by a sense of reciprocity. Thus, even in the wake of a catastrophic and uncontrollable event like a

flood or hurricane, a community is more likely to feel that it can manage the aftermath of such an event if a strong sense of reciprocity is present in the community. However when a sense of reciprocity is absent, people are more likely to feel that they have no control over their lives. Under such circumstances, the threat of economic, political, environmental, or religious upheaval can intensify.

Given the prevalent perception in late sixteenth-century England that reciprocity was on the decline, Bacon's desire to develop a comprehensive natural philosophy that would enable a complete instrumentalization of nature was perfectly understandable. Although Bacon did not, unlike many of his contemporaries, directly take up the issue of weakening reciprocal ties in the culture, the weakening of the ideal of mutuality and reciprocity would certainly have thrown "the inconveniences of man's estate" (4:299) into sharp relief and heightened the necessity to "relieve" these inconveniences. Bacon certainly demonstrates throughout his work that he is sensitive to the miseries of the human condition, and his proposal for a pragmatic natural philosophy that focuses on instrumentalizing relations between man and the world arises in some part of his desire to ease both the inconveniences of man's estate (and the inconvenient

pressure that they place on the state).¹⁴ Bacon repeatedly couches his quest for an enlightened natural philosophy in terms that are both moral and religious:

To God the Father, God the Word, God the Spirit, we pour forth most humble and hearty supplications, that He remembering the calamities of mankind and the pilgrimage of this our life in which we wear out days few and evil, would please to open to us new refreshments out of the fountains of his goodness, for the alleviating of our miseries.

(*Works*, "Prayers" 7:259)

As Johann Mouton points out, Bacon sees the extension of man's power over the earth as "therapeutic"—as a means of healing the wounds—"the immeasurable helplessness and poverty of the human race"¹⁵—that man suffered as a result of the fall and as a means

¹⁴Of course Bacon's proposal is also rooted to a large degree in his desire for professional advancement.

¹⁵Francis Bacon, *The Masculine Birth of Time or the Great Instauration of the Dominion of Man over the Universe* in *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon: An Essay on Its Development from 1603 to 1609 with New Translations of Fundamental Texts*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Farrington (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1964): 72. Also included in Farrington's text are translations of *Thoughts and Conclusions* and *The Refutation of Philosophies*. Future references to these three texts will refer to Farrington's translation and will be cited in text by title and page number. They can be distinguished from references to Spedding's edition, which are referred to parenthetically by *Works*, title, and page number.

of recapturing, at least in part, something of a prelapsarian state of grace.¹⁶

Of course, instrumentalizing the world radically changes man's relationship to it. What was once an organic relationship, one which emphasized the interdependence of all the parts both human and nonhuman now shifts to a dualistic one, in which man sees himself as radically separate from the world. Domination replaces interdependence. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno note:

Bacon's view was appropriate to the scientific attitude that prevailed after him. The concordance between the mind of man and the nature of things that he had in mind is patriarchal: the human mind, which overcomes superstition, is to hold sway over a disenchanted nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles: neither in the enslavement of men nor in compliance with the world's rulers. . . . Technology is the essence of this knowledge. It does not work by concepts and images, by the fortunate

¹⁶Mouton in Sessions 139-150. See also Mouton's "Power and Therapy in Francis Bacon's Natural Philosophy," *Abstracts of the 7th International Congress on Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* 6 (1983): 140-44. For other discussions of the "therapeutic" impulse in Bacon see Stillman, who argues that Bacon sees linguistic containment as therapeutic; Alvin Snider, *Origin and Authority in Seventeenth-Century England: Bacon, Milton, Butler* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994); and Michael McCanles, "From Derrida to Bacon and Beyond," Sessions 25-46. Both Snider and McCanles locate in Bacon, a "a desire to heal [*italics mine*] the gap between mental and symbolic signifiers" (McCanles 34).

insight, but refers to method, the exploitation of others' work and capital. The "many things" which, according to Bacon, "are reserved," are themselves no more than instrumental . . . What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men.

That is its only aim. (4)

Horkheimer and Adorno are by no means the only social critics who view "this disenchantment of the world" with alarm and who write narratives of modern science in which Bacon figures as the "diabolic" father of modern instrumentality, who devotes his life to a "cult of power."¹⁷ A growing number of critics, particularly those working in the disciplines of environmental ethics and ecofeminism have joined the ranks of Bacon bashers. Susan Griffin includes Bacon in her gallery of white male rogues who have violently silenced both women and nature, and Carolyn Merchant argues that Bacon's "new ethic sanctioning the exploitation of nature" ultimately results in nature's death.¹⁸

¹⁷Harold Fisch, "Bacon and Paracelsus," *Cambridge Journal* 5 (1952): 752; Oskar Kraus qtd. in Johann Mouton, "'The Summary Law of Nature': Revisiting Bacon's Views on the Unity of the Sciences in William A. Sessions, ed., *Francis Bacon's Legacy of Texts: 'The Art of Discovery Grows with Discovery'* (New York: AMS, 1990) 139; hereafter, Mouton's article will be cited in text by author and page number.

¹⁸Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her* (New York: Harper, 1978) 15, hereafter cited in text by author and page number; Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* 164.

That these writers have represented this instrumentalizing of relations between humans and nature and ultimately between human and human as bad, I have no quarrel. I, too, find Bacon's version of a collective human agency that is divorced from nature disturbing, dysfunctional, and potentially deadly. However, I would argue that Bacon's detractors have demonized Bacon's project without clearly understanding it as a rather complicated response to a disturbing set of cultural circumstances that I have outlined above and in Chapter Two. Horkheimer and Adorno, for example, provide absolutely no analysis of the historical and cultural particularities surrounding Bacon's project. To the extent that they address historical contingencies, they do so by presenting history as mythic process. Thus, they represent the increasing alienation of labor that occurs as capitalism matures in terms of the myth of Odysseus and the sirens. Odysseus' crew, with their plugged up ears represent laborers in an instrumentalized world who "concentrate as they look ahead . . . ignore whatever lies to one side . . . [and] doggedly sublimate . . . the drive that impels to diversion" (Horkheimer and Adorno 34). As for the mast-bound Odysseus, he represents the capitalist proprietor who "can not yield to the temptation of self-abandonment" and who must "renounce even participation in labor" (Horkheimer and Adorno

35).¹⁹ Likewise, Griffin fails to ground her critique in a historically particularized narrative. Merchant does provide a useful analysis of the historical circumstances in which Bacon's proposal for a natural philosophy emerges particularly as his proposal reflects prevalent attitudes about women. However, her argument that the goal of Bacon's project is to promote the interests of the mercantile class strikes me as somewhat off the mark. To be sure the mercantile class ultimately did benefit (and richly) from the increased instrumentalization of nature; however, Bacon makes clear over and over again that specific class interests that he promotes are those of a courtly elite. In any case, Merchant fails to examine why, class interests aside, Bacon might have found the instrumentalization of nature so attractive.

Rather than simply demonize Bacon as the father of modern instrumentalized reason, I think that Bacon's detractors would do well to examine why the promise of control offered by Bacon's natural philosophy was and continues to be so attractive. If we truly wish to escape the evils of instrumentality, then we would do well to come to terms with the very human desire for control and to address seriously those phenomena that exacerbate that desire to unhealthy levels.

¹⁹Horkheimer and Adorno's method of representing history in mythologized terms bears an uncanny resemblance to Bacon's *De Sapientia Veterum* (*Wisdom of the Ancients*). One wonders what anxiety of influence is in operation here.

Instrumentalization, Efficiency, and Elitism

In providing a method for instrumentalizing nature, Bacon offered up to mankind the promise of a controlled and orderly world. However, instruments need wielders if they are to be used effectively. From Bacon's perspective, the most efficient means of ensuring control was to place his instruments at the disposal of an elite class, who were in turn answerable to and under the control of an absolute monarch. Bacon was no proponent of leveling the distinctions between men or of allowing democratic rule, which he associated with anarchy. An unjust monarchy was better than the tyranny of the mob. As he noted in *Aphorismi de Jure*, "anarchy is more malicious than tyranny, since the lusts of a single person have a limited scope, but those of the multitude extend everywhere" (qtd. in Coquillette 240).

Some critics, including Nietzsche himself—who remarks that Lord Bacon was "the first realist in every great sense of that word" (*Ecce Homo* 3)²⁰—have found it tempting to read Bacon as a kind of proto-Nietzschean overman, who sounds the trumpet rallying all men to throw off the bonds of received opinion, thereby appropriating for themselves that agency hitherto reserved for God

²⁰Nietzsche's texts, like those of Bacon, exhibit frequent inconsistencies. Elsewhere, Nietzsche lumps Bacon with all the other English, whom he characterizes as intellectual philistines having "no rhythm and dance, indeed not even the desire for rhythm and dance" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 190).

and kings.²¹ Certainly Bacon himself, at times, employs language that prefigures the same Promethean hubris and excess that one finds in Nietzsche. Thus, Bacon writes in *The Masculine Birth of Time*:

My dear, dear boy, what I propose is to unite you with things themselves in a chaste, holy, and legal wedlock; and from this association you will secure an increase beyond all the hopes and prayers of ordinary marriages, to wit, a blessed race of Heroes or Supermen who will overcome the immeasurable helplessness and poverty of the human race, which cause it more destruction than all giants, monsters,

²¹For a discussion of Bacon as a proto-Nietzschean, see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times: A Study of Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993). Although Lampert makes some perceptive connections between Baconian and Nietzschean hostility to philosophy (old style) with its blind conformity to the so-called "wisdom" of the ancients, he fails to adequately historicize Bacon and his work. Unloosed from his historical moorings, Lampert's Bacon emerges as hostilely anti-Christian and deeply critical of the monarchy. Lampert interprets Bacon's "folded and enigmatical style" and fondness for aphorisms as a means of offering veiled criticisms of the state that would be impermissible to state directly. Such an interpretation demands that we either ignore or dismiss Bacon's own repeated attempts, both in his public as well as his private writings, to yoke his new philosophy to the interests of the monarchy. Lampert's interpretation also demands that we treat as rhetorical opportunism Bacon's persistent depiction of his new philosophy as a Christian endeavor. Had Bacon, in fact, felt deep antipathy towards Christianity, he undoubtedly would have had to disguise such sentiments. However, the sheer number of pro-Christian sentiments in his writings argues against such an interpretation. Bacon would have had to have practiced duplicity on a level that simply is not credible.

or tyrants, and will make you peaceful, happy, prosperous and secure [*italics mine*]. (72)

However, two points are worth noting. First, despite his generally confident stance that man can and should dominate nature, Bacon is, by no means, absolutely consistent in the rhetoric he employs to describe this relationship. For example in his *Natural and Experimental History*, Bacon exhibits profound anxiety about man's relationship with the natural world and appears to retreat from the Promethean excess elsewhere exhibited in his writing:

[W]e clearly impress the stamp of our image on the creatures and works of God . . . Wherefore our dominion over creatures is a second time forfeited, not undeservedly; and whereas after the fall of man some power over the resistance of creatures was still left to him . . . yet this too through our insolence, and because we desire to be like God and to follow the dictates of our own reason, we in great part lose. (5:132)

Second, one should not confuse either Bacon's own ambitions regarding himself or his project with any desire on his part to promote strategies that increase the individual's ability to define himself or shape the world to his own purposes. While Bacon's new philosophy certainly does open up the possibility that the world can be shaped to the purposes of men, the men whom Bacon

intends to do the shaping are those select, enlightened few, who by virtue of birth and education are capable of determining the best interests of the masses. Bacon's project is elitist in its trajectory; he simply does not believe that most men are capable of or even should attempt to engage in self-fashioning. "Common people," he writes in his essay "On Sedition," "are slow of motion, if they be not excited by the greater sort".²² And in "An Advertisement Touching the Controversies of the Church of England," he writes, "the people is no meet judge nor arbitrator, but rather the quiet, moderate, and private assemblies of the learned" (*Works, Letters* 8:94). For Bacon then, men, like nature, must be led, must be dominated.

In the *New Atlantis*, Bacon further elaborates on the virtues of a state closely administered and controlled by these private assemblies of the learned.²³ He provides a model showing how the

²²Buchanan Sharp points out in his book *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1596-1660* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980), that Bacon shared with his contemporaries the assumption that the common people were, in fact, incapable of acting on their own unless spurred by their betters. However, as Sharp study demonstrates, the rural artisans and landless poor were, in fact, quite capable of acting on their own to incite riot and rebellion over food and wages. His analysis of the actual participants of food riots and rebellions reveals that these people were overwhelmingly from the landless, artisan class.

²³For an extended close reading of Bacon's *New Atlantis*, see Howard B. White, *Peace among the Willows: The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1968) 93-251. For other useful analyses of Bacon's *New Atlantis*, see Charles Whitney, "Merchants of Light: Science as Colonization in the *New Atlantis*"

utopian (at least for him) goal of perfect control can be achieved through the effective deployment of natural philosophy by a learned elite. Bensalem, the model society depicted in Bacon's utopian narrative, is organized along rigidly authoritarian lines, with a king heading the state aided by the thirty-six worthies of the House of Salomon, who are responsible for gathering, developing, implementing, and disseminating all knowledge as they see fit. The fellows of Salomon's House bear a close resemblance to the Aristotelian ideal of the great-souled citizen. Like Aristotle's ideal citizen, the brethren of Salomon's House are virtuous men, men, who achieve their virtue by their active participation in political life. However, they also differ from the Aristotle's ideal in some significant ways.

For Aristotle, civic life, the life led in the service of the polity, is separate from the contemplative life, which he

in *Francis Bacon's Legacy of Texts: "The Art of Discovery Grows with Discovery,"* ed., William Sessions, (New York: AMS, 1990): 255-68; Harvey Wheeler, "Francis Bacon's New Atlantis: The 'Mould' of a Lawfinding Commonwealth" in Sessions 291-310; Sharon Achinstein, "How to Be a Progressive without Looking Like One: History and Knowledge in Bacon's New Atlantis, *Clio* 17 (1988): 249-64. Also of interest is Daniel R. Coquillette's *Francis Bacon* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992). Coquillette, who is interested in resurrecting Bacon as an important influence on modern jurisprudence, argues that although Bacon did not actually get around to composing a frame of Laws for New Atlantis (which had been Bacon's original intention according to William Rawley), he, nevertheless, anticipated some of the legal problems posed by scientific technology.

describes as the life most likely to promote man's happiness.²⁴ Aristotle's separation of the political and the contemplative lives closely corresponds to his separation of moral and intellectual virtues. Moral virtue, argues Aristotle, lies in the realm of action—action undertaken in "accordance with right rule"; intellectual virtue, on the other hand, enables us to frame the right rule.²⁵

In the *New Atlantis*, an elite cadre of citizen-scholars control the affairs of state; they both frame right rule and

²⁴In *The Nichomachean Ethics* (Bk 10.7), Aristotle writes: "Happiness in the highest sense is the contemplative life. . . . For firstly, this activity is the best (since not only is reason the best thing in us, but the objects of reason are the best of knowable objects); and secondly, it is the most continuous, since we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can do anything. . . . the activity of philosophic wisdom is admittedly the pleasantest of virtuous activities; at all events the pursuit of it is thought to offer pleasures marvelous for their purity and their enduringness, and it is to be expected that those who know will pass their time more pleasantly than those who inquire" (263-64).

²⁵David Ross, "Introduction," Aristotle xv. Aristotle categorizes the intellectual virtues under six headings: science, art, practical wisdom, intuitive reason, philosophic wisdom, and political science. Practical wisdom provides us with a means of framing the rules whereby we can live morally virtuous lives. Aristotle argues that practical wisdom and political science are closely allied (i.e., they belong to "the same state of mind"); however, he makes a distinction between their essences. Practical wisdom, Aristotle maintains, "is concerned with a man himself—with the individual; whereas, political science is concerned with the good of men considered as part of the body politic" (147).

undertake its realization.²⁶ By linking citizenship and scholarly endeavor, Bacon accomplishes more than simply a transfer of power from one group of citizens to another; he also translates scholarly endeavor from the realm of the contemplative to the realm of the political. In Bacon's utopia, the contemplative becomes synonymous with the active, and intellectual virtue becomes synonymous with moral virtue.²⁷

Like Bacon himself, the members of Salomon's house have taken all knowledge to be their province. "All knowledge," for them encompasses the theoretical, practical, and the mechanical, although they place rather more emphasis on the practical and mechanical arts than they do on theoretical knowledge. Of the twelve Merchants of Light, only three, the Interpreters of Nature, actually take theoretical knowledge as their province. This

²⁶For a discussion of Aristotle's influence on Renaissance deliberations about politics and ethics, see Brian P. Copenhaver and Charles Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy, History of Western Philosophy* 3 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), especially 270-71. See also Jill Kraye, "Moral Philosophy," *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, eds., Charles B. Schmitt et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 303-86.

²⁷Elsewhere, Bacon reveals considerably more ambivalence about the possibility of connecting the contemplative and active life. In the "Proem" to *Of the Interpretation of Nature*, he seems to argue that a profound disjuncture exists between the contemplative and the civic life. he writes, "For myself, I found that I was fitted for nothing so well as for the study of truth . . . Nevertheless, because my birth and education had seasoned me in business of state . . . and because I thought that a man's own country has some special claims upon him . . . I applied myself to acquire the arts of civil life" (10:85).

emphasis on the practical and mechanical accords with Bacon's stress on the importance of inductive reasoning as means of correcting faulty theoretical knowledge that has been passed down from ancient thinkers. Bacon argues that an unquestioning reliance on the wisdom of the ancients results in the truths of the objective world being molded to fit false theories, rather than in theories that emerge naturally from careful observation of nature.²⁸ Bacon's fascination with the mechanical arts also corresponds to his argument that pragmatic outcomes should be the ultimate end of knowledge. Knowledge, as he notes in *Valerius Terminus*, which "tendeth but to satisfaction is but as a courtesan, which is for pleasure and not for fruit or generation" (*Works* 3:223).

To increase the fruits and generative power of knowledge, the brothers of Salomon's House labor tirelessly. Their express mission, as one of the brethren announces to the narrator of *New Atlantis*, "is [to discover] the knowledge of Causes and secret motion of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible" (3:156). However, as the ruling class on Bensalem clearly, if not explicitly, recognizes,

²⁸Alas, Bacon does not always follow his own advice about letting the facts dictate the theory. In *A Natural History*, for example, he organizes natural phenomena into centuries. The irony of taking information that does not depend on a chronological base and forcing it to fit man's way of organizing the world is apparently lost on him.

to accumulate knowledge is to accumulate dynamite—dynamite, which used indiscriminately can topple the very state whose power it sustains.²⁹ Even in a utopian state like Bensalem, whose citizenry enjoy the benefits of a stable government and the general prosperity enabled by the unlocking of nature's secrets, the common people are hardly meet judges of how to employ the knowledge thus collected since as Bacon comments elsewhere, they are by nature "always swelling with malice towards their rulers, and hatching revolutions" (*Works, De Sapientia Veterum* 6: 718). Thus, the prosperity and order in Bensalem depend upon the benevolent paternalism of the Salomon House elite, whose members collectively decide "which of the inventions and experiences which we have discovered shall be published, and which not: and take all

²⁹Bacon takes great pains to downplay the subversive potential of the new philosophy. He vigilantly seeks "to deliver" natural philosophy "from the discredits and disgraces which it hath received" and dismisses "as mere depravation and calumny" the argument that learning "should undermine the reverence of laws and government" (*Works, Advancement* 3: 273). However, clearing natural philosophy from the imputation of insurrectionist tendencies forces Bacon to make claims that are odds with his insistence that the dispersal of knowledge belongs in the hands of "a learned few." If, in fact, "it is without all controversy that learning doth make the minds of men gentle, generous, maniable, and pliable to government; whereas ignorance makes them churlish, thwart, and mutinous," then there can be no good reason for maintaining such tight controls over knowledge (*Works, Advancement* 3: 273). That Bacon clearly insists on natural philosophy's being a tool at the disposal of an elite few betrays his own anxieties about its subversive potential.

an oath of secrecy, for the concealing of those which we think fit to keep secret" (*Works, New Atlantis* 3:165).³⁰

The valorization of secrecy as both a necessary and ethical method for controlling the citizenry occupies a foundational position in Bensalem's history. Bensalemites trace their prosperity back nineteen hundred years to the rule of King Solamona, who, we are told, "had a large heart, *inscrutable* for good" (*Works, New Atlantis* 3:144 [*italics mine*]) and who initiated the policy of secrecy under which Bensalem operates. Solamona's policy of secrecy restricts contact between Bensalem and the rest of the world. Except in situations of extreme duress, Solamona's law forbids strangers entrance to the country and altogether prohibits the general population of Bensalem from traveling abroad. Only the twelve Merchants of Light, who are part of the elite fellowship of Salomon's House may travel abroad, thereby ensuring the preservation of "the good which cometh by communicating with strangers, and avoiding the hurt" (*Works, New Atlantis* 3:145).

Bacon's interest in secrecy extends beyond the confines of his utopian fiction and finds its counterpart in his discussions of nature and of Tudor and Jacobean politics. Bacon's discussions on secrecy are interesting on two counts: (1) secrecy offers a

³⁰Martin argues "[a]ny true 'modernity' or 'reforms' as Bacon understood them, would come through prudent and vigorous governance from the top" (68).

paradoxical means of efficiently realizing the promise of control afforded by a project ostensibly aimed at penetrating nature's secrets, and (2) these discussions provide an interesting example of the way in which Bacon ties his project to an absolutist ideology. When I say that Bacon ties his project to an absolutist ideology, I refer to ideology in the rather narrow political sense invoked by Clifford Geertz in his essay "Ideology as Cultural System," that is as a "schematic image of social order"—in Bacon's case a hierarchical system that extends from God, through the king, through his subjects, to nature—that "guide[s] man in his political life."³¹

Bacon's valorization of secrecy as a means for assuring order in the community echo the king's own pronouncements on the subject: "A king," James writes in *Basilicon Doron*, "will haue need to vse secrecie in many things."³² For Bacon, secrecy is not simply a convenient fictional method for maintaining order in his

³¹Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as Cultural System," *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter (New York: Free, 1964) 63, 64. For the remainder of this chapter, when I use the term ideology, I will use it in the sense expressed by Geertz.

³²James I, *Basilicon Doron* in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 51. James concludes his advice as follows: "but yet behaue your selfe so in your greatest secrets, as yee neede not bee ashamed, suppose they were all proclaimed at the mercate crosse" (51). In the glossary to his edition, Sommerville notes that the term "secrets" also meant "a concealed coat of armour" (308). Thus one might say that the king cloaked himself in secrecy as one would don armor.

best of all possible worlds; secrecy is a pragmatic and ethical exigency of real-world political praxis—an exigency that finds its legitimation in the operations of nature. The operations of the natural world, as Bacon repeatedly informs his readers, are "secret" and "hidden" full of "fogs and clouds" and "phantasms flitting about on every side" (*Works, Great Instauration* 4:19). "The universe," he tells us "to the eye of human understanding is framed like a labyrinth; presenting as it does on every side so many ambiguities of way, such deceitful resemblances of objects and signs, natures so irregular in their lines, and so knotted and tangled" (*Great Instauration* 4:18). Secrecy, then, is the rule of nature; it is also, as Bacon argues in *Of the Advancement of Learning*, the rule of government. "Concerning Government," he writes,

it is a part of knowledge secret and retired, in both these respects in which things are deemed secret; for some things are secret because they are hard to know, and some because they are not fit to utter. We see all governments are obscure and invisible. (*Works, Advancement of Learning* 3:473-74)

Bacon justifies secrecy in government on grounds both divine and natural. From a divine perspective, political secrecy is justifiable because "the Government of God over the world is hidden" (*Works, Advancement* 3:474). Further, biblical injunction

forbids us to use "cunning and bent observation to pierce and penetrate into the heart of kings, which Scripture hath declared to be inscrutable" (*Works, Advancement* 3:280). From the perspective of nature, political secrecy is legitimate because the political recapitulates the natural. As Bacon informs us,

there is a great affinity and consent between the rules of nature and the true [italics mine] rules of policy: the one being nothing else but an order in the government of the world and the other an order in the government of an estate. And therefore the education and erudition of the kings of Persia was in a science which was termed by a name then of great reverence but now degenerate and taken in ill part: for the Persian magic, which was the secret literature of their kings, was an observation of the contemplations of nature and an application thereof to a sense politic; taking the fundamental laws of nature, with the branches and passages of them, as an original and first model, whence to

take and describe a copy and imitation for government.³³

(*Works, Letters* 10:90 [italics Bacon's])

In a similar vein, Bacon elsewhere writes:

Is not the ground which Machivel wisely and largely discourseth concerning governments, that the way to establish and preserve them is to reduce them *ad principia*, a rule in religion and nature as well as in civil administration? Was not the Persian Magic a reduction or correspondence of the principles and architecture of nature to the rules and policy of governments? (*Works, Advancement* 3: 348)

By carefully deploying scriptural and "natural" precedents, Bacon designs a natural philosophy congruent with the rhetoric of divine right favored by the Tudors and the Stuarts. In the Baconian script, the King assumes the role of magician/magus extraordinaire, who combines hidden knowledge to which only he has access to produce wonderful operations—i.e., the laws, the

³³The passage occurs in "A Brief Discourse Touching the Happy Union of the Kingdoms of England and Scotland." The context in which this passage occurs is worth noting because we can observe Bacon actually deploying natural philosophy in the service of political practice—in this instance to forward a project (the unification of Scotland and England) that was very dear to the then newly installed King James I. Although Bacon was not successful in convincing Parliament to approve unification, he did succeed, through this and other services to the King, in successfully promoting his own political career, which had stagnated during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

perfect state.³⁴ He is himself a display of divine nature, who does not admit "any near or full approach either to his power or his secret."³⁵ The King's manipulations of things hidden and secret recapitulate his own divinely authorized relationship with God. As Bacon declares:

The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the king is to find it out";³⁶ as if, according to the innocent play of children, the Divine Majesty took delight to hide his works, to the end to have them found out; and as if kings could not obtain a greater honour than to be God's playfellows in that game; considering the great commandment of wits and means, whereby nothing needeth to be hidden from them. (*Works, Advancement* 3:299)

³⁴For a discussion of the roles that magic and alchemy play in Bacon's work, see Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968). Rossi argues that although Bacon draws upon the magico-alchemical tradition, he utilizes it only insofar as it supports his own inductive method. For a short, succinct version of Rossi's argument, see his entry "Baconianism," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, chief ed. Philip P. Wiener, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, 1973): 172-79. 5 vols.

³⁵Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983).

³⁶See Proverbs 25: 2-3: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search out a matter. The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable."

In the Baconian script, God, King, and nature form a mutually legitimating trinity. To enhance the effectiveness of this trinity, Bacon offers up, "as the fat of the sacrifice," his natural philosophy "to be incensed to the honour, first of the Divine Majesty, and next of your Majesty [King James], to whom on earth I am most bounden" (*Works, Advancement* 3:491).

Slavoj Žižek's concept of the "ideological quilt" provides a useful model for understanding both the ways in which Bacon pieces together into a unified field his discussions of natural philosophy, nature, religion, secrecy, magic, and political practice and for showing how the Baconian marriage of ideology and ethics breaks down. Žižek, borrowing from Jacques Lacan and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, argues that what "creates and sustains the identity of a given ideological field" is the intervention of a "nodal point" or "point de capitan" that "quilts" a series of floating signifiers into "a unified field":

The "quilting" performs the totalization by means of which this free floating of ideological elements is halted, fixed—that is to say, by means of which they become parts of the structured network of meaning.³⁷

³⁷Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) 87; hereafter cited in text as Žižek followed by the page number. Žižek's analysis of culture is a syncretic blend of ideological critique and psychoanalytical description. Žižek reintroduces the *point de capitan* of Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a "fundamental ideological operation," that enables us to better understand the workings of ideology (Ernesto Laclau, "Preface,"

Thus, if a group of signifiers like "natural philosophy," "monarchy," "Christianity," "nature" or "ethics,"—signifiers that have no "necessary," predetermined connection to one another—are quilted through the rhetoric of absolutism, their meanings carry rather different valences than if the point de capitan is Calvinism. Žižek points out, however, that ideological critique is incomplete if we simply stop our investigations at the place where the point de capitan halts the slide of signification and constitutes the signifier into a fixed field of meaning. Because the point de capitan must confer its meaning retroactively, the process of interpellation is always already incomplete. What this retroactive conferral of meaning obscures is the scandalous secret at the heart of all ideology: that the big Other, the singular signifier that confers meaning on the other signifiers, is itself empty, devoid of content. In order to hide this lack in itself, the big Other resorts to fantasy—a fantasy that simultaneously

Žižek xi). In psychoanalytic terms, the points de capitan are the anchoring points, by means of which the signified is hooked to the signifier. These anchoring points bind the subject into the signifying chain of words, and thereby constituting her as subject. See also Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans., Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985; London: Verso, 1990). Žižek's discussion of ideological interpellation is quite similar to Foucault's description of the intimate and indissoluble relationship between knowledge (or truth) and power. As Foucault remarks, "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend in it a reign of truth" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 133).

supports and undermines the effects of ideology. As Žižek argues, "Beyond interpellation, is the square of desire, fantasy, lack in the Other and drive pulsating towards some surplus-enjoyment" (124).³⁸ Fantasy, which is structured in this pre-ideological kernel of enjoyment, provides a means through which ideology can mask its own void, can represent its own impossibility.

In Bacon's texts, nature is the fantasy of an absolutist discourse, the means through which that discourse can take into account its own impossibility and simultaneously reassert a control that it does not actually possess.³⁹ In the Baconian version of a brave new world, unruly nature is tamed by the disciplinary gaze of a masculine natural philosophy and presented as a compliant bride and helpmate to mankind: "she is put in

³⁸The problem with standard accounts of ideology, according to Žižek, is that they dismiss this pre-ideological kernel of surplus-enjoyment as irrelevant precisely because it is pre-ideological. According to Žižek, "[i]n ideology 'all is not ideology'; rather, the surplus 'is the last support of ideology' (124).

³⁹I do not mean to suggest Bacon actually believed that the concept of an absolutist monarchy—a concept that repeatedly informs his discussions of law, natural philosophy, civil government, religion, etc.—was at root devoid of content (who, after all, believes that her particular pet ideologies are empty?) or that the particular ideological quilt produced from his writings represented a conscious effort on his part to conceal the lack of self-legitimizing agency in the notion of absolutism. Clearly, Bacon possessed no such doubts about the monarchy. Nevertheless, an absolute monarchy was not a practical reality in early seventeenth-century England. As Stillman points out England's lack of a standing army, its uncertain financial situation, and its strong tradition of common law made it "an unlikely candidate for absolutist rule" (60).

constraint, molded and made as it were new by art and the hand of man; as in things artificial."⁴⁰ In this fantasy, nature can fill the void in the big Other and give it identity because nature is de-natured (i.e., mechanized, turned into artifice by "the hand of man"), while simultaneously absolutism, with all of its totalizing impulses, assumes the guise of the natural. And since nature's conquest has been depicted as an ethical endeavor—one which alleviates the suffering of mankind, absolutist discourse also assumes the mantle of ethical legitimacy. Absolutism is not inherently good or even inherently bad. It is merely one particular schematic among many available for ordering political reality. However, the kind of ideological quilting effected by Bacon in his texts obscures the boundary between ethics and ideology—boundaries that, at least on some occasions, we have good reason to maintain.

The economy of desire reflected in the macro-level exchange between the big Other "absolutism" and its sublime object

⁴⁰Various critics have commented on the ways in which Bacon's instrumentalized view depends on a gendered reading of feminine nature, which is brought under the rule of science's masculine gaze. For example, see Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (New York: SUNY P, 1987); Merchant, *The Death of Nature* cited above and *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989); Griffin cited above; Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985); Brian Easlea, *Witch Hunting, Magic, and the New Philosophy: An Introduction to Debates of Scientific Revolution, 1450-1750* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).

"nature," mirrors a similar economy occurring at the micro-level in the exchange between man and nature and man and man. However, the transposition of identity that occurs in this fantasy paradoxically limits agency at the very point of promising expanded agency. As Jessica Benjamin points out,

If I completely control the other, then the other ceases to exist, and if the other completely controls me then I cease to exist. A condition of our own independent existence is recognising the other. True independence means sustaining the essential tension of these contradictory impulses; that is, both asserting the self and recognising the other.

Domination is the consequence of refusing this condition.⁴¹

I have already argued that Bacon has little interest in the individual human agent per se. Rather, he explicitly puts his project in the service of an absolutist ideology. Nevertheless, subsequent appropriations of his project have had important implications for the concept of individual human agency. The instrumentalization of nature recapitulates and confirms a dualistic version of the self conceived as radically disconnected from and independent of others. As Val Plumwood points out, a

⁴¹Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (London: Virago, 1988): 53. See also her article "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination," *The Future of Difference*, eds., Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1985): 41-70.

close correlation exists between "the treatment of nature as an instrument or no more than a means to a human end" and the notion of the self "conceived as that of an individual who stands apart from an alien other and denies his own relationship to and dependency upon this other" (162).

Bacon clearly believes that an ethical project can be linked unproblematically to a political agenda; however, I would argue that the interpellation of ideology and ethics constitutes one of the principal problems of ethical modernity. When we tie ethics, which involves an exploration of the good, with a particular political ideology, of which instrumentalization is the *modus operandi*, we can no longer adequately consider the good as a good in and of itself. Rather, we come to value the good only insofar as it produces a desired end. Instrumentalizing the good also forces us in the direction of a consequentialist ethics. However, instrumentalization also produces an ever increasingly atomized and complex world in which consequences (ethical or otherwise) are often difficult, if not impossible to determine.

I do not mean to argue that when we behave according to our concept of the good, that such action does not produce consequences—consequences that may be good, neutral, or even, on some occasions, bad. Nor do I wish to argue that our concept of the good does not or should not guide our actions although I do agree with Taylor that our conceptions of the good are too

"narrowly concerned with what we ought to do, and not also with what is valuable in itself" (*Sources of the Self* 84 [italics Taylor's]). Furthermore, I do not wish to argue that ideological appropriations of ethical projects are always bad—although I would argue that such appropriations are always potentially problematic and bear watching. What I do wish to argue, however, is that the bond between ethics and ideology is not inevitable and that we gain a certain critical power by preserving a non-instrumentalized space for examining the good as valuable in and of itself.

The current debate about welfare reform in this country provides a good example of why we need to be able to examine and value the good in non-instrumentalized, non-ideological terms. In this particular debate, the ethical good or hypergood in question is the flourishing of others.⁴² Both liberal and conservative factions in this country agree that the flourishing of others is good; further, both factions agree that a significant segment of our population (of which welfare recipients represent an extreme and highly visible example) are not flourishing and

⁴²Here again I am using Taylor's definition of hypergoods as "goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, and decided about" (*Sources* 63). My use of the term "flourishing" also follows that of Taylor. Although Taylor never explicitly defines "flourishing," his use of the concept incorporates the notion of mental and physical well-being as well as the notion that these goods can be realized in terms that are emotionally satisfying to the individual agent.

that this situation is bad. The debate as I have characterized it thus far is not ideologically determined. However, what both liberals and conservatives have done is to seize this particular hypergood and promote it as a means to a variety of ends that are ideologically determined (i.e., ending the cycle of poverty, decreasing the tax drain, promoting economic prosperity, increasing the competitiveness of the United States businesses both at home and abroad, etc.). Thus, flourishing of others ceases to be a good in its own right; rather it becomes a means to an end. Once we instrumentalize this hypergood, some rather curious deformations of the concept of flourishing ensue. To jolt welfare recipients (who by definition are not flourishing—at least not particularly well) into flourishing, we have instituted harsh, even Draconian measures (i.e., cutting off monetary support, food stamps, access to public housing). The logic informing this move seems to be, as the old song goes, that "you've got to be cruel, to be kind."

Now if we examine human flourishing as a good in and of itself, most people will probably agree that deprivation of food and shelter is incommensurate with human flourishing. However, once we link this hypergood to a political agenda, we suddenly find ourselves singing a song that is morally counter-intuitive. The transposition of kindness to cruelty occurs precisely at the

point that the other's flourishing is no longer valued as a good in and of itself.

Similar sorts of transpositions plague significant sectors of the ecological movement, which has, as I have already noted, launched some of the most powerful critiques of the Baconian project. One of the goods valued by many ecologists is the preservation of the earth. As with the welfare debate, when ecologists shift from a simple valuation of preserving the earth for its own sake to valuing earthcare as means to an end, preservation of the earth may paradoxically turn out to be destruction and domination as usual.

Bacon originally envisioned tying knowledge to the service of absolutism—a step that inevitably involved the instrumentalization of knowledge. Although he had a number of self-serving reasons for offering up his project to the glory and perpetuation of an absolute monarchy, he also saw this move as an ethically empowering one. In other words, he argued that certain ethical goods were strengthened when placed in the service of ideology. Today, although we no longer offer up knowledge on the altar of absolutism, we still find knowledge linked to other ideological projects that are just as insistent in their pretensions to hegemony. For myself, I find that even as I criticize the effects of instrumentalized reason, the idea of instrumentality still exercises considerable allure. I find

myself wanting to instrumentalize the ethical goods that I value in hopes of bringing about a better world. Using Bacon's material as a looking-glass for my own age helps to remind me of the dangers of such a desire.

Conclusion

Of course, not all the effects of instrumentality are bad. Bacon's program has given rise to a number of useful technologies. As envisioned by Bacon, technology, has magnified—often in good ways—the power of human beings, and I certainly do not advocate that we reject wholesale the goods of technology and return to some Luddite notion of paradise. I agree, in sentiment, with the opinion expressed by Walter Truett Anderson in a 1996 article in *Mother Jones Magazine*:

We worry about the hole in the ozone layer—and we should worry about it—but don't appreciate the exquisite technology involved in detecting it, monitoring its ebbs and flows, projecting its future. Nobody sees a hole in the ozone. Like many other major environmental issues it is accessible to our understanding only through the use of monitoring techniques.⁴³

⁴³Walter Truett Anderson, "There's No Going Back to Nature," *Mother Jones Magazine*, Sept.-Oct. 1996: n. pag., Online, Internet, 1 Apr. 1996, available http://www.mojones.com/mother_jones/S096/anderson.html.

In any case, we cannot do away with the disciplines of science to which his project has given birth because, as Nolt tells us, "[h]aving become Lords of Nature, we need to know what we are doing."⁴⁴

However, I also agree with Nolt's observation that while technology has increased the scope of human power, it has done so "without correspondingly enlarging its field of care." In fact, rather the opposite has occurred: our field of care has shrunk. In an instrumentalized world, we no longer feel any deep sense of connectedness to the very products (food, shelter, clothing) on which we depend for our survival, nor do we feel any particular connectedness to those who produce these goods.

The ethical ramifications of this diminishing of our field of care are disturbing. As Nolt argues, "[w]hen my power exceeds my care, I don't care (perhaps because I don't know) about what I am doing" (192). We do not care, in fact we cannot care, about

⁴⁴John Nolt, *Down to Earth: Toward a Philosophy of Nonviolent Living* (Washburn, TN: Earth Knows, 1995) 212, hereafter cited in text by author and page number. I would also argue that certain currently popular alternatives to instrumentalized science—for example New Age versions of holism and the harsh ecologism of Earth Firsters who eulogize Nature and devalue humanity altogether—may, on close examination, turn out to be new masks for instrumentality as usual, with the crucial difference from Bacon's project being that this new instrumentality is no longer linked to an intellectually rigorous investigation of the world. As Andrew Ross points out in *Strange Weather*, the ideological trajectories of these solutions may not be that much kinder and gentler after all. Andrew Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits* (London: Verso, 1996).

the material means of our food or shelter's production because those means are so remote from our own lives. Not only are the means of production remote, but the knowledge required for production is remote, in large part because that knowledge has become so specialized. Instrumentalizing the world leads to more efficient methods of production, but it also results in the increasing specialization of knowledge and the ever greater complexification of the world, which in turn render unclear the ethical consequences of many choices that we might make.⁴⁵ When

⁴⁵For example, I may decide to join a political action group agitating against the extensive use of pesticides in the farming industry and against the production of pesticides generally. I may justify my actions on grounds that are both ethical and rational. However, what if I succeed? What if pesticides are banned? Today, most of our crops are genetically engineered to be more productive. In consequence, fewer varieties of any crop are available. Where, a hundred years ago, the varieties of a given crop may have varied from farm to farm within the same region, today all of that land may now be monocropped. Reduction in crop diversity increases the vulnerability of harvests to pest infestation since different varieties of the same crop may exhibit different degrees of resistance to the same pest. Without pesticides, one infestation of the wrong pest can wipe out the harvest of not just one farm but whole regions. Thus what initially seems like an ethical response to depredations of the environment and of human life may turn out to be simply the substitution of one evil for another. I may respond by calling for a return to the use of old heirloom seed varieties, which will increase crop diversity, decrease vulnerability to pests, and decrease farmers' dependence on the scientific industrial complex that produces and patents the new varieties of seeds. However, such a response may also be inadequate since the productivity of heirloom varieties is much less than that of the genetically engineered varieties available on the market today. In a world whose total population is rapidly approaching six billion people, eschewing the use of biogenetically engineered crops may not be a luxury that I can afford, whatever my ethical commitments may be.

the difficulties of decision-making expand too greatly, when people feel that they can no longer calculate with any degree of certainty the ethical consequences of their decisions, or that they cannot afford the consequences of their ethical commitments, a sense of helplessness and apathy may ensue. Under such circumstances, people are likely to abdicate ethical responsibility altogether. For me, this potential for the abdication of ethical responsibility and the difficulty of maintaining a distinction between ethical and ideological concerns constitute the real peril of Bacon's legacy of instrumentality.

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, a dying father, in a recapitulation of the biblical confrontation between God and Cain, bestows on his son the admonition and blessing summed up in the Hebrew word "timshel," which, Steinbeck informs us, has been variously translated as "thou shalt," "thou must," and "thou mayest." The word, which occurs in Genesis 4:7, is spoken by God to an angry Cain whose sacrifice God has rejected: "If thou does well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt/must/mayest (timshel) rule over him." The definition of "timshel" which informs Steinbeck's reading of the biblical passage is "thou mayest." For Steinbeck, the story of Cain is an allegory about free will, the peril and promise of

which are condensed in this particular translation of the word "timshel."

What Steinbeck emphasizes in his own reworking of the biblical myth is the radical interdependence of human agency and of community. Steinbeck argues that while we may choose our own paths, our choices take on richness and meaning and provide us with deep satisfaction only when those choices are realized within the context of community, within the context of care for and obligation toward our fellow human beings. Cain's sin, as it were, occurs precisely because he is unable to imagine himself as part of a dynamic and interdependent whole. For him, human agency only has meaning if conceived in radical opposition to communal values, represented in this case by God's preference of Abel's offering over that of Cain's. In a terrible, but nonetheless attractively romantic rebellion, Cain flouts the values of his community and kills his brother. When God asks him what he has done, he replies, "Am I my brother's keeper?" a response that is really not a question at all but a statement of denial of responsibility. Cain achieves agency but at a terrible cost: isolation from the community. Furthermore, in dissociating himself from any sense of obligation or responsibility for his actions, Cain paradoxically loses agency at the very moment that he asserts that agency.

I invoke Steinbeck's reading of this particular Judeo-Christian myth because I believe that it encapsulates the principal critical tensions that we are facing as we attempt to negotiate the problem of agency and community at the end of the twentieth century—a problem that for all the differences in cultural and historical particularities looks remarkably like that faced by our English forebears at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century. Like Cain, we alternately flirt with a version of human agency that is defined by its absolute separation from any normative values of the community, while at same time we flirt with the idea that we are not properly speaking agents at all but merely products of discourse. In either case, we sidestep crucial questions about obligations to one another. In the former case, we can deny responsibility for the impact of our choices on others because we can argue that obligation itself constitutes a false restriction of individual agency. We can complacently tell ourselves that we are not responsible for our neighbor's well-being, that she is responsible for her own well-being. In the latter case, we may regretfully (or perhaps not regretfully) note the disenfranchisement of others (for example, the third world factory workers who produce many of the goods we consume in this country) but disclaim responsibility on the grounds that we, like them, are merely cogs in the machine of global capitalist ideology.

Both responses strike me as woefully inadequate, not to mention frightening, because they provide rationales for meanness. We currently live in a mean age—an age that does not try to hide its meanness but rather openly and complacently celebrates that meanness as virtue. The message that meanness is virtue infiltrates almost every aspect of contemporary life. Current welfare reform rests on this assumption. Corporate managerial strategies, such as the much-lauded method of total quality management, also testify to the virtues of meanness. On the political right, commentators like George F. Will smugly eulogize social inequality and blithely consign large numbers of people to the miseries occasioned by economic disenfranchisement:

Equality—other than equality before the law—is a problematic, and often pernicious, social value. The celebration of equality of condition is often merely envy tarted up in the clothing of compassion. Furthermore, when equality of outcomes, rather than equal opportunity, is regarded as a matter of moral urgency, this often disposes society to a surly resentment of virtues and talents that, for good reasons, receive high rewards.¹

Responses from the so-called "liberals" hardly provide correctives to the kind of rapaciousness endorsed by the Wills of

¹George F. Will, "Healthy Inequality," editorial, *Newsweek* 28 Oct. 1996: 92.

the country. As Anne Roiphe, a self-styled "old cold liberal" notes,

I used to feel this cruelty was wrong, immoral. . . . Now I don't know. Maybe it's the fuel that powers the palace. I like the wicked clink of glasses, the light bouncing off the rhinestone clasp . . . , the chandeliers glinting against the dark. . . . Cruelty is part of the energy, part of the delight. . . . I want to eat good food till the millennium. . . . I am feeling full of nerve. Nerve is what you need to get through. . . . What you must decide is that shame is bearable.²

But what I find more disheartening than the inculcation of the virtue of meanness into mainstream culture is my own discipline's apparent paralysis in the face of this onslaught. As a teenager, I was taught that the disciplines in the humanities were potentially potent sources of dissent and social change. Regrettably, this observation seems less true to me today than it did twenty years ago. On some occasions (although not always), I find myself reluctantly agreeing with environmental ethicist David Orr, who notes that "[e]ven in the humanities where one might still expect dangerous thoughts about the plight and potentials of humankind, one often finds silliness, shrillness,

²Anne Roiphe, commentary, *New York Observer* Jan. 24, 1994 qtd. in Jonathan Kozol, *Amazing Grace: The Life of America's Children* (New York, Simon, 1996) 113-14.

and obscurity."³ Further, I am disturbed when I read comments like that of Scott Wilson, a cultural materialist critic working in the field of Renaissance studies:

The 'intellectual'—be it in the form of the philosopher, novelist, writer, teacher, lecturer, professor or scientist—if not dead already, is doomed . . . in the sense that he or she can design or direct, predict or even propose any significant political change with any hope that such a proposal will have any consequences. (261)

I also find Wilson's comments odd given his own political commitments to the gay community, a community that surely has benefitted, at least in some small way, from the active and supportive engagement of intellectuals with issue of homosexuality. At the bare minimum, undergraduate English majors today are aware that homosexuality is not, as one elderly professor informed me in the early eighties, a product of twentieth-century culture.

However, while I find Wilson's comments disheartening and odd, I do not find them particularly surprising given his obvious indebtedness to the critical apparatus provided by theorists like Foucault. As I have pointed out in Chapter Three, the strain of Nietzschean thought running through Foucault and Derrida has been

³David W. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, DC: Island, 1994) 100.

used to theorize both meaningful versions of human agency and of community out of existence. If we accept that the concepts of human agency and community are essentially empty (albeit perhaps dangerous), then resisting the (to my mind) detrimental instrumentalization of ourselves and our students is difficult. Education ceases to be a valuable ethical good in itself, and the intellectual becomes an efficient and utilitarian instrument that produces a commodity (the student) for exchange in the global market place. While I would agree that Wilson's vision of the politically (and by implication ethically) impotent academic is a real possibility, I do not believe that this vision is inevitable. As I have tried to suggest in Chapter One, one way of combating academic impotence and barrenness is by actively engaging literature as means to help us answer the question "how should we live?" To a certain extent, some literary criticism (particularly in the areas of gender studies, queer theory, and colonialist theory) does engage this question; however, as I argue in Chapter One that engagement remains largely an oblique one. Explicit connections between the interpretation of a particular text and our engagement with our own ethical dilemmas are, for the most part, absent.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to offer examples of what a more explicit connection between literary interpretation and the ethical dilemmas of my own culture might look like. I

have examined the way in which two Renaissance writers, Thomas Nashe and Francis Bacon, respond to the issues of community and human agency; I have also attempted to suggest some ways in which their responses to these issues can shed light on twentieth-century ethical concerns. I have argued that the strong version of human agency put forth by Nashe emerges as a critical response to a perceived breakdown of communal reciprocity. However, Nashe's concept of human agency is grounded in an appeal for a reciprocal community and provides a corrective both to the version of community and agency as a false either/or dichotomy and to theories that deny the value of community and agency.

I have also argued in this dissertation that Bacon's vision of an instrumentalized world is, likewise, an understandable response to a perceived breakdown in community. Bacon's vision holds forth the promise of perfect control of the world—a promise that perhaps sheds light on our own reluctance to free ourselves from the perils of instrumentalized reason. Further, I have argued that in his enthusiastic coupling of natural philosophy and absolutism, Bacon fails to preserve an adequate space between ethical and ideological concerns—a failure that we continue to recapitulate in the late twentieth century.

In "The Risks and Responsibilities of Affirming Ordinary Life," Jean Bethke Elshtain argues for "an ethic of responsibility," an ethic that calls us "to account" and demands

that we be "answerable" to one another for our practices in the world.⁴ I agree with Elshtain and would add that the more people's lives we touch the greater our accountability and answerability. As teachers, I believe our accountability is particularly high since we will all touch a great many students over the course of our professional careers. While we cannot guarantee how or if our students will use the knowledge they gain in our classrooms, I believe that what we teach them matters. If we draw exclusively on a critical apparatus that denies any rich possibilities for agency or community, then we, in essence, teach our students that they are not accountable since accountability demands some notion of both agency and a community of others to whom we might account.

For anyone living in the late twentieth century in this country, the stakes of accepting or denying accountability are high. The ordinary practices of daily consumption that constitute a significant portion of our everyday lives in this country connect us with countless individuals all over the globe. We may not know the name of the thirteen-year-old Malaysian child who, in unhealthy conditions and for poverty-level wages, has stitched

⁴Jean Bethke Elshtain, "The Risks and Responsibilities of Affirming Ordinary Life," *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, ed. James Tully (1994; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 80.

the logos on our Nike tennis shoes; however, when we purchase those shoes our lives connect with hers.

Furthermore, I believe that an intimate (although not neatly traceable) relationship exists between that child's activities and the acts of literary interpretation in which I, as an academic, engage. The cultural and historical differences between absolutist and late capitalist ideologies notwithstanding, certain patterns of domination and exploitation seem to recur with a disconcerting regularity. The disruption of the subsistence-level agricultural economy of twentieth-century Malay peasants—a disruption that has forced those peasants into the cities and the factories—is not all that different from the disruptions that forced sixteenth-century peasants out of the countryside and into the towns and cities. Further, for all the differences between sixteenth- and twentieth-century culture, both centuries' responses to the plight of the poor look remarkably similar. Analyzing literary texts with an eye to these similarities and pointing out these similarities to our students can be particularly productive on several counts. In my own experience, students often can more easily recognize past unjust practices than recognize current unjust practices. Pointing out structural similarities between past and present patterns of domination and social disenfranchisement can help them to see present injustice more clearly—and consequently to be better able to understand the

moral implications of the choices they make. Nor are our students the only beneficiaries. Examining the past (particularly at points that illuminate our own cultural dilemmas) can help us to articulate more clearly our own ethical commitments. And so to the Wilsons of the world, who believe that the academic is "doomed" and to the Greenblatts who deny that our choices can ever be "free" since such choices are historically and culturally encumbered, let me say: *Timshel. Thou mayest*

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