

The Humor of Skepticism: Therapeutic Laughter in Early Modern Literature

by

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Introduction

From the shadows of a dimly lit scriptorium venerable Jorge of Burgos emerges to admonish a group of monks for laughing at the ridiculous marginalia painted by a recently deceased brother. The blind librarian, guardian to the finest manuscript collection in all of Christendom, insists that laughter not only violates the Rule of St. Benedict but threatens to destroy the very tenets of faith. “Laughter fomented doubt” he bellows, “He who laughs does not believe in what he laughs at.”¹ For old Jorge, the antagonist of Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, laughter offends an essential spirit of gravity that sustains institutional power and official culture in all across a variety of different domains. Eco ultimately champions this laughter as an enlightened and liberating force. His protagonist, William of Baskerville, concludes upon Jorge’s defeat that “perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, *to make truth laugh*, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for truth.”² Despite the novel’s medieval trappings and indebtedness to popular mystery, Eco’s investments in poststructuralist theory and semiotics are here most apparent.³ His exhortation ‘to make truth laugh’ suspends all notions of absolute truth and, by imposing a degree of ironic distance, safeguards against the violent repercussions of dogmatic belief.

I begin with *The Name of the Rose* not because I wish to affirm Eco’s conclusions about the status of metaphysical truths but because he places laughter at the heart of a larger debate

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Romance of the Rose* (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2006), 152-53.

² *Ibid.*, 549.

³ See also Umberto Eco, “The Frames of Comic Freedom.” *Carnival!* ed. Thomas Sebeok (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), 1-10.

over skepticism and belief, complicity and resistance. *The Humor of Skepticism: Therapeutic Laughter in Early Modern Literature* investigates the degree to which laughter ‘foments doubt’ and bears on our capacity for rational judgement and ethical action. Beginning in mid-sixteenth century France and concluding in the early English Restoration, I show that laughter becomes an integral part of the early modern reception of ancient skepticism as well as broader conceptions of medical and philosophical therapy. By foregrounding laughter’s therapeutic function in literary works by Michel de Montaigne, Robert Burton, John Donne, Lucy Hutchinson, and John Milton, this project reveals the dynamic process through which laughter comes to approximate the classical end of tranquility which both the Skeptics and Epicureans call *ataraxia*. Whether laughter helps to regulate the fluctuations of the humoral body or to ease the perturbations of the soul, I argue that it furnishes an imperative to cultivate the self, to interrogate the terms and limits of political engagement, and to renegotiate the role of pleasure in everyday life.

Like Eco, whose novel imaginatively reconstructs the lost second book of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in order to posit an ancient theory of laughter as the key to unravelling a series of mysterious deaths, the early modern thinkers who feature in this study adopt a creative approach to classical sources, freely altering or supplementing them to suit entirely new purposes.⁴ Laughter, for example, features prominently in early modern debates over matters as diverse as Democritean atomism, the physiological function of the spleen, and the fully human yet fully divine nature of Christ, despite being quite foreign to the respective historical contexts of each. Drawing on the methodologies of classical reception and translation theory, this project examines alongside literary works a variety of medical and philosophical treatises, popular jest

⁴ For a more historical reconstruction of *Poetics II*, see Richard Janko, *Poetics with Tractatus Coislinianus: Reconstruction of Poetics II and The Fragments of the On Poets* (Cambridge: Hackett, 1987).

books, and apocryphal letters in order to reveal how laughter gained cultural currency as a therapeutic concept.⁵ Attending to laughter thus enriches our current understanding of early modern approaches to emotional management by offering an alternative to the dominant Christian/Neostoic model which attempts to control and inhibit the self.

While I aim throughout this project to allow early modern conceptions of laughter to frame my interpretation of early modern texts, I will offer a brief account here of contemporary theoretical treatments of early modern laughter since the therapeutic objectives that I ascribe to laughter may seem at odds with prevailing concerns over the past few decades. Eco's thematic focus on laughter, for example, places him in the tradition of Mikhail Bakhtin whose seminal work *Rabelais and His World* was the first to position laughter as a vital force against absolutism and tied inextricably to freedom. Bakhtin argues that "Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality."⁶ As a temporary revelation of what Bakhtin calls "unofficial truth," laughter bespeaks a shared understanding of the nonessential origins of political power and social hierarchy. While Bakhtin takes the institution of carnival in medieval and Renaissance France as the primary subject of his work, he simultaneously invokes the more immediate history of 1930's Russia and a contemporary debate, instigated by the Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky, over the function of satire in Soviet culture. As Michael Holquist has

⁵ See especially, *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English Vol. 2: 1550-1660*. ed. Gordon Braden, Robert Cummings, and Stuart Gillespie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Stuart Gillespie, *English Translation and Classical Reception: Towards a New Literary History* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), and *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Vol. 2 1558-1660*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 123.

pointed out, Bakhtin's work serves as a polemical response to Lunacharsky's argument in *The Social Role of Laughter* that the institution of carnival exists primarily to divert the passionate excesses of the folk away from revolution.⁷ Bakhtin acknowledges the ephemeral nature of carnival and its limitations as a government sanctioned festival but maintains that even brief sallies of the "unofficial truth" can, in Marxist terms, prepare the way for a new consciousness. Insofar as carnival whets the people's appetite for a perpetual Saturnalia, for a revolution born from laughter, Bakhtin's theory substantiates the worst of old Jorge's fears.

Since the English translation of *Rabelais and His World* first became available in 1968, Bakhtin's formulation of carnival, laughter, and the grotesque body have become commonplace in Renaissance studies. The anthropological approach of C.L. Barber's classic work *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959) similarly celebrates the relationship between the ritual practices of Elizabethan holidays and the representation and/or enactment of "misrule" on stage.⁸ The rise of New Historicism and cultural materialism in the 1980's, however, brought about a reevaluation of the fundamental relationship between state power and artistic production that not only challenged Bakhtin's revolutionary thesis but also changed critical estimations of laughter.⁹ Stephen Greenblatt's essay "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion" outlines a complex dynamic whereby the dramatic representation of radical subversion is ultimately contained by the very power that it appears to threaten.¹⁰ Although he notes a

⁷ Michael Holquist, "Prologue," in *Rabelais and His World*, xviii.

⁸ C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959). On popular culture see also Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), François Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁹ See especially Peter Stallybrass and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion." *Glyph* 8 (1981): 40-61.

“remarkable insistence upon the paradoxes, ambiguities, and tensions of authority,” Greenblatt, much like Lunacharsky, concludes that Shakespearean drama ultimately confirms the ruling ideology of an absolutist state.¹¹ Here, the New Historicist reading reasserts the very argument that Bakhtin sought initially to overturn.

Although Greenblatt does not specifically address the role of laughter in “Invisible Bullets,” his analysis hinges on the rejection scene in *2 Henry IV* of Falstaff, one of Shakespeare’s most enduring comic characters. Concerning the characteristic reversals of rogue literature, Greenblatt suggests that “it would be as much of a mistake to regard their final effect as subversion as it would be to regard in a similar light the comparable passages-- most often articulated by Falstaff-- in Shakespeare’s histories. The subversive voices are produced by the affirmations of order, and they are powerfully registered, but they do not undermine that order.”¹² If we adopt Greenblatt’s thesis, then the moment when Henry V says to Falstaff, “Reply not to me with a fool-born jest: Presume not that I am the thing I was,” marks not only the point at which monarchical power is consolidated in the play but also the point at which laughter loses its subversive potential.¹³ This negative appraisal represents the view of laughter that is most widespread in the field today. Indeed, since the publication of “Invisible Bullets,” it has been more common for scholars to disclose the processes by which carnival is contained, both in literature and in life, than to look for ways of reading beyond the subversion-containment dynamic.¹⁴ As Greenblatt concludes, “There is subversion, no end of subversion, only not for

¹¹ Greenblatt, 45.

¹² Greenblatt, 38.

¹³ *2 Henry IV*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: Histories*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016), V.5.55-56. Subsequent citations to Shakespeare plays are by act, scene, and line.

¹⁴ Notable exceptions include Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in The Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and Richard Strier, *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

us.”¹⁵ While this dialogue has been valuable in terms of overturning the assumption that literature, as an aesthetic object, is somehow isolated from culture or cannot be made subservient to power, it exaggerates the political dimension of what was, in the early modern period, a more nuanced and multifaceted discourse. For the present study, Greenblatt’s rejection of Falstaff is more important than Hal’s because it forecloses on the possibility that laughter may still be culturally and critically significant.

Juxtaposing Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque with Greenblatt’s theory of containment illustrates the wide range of political objectives with which laughter has been associated but it also points to the limitations of this discourse. Regardless of whether laughter serves revolutionary or absolutist ends, it calls into question the way that ideology functions and, to a lesser extent, the fundamental relationship between the private individual and the state. More specifically, in each of the paradigms outlined above, laughter plays on a perceived discrepancy between reality and “official truth” that gives priority to a detached form of inward experience. While contemporary theorists have debated laughter’s capacity to facilitate resistance or ideological critique, this study suggests that, in an early modern context, laughter reveals more about the individuals who laugh than the state or power that governs them. By turning to medical and philosophical discourses on therapy, *The Humor of Skepticism: Therapeutic Laughter in Early Modern Literature* aims to reframe the theoretical debate over laughter’s social and political function in ethical terms. By ethical, I mean tending toward what Michel Foucault, in his late work on Hellenistic philosophy, calls freedom rather than liberation. While liberation, in

¹⁵ Greenblatt, 45.

this sense, corresponds to common understandings of political liberty, freedom corresponds to the ethical practice of self-cultivation.¹⁶

For the early modern thinkers who feature in this study, laughter serves as an essential way both to conceptualize and to put into practice a similar kind of freedom, namely a freedom from perturbation. While fully implicated in the reception of classical ideals such as *ataraxia* and tranquility, laughter also looks forward to the establishment of a new critical vocabulary. In the English language, “humor” does not become associated with amusement until the latter half of the seventeenth century and even the word “laughter” follows a separate etymological history from the Latin “risus” and the French “rire.” The positive association between laughter and therapy becomes all the more apparent when examining slightly earlier treatises on laughter such as Juan Luis Vives’s *De anima et vita* (1539), Laurent Joubert’s *Traité du ris* (1579), and Celso Mancini’s *De risu, ac ridiculis* (1598).¹⁷ During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, laughter becomes an increasingly important point of contention for humanists because it enables them to fundamentally reconceive of broad affective categories like joy [gaudium], pleasure [voluptas], and happiness [laetitia].

Although antiquity provides many examples of what critics now call the superiority theory of laughter, this project calls attention to the early modern thinkers who initiate a break

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self,” in *Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Allen Lane, 1997), 281-301. See also *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Vol. 3*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, Vintage Books, 1988).

¹⁷ For a fuller exposition of these and other Renaissance sources see especially, Daniel Ménager, *La Renaissance et le rire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), Bruno Roger-Vasselín, *Montaigne et l’art de sourire à la Renaissance* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 2003), *Rire à la Renaissance*, ed. Marie Madeleine Fontaine (Geneva: Librairie Droz 2010), Michael Screech, *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes and the Classical Theory of Laughter.” *Visions of Politics Vol. 3: Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002) and “Why Laughing Mattered in the Renaissance: The Second Henry Tudor Memorial Lecture.” *History of Political Thought* Vol. XXII No.3 (Autumn 2001).

with this previous discourse.¹⁸ Girolamo Fracastoro, for example, maintains that “truly, these things which are said of the ridiculous are not properly said” while Joubert claims that “the subject of laughter is so vast and deep that few philosophers have attempted it, and none has won the prize of treating it properly.”¹⁹ Rather than affirming the conventional argument that laughter expresses contempt for vice, the early modern thinkers who ascribe a therapeutic function to laughter seek also to legitimate emotions such as mirth and cheerfulness. As Daniel Ménager notes, “Renaissance theorists did not forget that laughter is, without a doubt, a sign of pleasure. Man laughs when he is happy. It’s that simple.”²⁰ Since the present study focuses on therapeutic laughter as a concept that emerges from a specific set of cultural concerns, it in no way claims to give a comprehensive account of early modern laughter. Indeed, Philip Sidney’s condemnatory claim in *The Defense of Poesie* that laughter “almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature. Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent, or present. Laughter hath only a scornful tickling” articulates a perspective shared by many during the period.²¹ In addition to having a therapeutic function, early modern laughter can also be vulgar, silly, or just plain cruel.²² Nevertheless, therapeutic laughter mounts an important challenge to the asceticism of

¹⁸ On the three dominant theories of humor (superiority, incongruity, relief) in a trans-historical context, see John Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987). On humor and philosophy/theory, see Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Simon Critchley, *On Humor* (New York: Routledge, 2002), Ana Parvalescu *Laughter: Notes on a Passion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010). On laughter in ancient Greece and Rome, see especially Stephen Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) and Mary Beard, *Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

¹⁹ “Verum haec non proprie ea sunt, quae ridicula dicuntur.” Girolamo Fracastoro, *Veronensis Opera omnia: in vnum proxime post illius mortem collecta, quorum nomina sequens pagina plenius indicat* (1555), 100, Laurent Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter*, trans. Gregory de Rocher (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1980), 11.

²⁰ “Les théoriciens de la Renaissance n’avaient pas oublié que le rire était sans doute un signe de plaisir. L’homme rit quand il est heureux. Voilà qui est simple” (my translation). Ménager, *La Renaissance et le rire*, 33.

²¹ Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie*, ed. Edward Arber (London: Alex, Murray and Sons, 1868), 66.

²² Two useful accounts of laughter on the early modern English stage are Indira Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008) and Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007).

cultural norms and religious institutions that disproportionately venerate tears in order to render the pleasures of this life incompatible with those of the next.

By demonstrating how medical and philosophical discourses on laughter converge with respect to therapy, *The Humor of Skepticism: Therapeutic Laughter in Early Modern Literature* aims to bring scholarship on the cultural history of the emotions into conversation with scholarship on early modern skepticism and Epicureanism. Since the mid-1990's, the field of early modern studies has responded to what scholars in the broader humanities and social sciences have called the "affective turn" by revealing the extent to which humoral theory, the prevailing medical discourse of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, transforms critical understandings of early modern subjectivity and embodiment.²³ By historicizing emotions like shame and sadness, scholars have shown that a neo-Galenic conception of the humoral body structures both psychological and physiological experience as well as its representation in literature, but the primary focus of this work has been on the negative effects of one such humor: melancholy.²⁴ Turning to laughter, which was widely associated with the purgation of melancholy humors enables us to consider a wider spectrum of emotions including mirth, cheerfulness, and joy. That a period so marked by political strife and religious turmoil should produce a discourse celebrating laughter challenges some of our deepest assumptions about early modern culture.

²³ See especially Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Selgworth, ed., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), Patricia Clough and Jean Halley, ed., *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, ed., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of the Emotions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

²⁴ Some examples include, Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1640* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952).

The recovery of Pyrrhonian skepticism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has long been important to the study of early modern literature, but it has most commonly been associated with tragedy, melancholy, and narratives of crisis.²⁵ Although Sextus Empiricus, author of the foundational *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, clearly posits a tranquil mind as the objective of skeptical philosophy, modern scholars have been more willing to view doubt as a source of anxiety than *ataraxia*. My central claim that early modern laughter comes to approximate the therapeutic ends of classical tranquility provides new grounds for theorizing affect and epistemology together. By showing how early modern thinkers embellish apocryphal accounts of Hellenistic philosophy in order to posit laughter as a cure for melancholy, I bring the medical discourse of humoral theory into dialogue with a broader cultural framework that reaffirms the ancient role of a philosopher-physician who cares holistically for both body and soul. Martha Nussbaum explains that the “Epicureans, Sceptics, and Stoics-- all conceived of philosophy as a way of addressing the most painful problems of human life. They saw the philosopher as a compassionate physician whose arts could heal many pervasive types of human suffering.”²⁶ While *The Humor of Skepticism: Therapeutic Laughter in Early Modern Literature* begins with Montaigne’s treatment of laughter in the *Essais*, the impact of his skepticism on seventeenth-century English writers constitutes a secondary thread of influence that extends across chapters.²⁷

²⁵ See especially Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge: In Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and William Hamlin, *Tragedy and Scepticism in Shakespeare’s England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

²⁶ Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 3.

²⁷ My interest here lies much more in the general dissemination of Montaigne’s ideas than in the particular circulation of his text. We know both from direct citation and implicit allusion that Burton and Donne, for example, were readers of Montaigne although we do not have preserved their copies of his book. Nevertheless, either approach to the English reception of Montaigne seems welcome in light of the fact that most scholarship has focused on the question of Montaigne’s influence on Shakespeare. William Hamlin’s work on annotated copies of Florio’s Montaigne, *Montaigne’s English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare’s Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) is especially valuable in this latter regard as is Warren Boutcher’s forthcoming two-volume work, *The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Chapter one positions laughter at the very heart of the early modern skeptical tradition by examining Henri Estienne's unusual claim, in the 1562 preface to his influential Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus, that reading the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* cured him of a dangerous fever by making him laugh. Turning to the *Essays*, I suggest that Estienne's account of his "tragicomic metamorphosis" prefigures Montaigne's own encounter with Pyrrhonian skepticism. Whether Montaigne endeavors to construct a "frolicsome" portrait of philosophy as in "Of Education" or to derive pleasure from tickling himself as in "Of Some Verses of Virgil," I argue that laughter is integral to his ethical project of self-cultivation and constant pursuit of "cheerful tranquility."

My second chapter explores the relationship between therapeutic laughter and early modern medicine by considering Robert Burton's engagement with the legacy of "the laughing philosopher" in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. I argue that by presenting himself as Democritus Jr., Burton invites us to consider how his serio-ludic style and satirical objectives help rather than hinder his larger therapeutic program for the melancholy reader. Although the *Anatomy of Melancholy* serves as a vast repository of medical knowledge, I suggest that Burton ultimately adopts a skeptical attitude toward the prospect of human learning and offers, in place of an absolute cure, laughter as a viable means to purge melancholy humors.

Chapter three analyzes the relationship between laughter and learning over the course of John Donne's career in order to challenge the familiar claim that his skepticism and the emotional turmoil of his apostasy are invariably linked. In early satirical prose such as the *Paradoxes* and the *Catalogus Librorum Aulicorum*, I show how Donne employs skepticism as a means to delight and amuse coterie audiences. Turning to some of his most influential poems, I argue that laughter likewise informs Donne's radical conception of erotic love in "Elegy XIX"

and skeptical defense of true religion in “Satire III.” In the late devotional context of the *Sermons* and *Essays in Divinity*, I suggest that laughter enables Donne both to mitigate the threat of spiritual despair in his own life and to dramatically re-envision, for the benefit of his auditory, a biblical exhortation to rejoice.

My final chapter looks to Lucy Hutchinson’s translation of *De rerum natura* and compares the Lucretian subtext of her *Order and Disorder* with that of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Although Hutchinson mocks Lucretius for asserting that death and divine punishment are nothing to fear, her efforts to render into English for the first time a cosmos where atoms laugh and the weather smiles for Venus presents early modern readers with a deeply unsettling alternative to the Christian notion of providence. By focusing on Hutchinson’s translation of key terms such as *ridere* [to laugh] and *deridere* [to deride], I argue that laughter is not only central to Lucretius’s poetic representation of philosophical tranquility but also comes to inform Hutchinson’s own appropriation of this concept. Despite their vast ideological differences and attitudes toward laughter, both Hutchinson and Milton aim similarly to translate Lucretius’s therapeutic objectives into the new context of English biblical epic.

By emphasizing the therapeutic function of laughter in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, I am attempting to understand one of many ways in which early moderns endeavored to cope with physical pain and emotional suffering. Much like tranquility or skeptical and Epicurean *ataraxia*, therapeutic laughter aims to produce a mind that is free from perturbation, but it also transforms this essentially negative ideal into a positive one. Since the laughing subject aims to reconcile body and mind, he or she enjoys a state that is characterized not only by the absence of pain, as in the classical context, but also by the presence of pleasure. The readiness with which early modern thinkers used laughter to transform the central tenet of

Hellenistic philosophy attests to the urgency with which they sought to cultivate positive emotions and challenges more austere representations of affective experience during the period.

During the seventeenth century, critics have observed the proliferation of English popular pamphlets and jest books that specifically address a melancholy audience. Angus Gowland, for example, has cited works such as Samuel Rowlands's *Democritus, or Doctor Merry-Man his Medicines, against Melancholy Humors* (1607) and *The Pennilesse Parliament of Threed-bare Poets: or, The Merry Fortune-teller, Wherein All Persons of the Four Severall Complexions May Finde their Fortunes. Composed by Doctor Merry-Man: Not Onely to Purge Melancholy: but also to Procure Tittering and Laughing. Full of Witty Mirth, and Delightfull Recreation, for the Content of the Reader* (1649) in order to highlight the pervasiveness of melancholy during the period, but I want to stress how thoroughly laughter had been assimilated in the popular imagination as its cure.²⁸ Both attributed to "Doctor Merry-Man," these titles and many others like them not only attest to a playful fusion of medical and philosophical discourse but also to the practical orientation of each. If early modern medicine is an applied science, then skepticism and Epicureanism are lived philosophies.

While *The Humor of Skepticism: Therapeutic Laughter in Early Modern Literature* aims to contribute to a large body of existing scholarship on the cultural history of the emotions, it also complicates some of the operating assumptions that have specifically informed this work in the field of early modern studies over the past several decades. Richard Strier has argued that the New Historicism and a body of scholarship that he calls the "new humoralism" are at fault for perpetuating a vision of the Renaissance and early modern period that is too "dark" and "dour." In many ways, this study on therapeutic laughter echoes and attempts to answer the central

²⁸ Angus Gowland, "The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy," *Past and Present* 191.1 (2006), 85-86.

question of his introduction, “Whence the Gloom?”²⁹ By showing how early moderns posit laughter as a cure for melancholy and link it to the therapeutic ends of Hellenistic philosophy, this study calls for a broader and more rigorous consideration of positive affect in early modern culture. Furthermore, it offers in contrast to the more widely accepted account of Neostoic emotional management the alternative paradigms set forth by early modern skepticism and Epicureanism. Therapeutic laughter, though not always justly, is often associated with charges of atheism and sensual indulgence.

Although Strier favors Jacob Burckhardt over Bakhtin, his recourse to the language of “the ‘official’ and, one might wrongly think, unquestioned values of the period” also invokes their dialectical opposite: that is, the “unofficial culture” that Bakhtin links to the carnivalesque. Here, we glimpse Strier’s desire to turn the tables once more in favor of revolution and radical politics. Indeed, the nostalgia inherent in a “return” to anything, but to Burckhardt in particular, is poignantly felt in introductory pages to *The Unrepentant Renaissance*. Where I differ from Strier, is both in my reluctance to part ways with Galenic humoral theory because I still believe it to be the best model for thinking about embodied subjectivity in the early modern period and in my turn to Foucault’s ethics of the self. Whereas he calls for a return to Burckhardt’s autonomous individual, I maintain that New Historicism has not entirely foreclosed on the notion of a Renaissance self, although Strier is right to note that Greenblatt, especially in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, relies too heavily on Foucault’s earlier work on governmentality.³⁰

Shortly before his death, Foucault looked to Plutarch, Seneca, and Epictetus, among other ancient philosophers, to theorize what he calls *les techniques de soi* or *le souci de soi*. While

²⁹ Richard Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch, to Shakespeare, to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 6-7.

³⁰ Strier, 7-8.

much of his earlier work such as *Discipline and Punish* examines the way in which government and institutions of power exert control over individuals, the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* examines the way in which individuals exert control over themselves. To care for oneself or to invest in the project of self-cultivation, requires a turn “to personal ethics, to the morality of everyday conduct, private life, and pleasure.”³¹ Foucault insists that this reorientation does not entail the rejection of others or an abdication of political responsibility but rather problematizes “the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject in the entire sphere of social, political, and civic activities.”³² To the extent that therapeutic laughter also prioritizes ethical pleasure and the self, I argue that it provides us with the grounds to contradict Greenblatt’s observation that “the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree” and yet, it does not allow us to go so far as Strier might like in substituting a discourse of liberation for a discourse of freedom.³³ As both a concept and a practice, this project locates therapeutic laughter in the intermediary space that early modern thinkers, as in the case of Foucault and the philosophers of antiquity, understood to be in the domain of ethics and aims to reconstitute this space as an urgent object of critical investigation.

³¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 3*, 84.

³² *Ibid.*, 94.

³³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 256.

Chapter 1

Laughter and the Self: Therapeutic Philosophy in the *Essays*

Until the late seventeenth century when Louis XIV moved the court to Versailles, the Palais du Louvre served as the seat of royal power and the center of social and political life in France. During his many years of service in the Parliament of Bordeaux, Montaigne made frequent trips to the court of Charles IX and would later return to Paris in 1580 and 1588 to oversee the publication of the *Essays* while representing Henri de Navarre in negotiations with Henri III. Despite his engagement in rather pressing and sometimes dangerous affairs of state, Montaigne claims to have maintained a sense of nonplussed amusement while at court. He writes, “at the Louvre and in the crowd I withdraw and contract into my skin; the crowd drives me back to myself, and I never entertain myself so madly, licentiously, and privately as in places full of respect and ceremonious prudence. Our follies do not make me laugh, our wisdom does.”¹ Quite unlike Castiglione, whose famous discourse on laughter in book two of *Il Cortegiano* stipulates when, where, with whom, and at what one may laugh, Montaigne dissociates laughter and sociability all together. In the company of kings and courtiers who vie with one another through the skillful exchange of pleasantries and pointed witticisms, Montaigne laughs quietly to himself. This laughter, which contrasts interior levity with exterior gravity, is integral to

¹ All references to the *Essays* are by book, chapter, and page number. I have included in-text citations in English from, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958) and footnotes in French from *Les essais*, ed. Villey-Saulnier (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004).

“[B] Au Louvre et en la foule, je me resserre et contraincts en ma peau; la foule me repousse à moy, et ne m'entretiens jamais si folement, si licentieusement et particulièrement qu'aux lieux de respect et de prudence ceremonieuse. Nos folies ne me font pas rire, ce sont nos sapiences” (III.3: V-S 823, F 625).

Montaigne's practice of solitude but also sheds light more broadly on early modern conceptions of personal freedom and pleasure.²

In this chapter, I argue that laughter consistently characterizes Montaigne's larger vision of philosophy and serves as the basis for an ethical project of self-cultivation. Part one shows how laughter first became implicated in the early modern reception of Pyrrhonian skepticism by examining the dedicatory epistle to the first printed translation of Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Skepticism*. Here, laughter becomes the hallmark of Henri Estienne's transformative encounter with skepticism which not only prefigures Montaigne's own encounter with skepticism but also demonstrates the confluence of early modern medical and philosophical approaches to therapy. In parts two and three, I consider contemporary movements like the cult of melancholy and Neo-Stoicism to argue that Montaigne's affirmation of laughter responds deliberately to a culture that disproportionately venerates pain. Whether Montaigne endeavors to dispel gloomy portrayals of wisdom as in "Of Education" or to tickle himself as in "Of Some Verses of Virgil," he makes laughter essential to the practice of philosophy, to the pursuit of health and happiness in distressing times. Finally, in part four, I suggest that therapeutic laughter enables Montaigne to advance a positive conception of tranquility and examine how this bears upon his ethics of self-care and care for the other. While some recent work has gestured toward the critical function of laughter in the *Essays*, its ability to further current understandings of emotional management,

² Montaigne later describes his comportment with household members and guests in a similar manner: "[B] Mais cette mollesse de jugement, dequoy je parle, m'attache par force à *la solitude*: voire chez moy, au milieu d'une famille peuplée et maison des plus fréquentées. J'y voy des gens assez, mais rarement ceux avecq qui j'ayme à communiquer; et je reserve là, et pour moy et pour les autres, *une liberté inusitée*." (my emphasis III.3: V-S 823-824, F 625).

therapeutic philosophy, and classical reception during the early modern period has remained largely unexplored.³

I. Laughter in the Library: Henri Estienne and Early Modern Skepticism

Before turning to the *Essays*, we need to take a moment to situate Montaigne's treatment of laughter within a broader philosophical context, specifically the early modern reception of Pyrrhonian skepticism. The onset of what Pierre Villey and Richard Popkin have called *la crise pyrrhonienne* during the sixteenth century has come, in large part, to define the early modern period as the pivotal link between Reformation and Enlightenment, as the threshold of modernity itself.⁴ This language of crisis, however, apart from conferring a sense of urgency to the recovery of Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, connotes a level of psychological turmoil or inner strife that is quite at odds with the express aims of Pyrrhonian philosophy. Considering the relationship between laughter and early modern skepticism diffuses this language of crisis, reversing our notion of what constitutes a cause and what constitutes a cure, and demonstrates how attention to the more literary aspects of philosophical writing can enrich the work of intellectual history.

Although Pyrrho of Elis (c.365-c.270 BCE) committed nothing to writing, several anecdotes corroborate his calm and unaffected manner, even under extreme circumstances. Indeed, the skeptic's ability to meet hardship with equanimity accounts, at least in part, for Pyrrhonism's renewed popularity during the sixteenth century, a period Popkin rightly

³ See especially Jean Balsamo, "Les rires de Montaigne," in *Rire à la Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2010), Bruno Roger-Vasselín, *Montaigne et l'art de sourire à la Renaissance* (Saint-Genouph: Librairie AG Nizet, 2003), Daniel Ménager, *La Renaissance et le rire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995).

⁴ Richard Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), Pierre Villey, *Les sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1908), Pierre Force, "Montaigne and the Coherence of Eclecticism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 70, No.4 (October 2009).

characterizes in terms of political strife and religious uncertainty. However, it is my claim that early modern thinkers like Erasmus and Montaigne not only understood but strategically amplified the therapeutic objectives of Pyrrho's philosophy, even if modern historians have since lost sight of them. One of Pyrrho's foremost students once wrote the following verse in honor of his teacher:

These things, my heart, O Pyrrho, longs to hear,
How you enjoy such ease of life and quiet,
The only man as happy as a God.⁵

Whereas Academic skeptics conclude their search for wisdom with the dogmatic assertion that nothing can be known, Pyrrhonian skeptics suspend their judgment (*epoché*) on matters of uncertainty and so attain a state of tranquility or freedom from perturbation (*ataraxia*). During the early modern period, I argue, this state finds a unique expression in laughter which joins together the therapeutic aims of both medicine and philosophy. Although the intellectual culture of the Reformation undoubtedly led many to question the criteria for truth in the domains of theology, philosophy, and science, the term *la crise pyrrhonienne*, much like "existential crisis" or "crisis of faith," evinces a particularly modern tendency to associate the experience of radical doubt with anxiety and fear rather than tranquility.

In the dedicatory epistle of his 1562 Greek-Latin translation of the *Outlines*, the first ever to be printed in Europe and the edition that Montaigne likely consulted while writing the "Apology of Raymond Sebond," Henri Estienne recounts how skeptical arguments dispelled a fever induced by too much study and "made me laugh- like medicine, as the doctors say."⁶ This

⁵ Timon Philius: fragment from the *Conceits* as quoted by Diogenes Laertius in "Life of Pyrrho." *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Vol.2. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1925), 479.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Latin-English translations of Estienne are my own. For my full English translation of the dedicatory preface, see Appendix. For Latin-French translations of Estienne's preface see Jean Grenier, *Oeuvres choisies de Sextus Empiricus* (Paris: Aubier, 1948) and Emmanuel Naya, "Traduire les Hypotyposes pyrrhoniennes:

unusual anecdote places laughter at the very heart of an early modern reception of Pyrrhonian skepticism and anticipates Montaigne's own representation of a "frolicsome philosophy" who "makes it her business to calm the tempests of the soul and to teach hungers and fevers to laugh."⁷ Despite the dark tenor of Popkin's and Villey's account, I want to suggest that early modern figures like Estienne and Montaigne, represent skepticism as a means to avert rather than induce or prolong crises of various forms. Furthermore, they contradict the supposedly natural affinity between skepticism and tragedy which critics like Stanely Cavell, William Hamlin, and Graham Bradshaw have found in the works of Shakespeare.⁸ Judging from Estienne's own narration of the "tragicomic story of my metamorphosis," one might even say that skepticism, at least Pyrrhonian skepticism, entered the Renaissance with a burst of laughter.

Given the immense influence of Estienne's translation which, "for the diffusion of Pyrrhonian themes," Luciano Floridi has suggested, "can hardly be overstated," I want to insist upon the dedicatory epistle's central role in determining both the meaning and potential value of skepticism for early modern readers.⁹ This is, of course, to assume that skepticism may invoke a different set of associations in ancient and early modern contexts and to allow for both strategic appropriation and productive misunderstandings. Thus, while Floridi and Popkin employ terms

Henri Estienne entre la fièvre quarte et la folie chrétienne." *Le scepticisme au XVIe et au XVIIe siècle* 1 (2001): 48-94. On Montaigne's edition of the *Outlines*, consult Luciano Floridi: *Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), Terence Cave, "Imagining Skepticism in the Sixteenth Century." *Retrospectives: Essays in Literature, Poetics, and Cultural History* (London: Maney Publishing, 2009), Floyd Gray: "Montaigne's Pyrrhonism," in *O un amy! Essays on Montaigne in Honor of Donald M. Frame* (Lexington: French Forum, 1977): 118-136; and Pierre Villey, *Les sources & l'évolution des essais de Montaigne* (Paris: Hachette, 1908), 218.

⁷ "[A] follastre," "[A] elle fait estat de serainer les tempestes de l'ame, et d'apprendre la fain et les fiebvres à rire" (I.26: V-S 160-161, F 118-119).

⁸ Stanely Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), William Hamlin, *Tragedy and Scepticism in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1987).

⁹ The Greek *editio princeps* was not published until 1621. Estienne's translation was reprinted throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century in 1569, 1619, 1621, 1652, 1659. His dedication was reprinted in 1569, 1619, and 1718. Floridi, *Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism*, 73.

like “transmission,” “recovery,” and “revival,” I will instead employ the term “reception” in order to more fully capture the degree to which early modern figures like Estienne and Montaigne actively participate in a continual process of determining how and what the *Outlines* signify to contemporary readers.¹⁰ More specifically, I want to suggest that Estienne’s laughter in the passage cited above as well as his playful register throughout the majority of the dedication, is essential rather than accidental to an emerging early modern interpretation of key skeptical concepts like *epoché* and *ataraxia*.

While rediscovering the *Outlines* initially prompts Estienne’s laughter, the dedication as a whole, which Popkin calls “a rather light-hearted promulgation,” makes clear that Estienne, having been transformed into a skeptic, is laughing still.¹¹ He jests in the opening verse, for example, that his translation is both a “little book of Greek wisdom” and an example of the “lepidas nugas” or “delightful trivialities” that his dedicatee, Henri de Mesmes, finds so pleasing. Estienne then stages a mock dialogue in which de Mesmes attempts to ascertain the work’s true value while Estienne responds, in Greek, with evasive sayings excerpted from the *Outlines*. Estienne addresses de Mesmes directly as follows:

“What?” you will say, if I know you well, “Do you write with such modesty and shame that you would call your little book a trifle or do you really feel this way in your heart, thus you speak and confess the truth frankly?” οὐ μᾶλλον τοῦτο ἢ ἐκεῖνο.¹² “Does this little book treat serious matters or trifles?” ἐπέχω.¹³ “Respond to this at least: is the

¹⁰ Here I am drawing upon the methodology of classical reception studies which has been elaborated in works by Charles Martindale and Lorna Hardwick, most notably *Classics and the Uses of Reception*. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006) and *Reception Studies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003). For early modern classical reception see especially Stuart Gillespie, *English Translation and Classical Reception: Toward a New Literary History* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), David Hopkins and Charles Martindale ed., *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature Vol. 3 (1660-1790)* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012). Volume 2 in the Oxford series is forthcoming.

¹¹ Popkin, *The History of Skepticism*, 36.

¹² All English translations of Sextus from *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1933). “Not this more than that.” (I.188), 109.

¹³ “I suspend judgement.” Ibid. (I.196), 115.

argument philosophical?” οὐ καταλαμβάνω.¹⁴ “Come on, what is determined and established with this little book of yours?” οὐδὲν ὀρίζω.¹⁵ “At least reveal your thinking to me concerning this matter, whatever it may be.” But I have no answer, in as much as I have no opinion. “Then what are you doing?” σκεπτόμενος διατελῶ.¹⁶

Although Estienne refuses to describe the content of his work in any forthright manner, his demonstration of skeptical tactics draws explicitly from sections I.18-28 of the *Outlines*.¹⁷ The dialogue form, which requires Estienne to play the part of the skeptic, not only complements the theatrical themes that he will develop later and sets a precedent for his turn from tragedy to comedy, but also suggests the extent to which he has assimilated the central teachings of the *Outlines*. In his first book, Sextus specifically details nine expressions or formulae that the skeptic may employ to communicate a “sceptical attitude and tone of mind.”¹⁸ De Mesmes seems to grow impatient as the interrogation continues but Estienne’s suspension of judgement concerning the value of his own work ironically affirms both the utility and appeal of the *Outlines*.

The opening dialogue also illustrates just how amusing and infuriating skeptical phrases can be when viewed from the interlocutor’s perspective. By emphasizing the deliberately playful aspects of their repartee, Estienne casts his dialogue with de Mesmes in a tradition of comic caricature that immediately bring to mind Rabelais’s depiction of the academic skeptic Trouillogan in the *Tiers Livre* and Lucian’s depiction of Pyrrho in the *Sale of Creeds*.¹⁹

¹⁴ “I apprehend not.” Ibid. (I.201), 119.

¹⁵ “I determine nothing.” Ibid. (I.197), 115.

¹⁶ “I continue to investigate.” Ibid. (Cf. I.1), 3.

¹⁷ Montaigne inscribed the beams of his study with ten similar Greek quotations from Sextus at least one of which is thought to come from Estienne’s edition. See Alain Legros, *Essais sur poutres: Peintures et inscriptions chez Montaigne*. (Paris: Klincksieck, 2000), 192, 212-213, 294-295.

¹⁸ *Outlines*, (I.187), 107.

¹⁹ Estienne further develops the relationship between comedy and skepticism by playing off of the visual and aural similarities between the Greek words σκωπτικός and σκεπτικός. He writes, “But now I differ from you only by a single letter. For you [de Mesmes] are a σκωπτικός [jester], as is the way of very charming men, I however, am a σκεπτικός [skeptical].”

However, Estienne's approach differs insofar as he plays the role of the skeptic himself and gives a more nuanced explanation of how laughter approximates the ends of Pyrrhonian philosophy. While Rabelais and Lucian elicit laughter at the skeptic's expense, Estienne represents the skeptic as the one who laughs. Jan Miernowski has argued that Montaigne's "approche ludique" to skepticism constitutes a particular form of intellectual and artistic play predicated on the proliferation "de nouveaux doutes et de nouvelles contradictions."²⁰ If philosophical skepticism is a game, as Miernowski's title "Le 'beau jeu' de la philosophie" suggests, then Estienne's laughter makes particular sense in light of his frustrated scholarly ambitions.

Although we learn that the *Outlines* eventually lead Estienne to resume his studies, he confesses that "I recovered with skeptical books more than any others, at least I think this was the case, because I was hoping that skepticism, refuting all professors in every subject, would confirm my heart in this hatred. Moreover, I placed my hope for health in this hatred since I thought that what remained of my life would be ἀβίωτον [lifeless] if I continued in the study of letters." Since Pyrrhonian skepticism opposes dogmatism, it easily makes a mockery of vain pretensions to knowledge and enables Estienne to regard both himself and his scholarly endeavors in a new light. Emmanuel Naya offers the compelling observation that "Notre éditeur se présente dans cette préface implicitement comme le philosophe éclairé et rieur à qui le scepticisme a permis de réévaluer le rapport qui unit l'homme à la vérité."²¹ Within the context of Estienne's narrative, laughter becomes an essential, perhaps *the* essential, characteristic of the skeptical philosopher. It is certainly the most visible marker of the "tragicomic metamorphosis"

²⁰ All translation of French secondary criticism, unless otherwise noted, are my own: "ludic approach," "of new doubts and new contradictions." Jan Miernowski, "Le 'beau jeu' de la philosophie." *Montaigne Studies: La Philosophie de Montaigne*. Vol.12, No. 1-2, (October 2000), 29.

²¹ "Our editor implicitly presents himself in this preface as the enlightened philosopher and laugher whom skepticism has allowed to reevaluate the relationship that ties man to the truth. Naya, "Traduire les Hypotyposes," 60.

which Estienne calls upon de Mesmes and the reader to witness. Although I am not entirely convinced by Naya's argument that Estienne's laughter ultimately derives from Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*, it is significant that such laughter has no precedent in Sextus or in the Hellenistic tradition surrounding the life and work of Pyrrho.

Estienne's efforts to frame his encounter with Pyrrhonism as a comedy and to invest laughter with philosophical significance constitute an innovative contribution to the reception of skepticism that is specific to the early modern period. Bearing in mind Estienne's penchant for sprinkling his Latin prose with Greek phrases, one cannot help but notice that he never once mentions *ataraxia*, perhaps the most crucial term in the skeptical vocabulary, or *tranquillitas*, its Latin equivalent.²² Granted, this omission could stem from Estienne's reluctance to identify fully with the skeptics, as when he claims that "I still neither wish to be a supporter of the Skeptics myself nor to make others supporters." However, it also suggests that the key words scholars associate today with skepticism may have been less important to early modern readers. From the standpoint of reception theory, we cannot assume that skepticism's critical terminology remains stable across multiple languages, time periods, or cultural contexts and must attend carefully to the ways in which this discourse changes over time. Despite Estienne's scholarly predilections, his investment in skepticism here is much more practical than theoretical in nature. Rather than claiming definitively to have attained *ataraxia* or explicating it in formal terms as he does in the *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae*, Estienne demonstrates simply that the *Outlines* made him laugh. His laughter calls attention to the very personal and affective dimensions of early modern philosophy.

²² As we shall see, even Montaigne only employs the term *ataraxia* twice in the *Essays* (II.12 V-S:503 and II.12 V-S:578).

By focusing on the more intimate and playful passages of the dedication, I have endeavored to show that laughter underscores Estienne's investment in the therapeutic function of skepticism. However, in order to understand why skepticism ultimately cures Estienne's fever, it is necessary to consider the confluence of philosophical and medical conceptions of therapy during the period. As Martha Nussbaum and R.J. Hankinson have argued, Hellenistic philosophy, and skepticism in particular, often employs the metaphor of the philosopher as the physician of the soul.²³ Sextus himself was both a philosopher and a physician and many of Pyrrho's teachings were transmitted through the Galenic medical corpus even though Galen himself sought only to refute them. Still, Estienne's use of medical terminology differs because it is so much more precise and more literal.

Estienne attributes both his aversion to study and his quartan fever to some form of humoral imbalance, taking special care to shield his eyes upon entering the library "lest the sight of books should disturb my bile" (Estienne xxii). In the treatise *Three Books of Life* (1482), Marsilio Ficino specifically associates quartan fever with the excessive production of melancholy humors. "When we are in this state" Ficino explains, "we hope for nothing, we fear every-thing, and it is weariness to look at the dome of the sky. If black bile- either simple or mixed- putrefies, it produces quartan fever, swellings of the spleen, and many infirmities of the same kind."²⁴ Although several studies have, in some way, suggested a causal link between melancholy and skepticism during the early modern period, Estienne's account provides a

²³ R.J Hankinson, "Scepticism in the Medical Schools and the Medical Tradition," in *The Sceptics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 225-236, Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994). See also John O'Brien, "Si avons nous une très-douce médecine que la philosophie" in *L'Écriture du scepticism chez Montaigne* (Geneva: Droz, 2004), 13-24 and James Allen, "Pyrrhonism and Medicine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 232-248.

²⁴ Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 92.

concrete historical precedent for putting such important and heavily theorized terms into conversation.²⁵ To the extent that Estienne subscribes to a Ficinian conception of melancholy genius, he posits skepticism as a potent cure rather than a festering symptom.

Estienne's close association of laughter and *ataraxia* further reinforces this logic since laughter, as many medical treatises and popular joke books of the period suggest, was widely regarded as a cure for melancholy.²⁶ Nevertheless, once skepticism cures Estienne's fever and reconciles the melancholy scholar to his studies, the laughter that so distinguishes the opening pages diminishes. In the closing sections of the dedication, Estienne turns from private matters to address the broader ramifications of Pyrrhonian skepticism, especially in theological terms, and speaks more frankly about his motivations for publishing the *Outlines*. He signals this transition clearly with the claim that "finally, I begin to speak seriously at last" (Estienne xxiv). At the very end of the dedication, Estienne supplies three clearly elaborated responses to the question of why he decided to publish the *Outlines* which respectively address their theological, philosophical, and philological merits.²⁷ His forthright style here contrasts sharply with the dedication's opening.

Scholars have interpreted this volte-face in a number of different ways that shed light on the symbiotic relationship between laughter and skepticism. Floridi perhaps represents the general critical consensus best when he states that Estienne's first pages are "the more curious

²⁵ See for example, M.A. Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy* (Paris: PUF 1992), Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 63-86.

²⁶ Titles include: *Wonders Worth the Hearing: Which Being Read or Heard... May Serve Both To Purge Melancholy from the Minde, & Grosse Humours from the Body* (1602); *Democritus, or Doctor Merry-Man his Medicines, against Melancholy Humors* (1607); *The Pennilesse Parliament... Composed by Doctor Merry-Man: Not Only to Purge Melancholy, but Also to Procure Tittering and Laughing* (1649).

²⁷ See Appendix for full passage.

but the less philosophically interesting.”²⁸ Terence Cave, by contrast, cautions readers against this interpretation and offers an alternate appraisal of Estienne’s opening pages which I heartily support.²⁹ He claims that “the playful part of the preface is extensive and elaborate; there is no reason to think that it is less significant than the later part. In fact, it is surely in the autobiographical fiction that the novelty, the strangeness of Pyrrhonism, its capacity to reorient the whole of one’s intellectual frame of reference, are most cogently embodied.”³⁰ By placing both parts of Estienne’s dedication on equal footing, Cave enables us to more critically examine the essential relationship between them. In so doing, we observe that a fideistic or merely instrumental interpretation of skepticism necessarily excludes laughter.³¹ In this respect, Montaigne succeeds where Estienne falls short, embracing a more thoroughgoing skepticism and developing a more comprehensive theory of laughter. Turning now to the *Essays*, I wish to take seriously the question of what it may have meant during the sixteenth century to posit therapeutic laughter as a formal end of philosophy.

II. Frolicsome Philosophy and the Cult of Melancholy: Laughter in “De l’Institution des Enfants”

²⁸ Floridi, *The Recovery and Transmission*, 73. Like Naya, Floridi ultimately regards Estienne as an early proponent of fideistic skepticism, a form of thinking that makes the demands of reason subservient to the demands of faith.

²⁹ Cave specifically states that “it would again be unwise to regard Estienne as merely another ‘Christian sceptic.’” Cave, “Imagining Skepticism,” 116.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ While Miernowski posits a certain continuity between Estienne’s skepticism and Montaigne’s, he is right to observe that, unlike Montaigne, Estienne, “se sentait forcé à renoncer au jeu, lorsqu’il comparait les sceptiques et les dogmatiques quant à leur connaissance de Dieu... le masque sceptique tombait devant les principes idéologique intouchables, bien trop chers pour être mis en jeu.” [felt compelled to stop playing, since he compared the skeptics and dogmatists with respect to their knowledge of God... the skeptical mask fell away in the face of untouchable ideological principles, much too dear to play with.] Miernowski, “Le ‘beau jeu,’” 42.

As if anticipating the onset of Estienne's scholarly melancholy, Montaigne rejects an approach to study that intuitively pairs learning with displeasure. In the essay "Of the Education of Children" he turns his attention more specifically to philosophy, asserting that "it is very wrong to portray her as "inaccessible to children, with a surly, frowning, and terrifying face," when in fact, "there is nothing more gay, more lusty, more sprightly, and I might say more frolicsome."³² In this section, I argue that Montaigne makes laughter integral to his representation of philosophy and show how this both opposes conventional assessments of melancholy and reveals the limitations of Galenic theory for understanding emotional management in the early modern period. By refusing to take sadness as the chief sign of wisdom, Montaigne attempts to recast some of the period's most deeply ingrained assumptions about learning and therapeutic philosophy.

Before proceeding further, I want to highlight the exaggerated and eccentric features of Montaigne's personification. As the "implacable enemy of sourness, displeasure, fear, and constraint" philosophy quickly attains a mock-heroic and quasi-mythical status that would capture any young child's imagination.³³ While the reader may wonder which philosophical school she belongs to or which philosopher she most resembles, Montaigne's description is almost completely devoid of specific philosophical content, focusing instead on philosophy's affect and living countenance. Although light-hearted, the concept of "frolicsome philosophy" is clearly polemical since it undercuts contemporary pedagogical practices and levels sharp criticism at those who, whether through malice or ignorance, have so distorted philosophy's true

³² "[A] On a grand tort de la peindre inaccessible aux enfans, et d'un visage renfroigné, sourcilleux et terrible. Qui me l'a masquée de ce faux visage, pasle et hideux? Il n'est rien plus gay, plus gaillard, plus enjoué, et à peu que je ne dise follastre." (I.26: V-S 160, F 118).

³³ "[C] ennemie professe et irreconciliable d'aigreur, de desplaisir, de crainte et de contrainte" (I.26: V-S 161, F 119).

face as to render her unrecognizable. By positioning philosophy as the wellspring of health and happiness, Montaigne evinces his disillusionment with the tired tropes of learning that he caricatures with sketches of grammarians who “knit their brows when discussing their science” and schoolmen who “make their disciples dirt-caked and smoky.”³⁴

While pedants serve as a natural target for Montaigne’s critique, the figure of the melancholy genius looms even larger as a key subtext for the passage cited above. When Montaigne claims, for example, that “the surest sign of wisdom is constant cheerfulness,” he invites the reader to imagine along with him a counter-type that he himself might embody.³⁵ Montaigne’s own childhood education was free from the gloomy constraints that he targets here and his approach to study as an adult remains similarly unencumbered. In the essay “Of Books,” Montaigne stipulates that “I should certainly like to have a more perfect knowledge of things, but I do not want to buy it as dear as it costs. My intention is to pass pleasantly, and not laboriously, what life I have left. There is nothing for which I want to rack my brain, not even knowledge, however great its value.”³⁶ When it comes to matters of learning, despite or perhaps because of his erudition, Montaigne consistently prefers ease before rigor, pleasure before pain, and nothing demonstrates the peculiarity of these valuations more than his depiction of “frolicsome philosophy.” Although he makes no explicit mention of skepticism in these passages, Montaigne’s underlying attitude toward knowledge and his deep aversion to intellectual turmoil underscores philosophy’s therapeutic ends.

³⁴ “[A] qu’il faut rider le front, s’entretenant de leur science,” “[A] rendent leurs supposts ainsi crotez et enfumés” (I.26: V-S 160-161, F 119).

³⁵ “[C] La plus expresse marque de la sagesse, c’est une esjouïssance constante” (I.26: V-S 161, F 119).

³⁶ “[A] Je souhaiterois bien avoir plus parfaicte intelligence des choses, mais je ne la veux pas achepter si cher qu’elle couste. Mon dessein est de passer doucement, et non laborieusement, ce qui me reste de vie. Il n’est rien pourquoy je me vueille rompre la teste, non pas pour la science, de quelque grand pris qu’elle soit” (II.10: V-S 409, F 297).

Valuable work on the cult of melancholy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has prompted literary scholars to consider why so many early modern authors claim a melancholy disposition in order to bolster their own intellectual capacities and natural talents.³⁷ Montaigne often plays a central role in this discourse since he attributes the very origin of the *Essays* to a certain melancholy humor which “first put into my head this daydream of meddling with writing.”³⁸ On the one hand, such statements make it easy to place Montaigne in a long tradition of melancholy geniuses ranging from antiquity to the late Renaissance.³⁹ On the other hand, scholars eager to do this have often overlooked Montaigne’s many efforts to distance himself from the cult of melancholy and his reluctance to identify fully as a melancholic himself. For example, Montaigne qualifies his previous statement with the claim that the melancholy humor responsible for the genesis of the *Essays* was “consequently a humor very hostile to my natural disposition.”⁴⁰ Far from exploiting the reputation and credit due to the melancholy genius, Montaigne excuses the eccentricity of his work by tethering it to the eccentricity of the particular mood that produced it.

Even in the opening pages of book one, Montaigne decries the cult of melancholy for making a fetish of sadness. His second essay “Of Sadness” opens with the dismissive claim that “I am one of those freest from this passion. I neither like it nor respect it, although everyone has

³⁷ See especially: Gail Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993), Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), and Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010).

³⁸ “[A] m'a mis premierement en teste cette resverie de me mesler d'escire" (II.8: V-S 385, F 287).

³⁹ See M.A. Screech, *Montaigne et la mélancholie* (Paris: PUF, 1984), Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne in Motion* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1985), Winfreid Schleiner, *Melancholy, Genius, and Utopia in the Renaissance*. (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), and William Engel, *Mapping Mortality* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1995).

⁴⁰ “[A] une humeur par consequent très ennemie de ma complexion naturelle” (II.8: V-S 385, F 287).

decided to honor it, as if at a fixed price, with particular favor. They clothe wisdom, virtue, conscience with it: a stupid and monstrous ornament!”⁴¹ Here, Montaigne holds the culture that venerates sadness in contempt as much as the passion itself. Casting himself as a deliberately cheerful objector, he goes on to mobilize key terms such as *ejouissance* or *gaieté* which enable him to cultivate a persona that deliberately undermines that of the melancholy genius.

While Montaigne especially disapproves of those who feign melancholy as a fashionable affectation, he cautions that even genuine melancholy can be excessive and indulgent. Reflecting on the frequent admixture of pain and pleasure in “That We Taste Nothing Pure,” Montaigne says, “I indeed imagine that there is design, consent, and pleasure in feeding one’s melancholy... There is some shadow of daintiness and luxury that smiles on us and flatters us in the very lap of melancholy. Are there not some natures that feed on it?”⁴² By positing pleasure and consent as the terms of melancholic suffering, Montaigne makes it appear more ignoble than heroic or virtuous. Thus, when speaking about himself, Montaigne anxiously qualifies the role that melancholy plays in his own humoral makeup. Reflecting on how images of death constantly occupied his thoughts as a young man, Montaigne claims that “I am by nature not melancholy but dreamy.”⁴³ Elsewhere, he characterizes himself as having “a strong, thick-set body, a face not fat but full, a temperament between the jovial and the melancholy, moderately sanguine and

⁴¹ “[B] Je suis des plus exempts de cette passion, [C] et ne l'ayme ny l'estime, quoy que le monde ayt prins, comme à prix fait, de l'honorer de faveur particuliere. Ils en habillent la sagesse, la vertu, la conscience: sot et monstrueux ornement” (I.2: V-S 11, F 6).

⁴² “[B] j’imagine bien qu’il y a du dessein, du consentement et de la complaisance à se nourrir en la melancholie; je dis outre l’ambition, qui s’y peut encore mesler. Il y a quelque ombre de friandise et delicatesses qui nous rit et qui nous flatte au giron mesme de la melancholie. Y a-il pas des complexions qui en font leur aliment?” (II.20: V-S 674, F 510).

⁴³ “[A] Je suis de moy-mesme non melancholique, mais songereux. Il n'est rien dequoy je me soye des toujours plus entreteu que des imaginations de la mort: voire en la saison la plus licentieuse de mon âge” (I.20: V-S 87, F 60).

warm.”⁴⁴ By consciously cultivating a more moderate and cheerful disposition, Montaigne challenges sadness as a cultural ideal and hallmark of intellectual distinction. Although conceptions of melancholy genius will continue to influence prophets, poets, and philosophers well into the seventeenth century, Montaigne is among the first to dispute the authenticity of such claims.

When we return to “Of the Education of Children,” we notice that philosophy, as personified by Montaigne, improves the mood and outward bearing of her students regardless of their innate humoral dispositions. According to Montaigne, philosophy “preaches nothing but merry-making and a good time. A sad and defected look shows that she does not dwell there.”⁴⁵ While recent work on the cultural history of the emotions has emphasized the role of humoral theory for diagnosing melancholy in medical terms, here we begin to glimpse the limitations of the Galenic model. Physiological descriptions of blood and bile, hotness and dryness, certainly do inform Montaigne’s understanding of the passions, but his characterization of cheerfulness and gaiety departs noticeably from this discourse. When Montaigne writes that “as for the teachings of philosophy, they are wont to delight and rejoice those who discuss them, not make them sullen or sad,” he indicates an emotional or psychological state that is not biologically determined.⁴⁶ Since early modern medicine and philosophy offer related though fundamentally different theories of the emotions, humoralism alone cannot account for Montaigne’s preoccupation with the therapeutic capacity of Stoic, Skeptical, and Epicurean thought. For

⁴⁴ “[A] J’ay au demeurant la taille forte et ramassée: le visage, non pas gras, mais plein; la complexion, [B] entre le jovial et le melancholique, moiennement [A] sanguine et chaude” (II.17: V-S 641, F 486). See also (I.20: V-S 87, F 60).

⁴⁵ “[A] Elle ne presche que feste et bon temps. Une mine triste et [Image 0060] transie montre que ce n'est pas là son giste” (I.26: V-S 160, F 118).

⁴⁶ “[A] Mais quant aux discours de la philosophie, ils ont accoustumé d'escayer et resjouir ceux qui les traictent, non les renfroigner et contrister” (I.26: V-S 161, F 119).

Montaigne, philosophy does not aim at the accumulation of abstract knowledge but at the alleviation of suffering caused by unregulated desire and irrational fear.⁴⁷

Having exposed the inauthenticity of philosophy's conventionally gloomy image, Montaigne remains wary of simply substituting one mask for another. Cheerfulness and gaiety, he maintains, reflect philosophy's true visage while bearing witness to the transformative effects that she has on both the body and the soul. Montaigne explains that "the soul in which philosophy dwells should by its health make even the body healthy. It should make its tranquility and gladness shine out from within; should form in its own mold the outward demeanor, and consequently arm it with graceful pride, an active and joyous bearing, and a contented and good-natured countenance."⁴⁸ That philosophy aims to produce an outward demeanor that corresponds to an inward state suggests that cheerfulness penetrates beneath the surface and consists in much more than social pretense. In this context, a 'countenance contente et debonnaire' represents the culmination of philosophy's educational and therapeutic efforts. However, the actual content of such efforts, productive as they may seem, remains largely unclear.

Just how does philosophy make her disciples cheerful? Which methods or strategies does she employ? Although Montaigne does not provide straightforward answers to these questions, he gives the reader plenty of indications as to where they may be found. For instance, his pronouncement that philosophy "makes it her business to calm the tempests of the soul and to teach hungers and fevers to laugh" invokes multiple discourses on the ancient concept of

⁴⁷ This conception of ancient, mainly Hellenistic, philosophy has been elaborated by such diverse thinkers as Pierre Hadot, Michel Foucault, and Alexander Nehamas. See especially Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (New York: Picador, 2005), *The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage, 1988), "Technologies of the Self." *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New York Press, 1997), 223-52; Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1998).

⁴⁸ "[A] L'ame qui loge la philosophie, doit par sa santé rendre sain encores le corps. Elle doit faire luire jusques au dehors son repos et son aise; doit former à son moule le port exterior, et l'armer par consequent d'une gratieuse fierté, d'un maintien actif et allegre, et d'une contenance contente et debonnaire" (I.26: V-S 161, F 119).

tranquility by Seneca, Plutarch, and Sextus Empiricus, among others.⁴⁹ Like Estienne, however, Montaigne refrains from using the technical terminology found in such works knowing full well how easily they may be conflated.⁵⁰ Moving away from nominalized abstract concepts like *ataraxia* or *tranquillitas* enables Montaigne to focus on the practical actions that characterize his already personified philosophy: here, ‘serainer’ and ‘apprendre à rire.’ While the former of these two active verbs nicely illustrates the shared goal of most Hellenistic philosophies, to foster a peaceful state of mind free from disturbances, the latter diverges significantly from this tradition and captures some of Montaigne’s most innovative thinking.

III. Tickling Oneself: Laughter and Pleasure in *Sur des Vers de Virgile*

In the essay “On Some Verses of Virgil,” Montaigne returns to the theme of how philosophy works upon the passions and, more specifically, how laughter mitigates the harmful effects of melancholy humors. While “On the Education of Children” considers this question with respect to youth and pedagogical practice, here Montaigne adopts the perspective of old age and personal reflection. In what follows, I argue that Montaigne’s attempts to tickle himself not only affirm the capacity of laughter to improve health and well-being but contribute to a more thoroughgoing, post-1580 defense of pleasure. By positing laughter as a legitimate object of philosophical contemplation and practice, Montaigne upsets the conventional valuations of pain and pleasure adopted specifically by his Christian and Neostoic contemporaries.

⁴⁹ “[A] elle fait estat de serainer les tempestes de l’ame, et d’apprendre la fain et les fiebvres à rire” (I.26: V-S 161, F 119). Jacques Amyot’s 1572 Greek-French translation of the Plutarch’s *Moralia*, which includes “De tranquillitate animi,” was consulted by Montaigne and widely read in France. See also Seneca’s *De tranquillitate animi*.

⁵⁰ The Latin *tranquillitas*, for example, encompasses each of the following Greek terms: *ataraxia*, which both the Epicureans and Pyrrhonian skeptics posit as the end of philosophical living; *apatheia*, which the Stoics employ to equal effect; and *euthumia*, the Democritean conception of cheerfulness which perhaps inspired them all.

Montaigne opens the essay by describing how he has fallen from an “excess of gaiety” into an “excess of severity,” expressing the fear that “I may dry up, wither, and grow heavy with prudence.”⁵¹ Clearly invoking the symptoms of melancholy, he describes the “coldness and temperance” of his body and repeatedly draws attention to the “gloom” that has settled on his everyday life.⁵² Perhaps this description accurately reflects the mental and emotional state of a man who, nearing the end of his life, suffers regularly from the stone, but it also gives Montaigne rhetorical license to speak frankly about sexual desire, female chastity, and the laws of marriage. In the throes of melancholy, he employs the Epicurean strategy of recollecting past pleasures in order to recuperate pleasure in the present.⁵³ While the actual contents of Montaigne’s “youthful wanton thoughts” are compelling in and of themselves, I am more interested in how they work on his imbalanced humors and contribute to the end of tranquility.⁵⁴

With an eye to sooth what cannot be remedied, Montaigne confesses that “I amuse myself” and “I tickle myself” even though “I can scarcely wring a poor laugh out of this wretched body any more.”⁵⁵ Given the overtly sexual content of the essay, this disclosure could easily be read as a reference to self-stimulation, but the pleasure that Montaigne seeks to arouse is more intellectual than physical in nature. Jean Balsamo suggests that “le rire toutefois, dans la langue de Montaigne, a plus généralement et de façon déterminante un sens général et abstrait,

⁵¹ “[B] l’excez de la gayeté,” “[B] celui de la severité,” “[B] je ne seche, tarisse et m’aggrave de prudence” (III.5: V-S 841, F 638).

⁵² “[B] froideur et de temperance,” “[B] le chagrin” (III.5: V-S 842, F 639).

⁵³ Montaigne refers to this strategy when he reproduces Epicurus’s last words from a letter to Hermachus in “Of Glory” (II.16: V-S 620, F 469).

⁵⁴ “[B] des pensemens folastres et jeunes” (III.5: V-S 841, F 638). For a fine treatment of Montaigne’s concluding jest, see especially Tom Conley’s “Montaigne moqueur: ‘Virgile’ and Its Geographies of Gender” (2002).

⁵⁵ “[B] me vois amusant,” “[B] je me chatouille,” “[B] je ne puis tantost plus arracher un pauvre rire de ce meschant corps” (III.5: V-S 842, F 639).

déjà métaphorique.”⁵⁶ I would go further to suggest that Montaignian laughter acquires the status of a philosophical construct or theoretical concept, especially in *allongails* of the Bordeaux Copy. Montaigne himself confirms in a C addition that “in truth, the pleasure I give tickles my imagination more sweetly than that which I feel.”⁵⁷ And yet, what might it mean to “tickle” one’s own imagination and how does Montaigne characterize the intellectual pleasure that such tickling yields? What is laughter if not a physiological phenomenon, a burst of sound that escapes the belly through mouth and lips? Here, Montaigne demonstrates how laughter constitutes a philosophical way of relating to the self, one that neither disparages the body nor dissociates wisdom from pleasure. Despite the awkward, even perverse connotations, Montaigne tickles himself or endeavors to make himself laugh because philosophy has taught him that virtue “is a pleasant and gay quality.”⁵⁸ Even while acknowledging that the titillating content he is about to present will land the *Essays* in the ladies’ boudoir, Montaigne makes concerns for decorum and reputation subservient to therapeutic efficacy and good fun.

Although Montaigne does not personify philosophy here as in earlier essays, he similarly highlights its affective dimensions. He declares, for instance, that “I love a gay and sociable wisdom, and shun harshness and austerity in behavior holding every surly countenance suspect.”⁵⁹ Surliness not only arouses Montaigne’s distaste but also his suspicion because it implies a self-conception that is incongruous with natural human capacities. A harsh countenance, for Montaigne, smacks of pretense and hypocrisy, so much so that he deems it necessary to contrast his previous “I love” declaration with one of equal and opposite force. “I

⁵⁶ “In the language of Montaigne, laughter always has, in a determined way, a more general and abstract sense, it is already metaphorical.” Balsamo, “Les rires de Montaigne,” 220.

⁵⁷ “[C] En vérité, en ce desduit, le plaisir que je fay chatouille plus doucement mon imagination que celui que je sens” (III.5: V-S 894, F 682).

⁵⁸ “[B] La vertu est qualité plaisante et gaye” (III.5: V-S 845, F 641).

⁵⁹ “[B] J’ayme une sagesse gaye et civile, et fuis l’aspreté des meurs et l’austerité, ayant pour suspecte toute mine rebarbative” (III.5: V-S 844, F 641).

hate,” he writes, “a surly and gloomy spirit that slides over the pleasure of life and seizes and feeds upon its misfortunes: like flies, which cannot cling to a smooth and well-polished body, and attach themselves to and rest on rough and uneven places, and like leeches that suck and crave bad blood.”⁶⁰ The decadence of Montaigne’s simile reflects the intensity of his feelings as do the images of parasitic and scavenging animals who thrive on diseased flesh. His reference to leeches, in particular, also casts in a negative light the medical practice of blood-letting, a common treatment for melancholy during the early modern period.

When Montaigne returns to the medical metaphor in a later passage, he makes clear that he would recommend love before leeches with the following statement: “It [love] is a vain occupation, it is true, unbecoming, shameful, and illegitimate; but carried on in this fashion, I consider it healthy, proper to enliven a heavy body and soul; and as a physician, I would prescribe it to a man of my temperament and condition as readily as any other recipe.”⁶¹ Although a philosopher in love or an amorous old man may seem like the height of comic absurdity, Montaigne argues that when the scales are tipped in favor of pain, an excess of pleasure can only restore balance and moderation.⁶² Love, he says, “would secure my countenance, so that the grimaces of old age, those deformed and pitiable grimaces, should not come to disfigure it... would divert me from a thousand troublesome thoughts, a thousand

⁶⁰ “[B] Je hay un esprit hargneux et triste qui glisse par dessus les plaisirs de sa vie et s'empoigne et paist aux malheurs: comme les mouches, qui ne peuvent tenir contre un corps bien poly et bien lissé, et s'attachent et reposent aux lieux scabreux et raboteux; et comme les vantouses qui ne hument et appetent que le mauvais sang. (III.5: V-S 845, F 642).

⁶¹ “[B] C’est une vaine occupation, il est vray, messeante, honteuse et illegitime; mais, à la conduire en cette façon, je l'estime salubre, propre à desgourdir un esprit et un corps poisant; et, comme medecin, l'ordonnerois à un homme de ma forme et condition, autant volontiers qu'aucune autre recepte” (III.5: V-S 891, F 680).

⁶² In the essay “Of Experience” Montaigne mocks the philosopher who disdains sensual pleasure, joking that “the only pleasure he derives from the enjoyment of a beautiful young wife is the pleasure of his consciousness of doing the right thing, like putting on boots for a useful ride. May her [philosophy’s] followers have no more right and sinews and sap in deflowering their wives than her lessons have!” (F 1042). For commentary, see Ann Hartle, *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 173-173.

melancholy moods... would warm up again, at least in dreams, this blood that nature is abandoning.”⁶³ By affirming romantic love, or at least the remembrance of past loves, in the throes of old age, Montaigne makes pleasure the natural ally of both wisdom and experience. Furthermore, his efforts to cheer himself up by means of tickling reveal a clear preference for philosophical cures before medical ones as well as a consistent affirmation of laughter’s therapeutic function.

Many scholars have cited “On Some Verses of Virgil” as evidence to support the centrality of Epicurean philosophy in Montaigne’s later writing, mainly book three and manuscript additions to books one and two.⁶⁴ I find this thesis especially compelling given the essay’s thematic focus on pleasure as well as the attention and great esteem that Montaigne affords to Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*. However, the eclecticism of the *Essays* is such that equally strong cases can and have been made for Montaigne’s Platonism, Stoicism, and Cynicism, never mind his Skepticism, whether Pyrrhonian or Academic in orientation. It seems then that there is little to be gained in assigning a definitive designation to Montaigne’s thought, especially since he himself is wont to regard the dissensions between philosophical sects as

⁶³ “[B] r’asseureroit ma contenance à ce que les grimaces de la vieillesse, ces grimaces difformes et pitoiables, ne vinsent à la corrompre; [C] me remettrait aux études saines et sages, par où je me peusse rendre plus estimé et plus aymé, ostant à mon esprit le desespoir de soy et de son usage, et le racointant à soy; [B] me divertiroit de mille pensées ennuyeuses, [C] de mille chagrins melancholiques, [B] que l’oisiveté nous charge en tel aage [C] et le mauvais estat de nostre santé; [B] reschaufferoit, au-moins en songe, ce sang que nature abandonne (III.5: V-S 893, F 681-682).

⁶⁴ See Rafal B. Krazek, *Montaigne et la philosophie du plaisir. Pour une lecture épicurienne des Essais*. (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012), Eric Macphail, “Montaigne’s New Epicureanism.” *Montaigne Studies: La Philosophie de Montaigne*. Vol. XII, No. 1-2. (October 2000), Simone Fraisse. “Montaigne et les doctrines épicuriennes.” *Actes du VIIIe congrès de l’Association Guillaume Budé* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1969), 677-685, Daniel Ménager, “Les citations de Lucrèce chez Montaigne,” in *Montaigne in Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia, 1989), 25-38; and Marcel Conche, “Plaisir et Communication” in *Montaigne et la Philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

“frivolous subtleties.”⁶⁵ By emphasizing Montaigne’s defense of pleasure, as when in a lengthy C addition to “That to Philosophize is to Learn to Die” he brazenly conflates *virtu* and *volupté*, I do not mean to make Montaigne out to be an Epicurean.⁶⁶ Rather, I want to pursue what I hope is a more nuanced question, namely: How does Montaigne use Epicurean philosophy as a means to challenge the way that pleasure is understood in his own historical moment and cultural context?

By tickling himself, I argue, Montaigne not only attempts to moderate an excess of severity with laughter, but adopts a mode of relating to the self that opposes the asceticism and latent masochism of the Christian tradition.⁶⁷ Reflecting specifically on the practices of penitence and self-flagellation, he remarks that “it seems somewhat reasonable that we should behave as favorably at least toward the use of pleasure as we do toward pain.”⁶⁸ Although the saints may indulge suffering too eagerly, they recognize an essential connection between the body and the soul, the corporeal and spiritual dimensions of man, that Montaigne wants very much to uphold. He writes, “They [the saints] were not content that it [the body] should simply follow and assist the afflicted soul; they afflicted the body itself with atrocious and appropriate torments, in order that, vying with each other the soul and the body should plunge man into pain, the more salutary for its harshness.”⁶⁹ If physical pain contributes to the perfection of the soul as the saints

⁶⁵ Montaigne writes, “[C] Les dissensions des sectes Philosophiques, en ce cas, sont verbales. *Transcurramus solertissimas nugas*. Il y a plus d’opiniastreté et de picoterie qu’il n’appartient à une si sainte profession” (I.20: V-S 81, F 56).

⁶⁶ (I.20: V-S 81, F 56).

⁶⁷ See also Montaigne’s claim in “De la vanité” that “Quelqu’un se blasmeroit et se mutinerait en soy-mesme, de se sentir *chatouiller* d’un si vain plaisir. Nos humeurs ne sont pas trop vaines, qui sont plaisantes; quelles qu’elles soient qui contentent constamment un homme capable de sens commun, je ne sçaurois avoir le coeur de le pleindre. [Some might blame themselves and rebel inwardly at being *tickled* by so vain a pleasure. Our humors are not too vain if they are pleasant; whatever they may be, if they give constant contentment to a man capable of common sense, I would not have the heart to pity him]” (III.9: V-S 997, F 763).

⁶⁸ “[B] il semble y avoir raison que nous nous portions, envers l’usage du plaisir, aussi favorablement au moins que nous faisons envers la douleur” (III.5: V-S 893, F 681).

⁶⁹ “[B] si, ne se sont ils pas contentez qu’il suyvit nuement et assistat l’ame affligée; ils l’ont affligé luy mesme de peines atroces et propres, affin qu’à l’envy l’un de l’autre l’ame et le corps plongeassent l’homme dans la douleur, d’autant plus salutaire que plus aspre” (III.5: V-S 893, F 681).

themselves maintain, then physical pleasure can also be efficacious, by the very same logic and to the very same degree. Montaigne thus posits tickling, an essentially autoerotic practice, as a form of self-inflicted pleasure that counterbalances the many forms of self-inflicted pain adopted by the saints. Aiming to bring about the same ends by very different means, Montaigne skillfully employs Christian reasoning to overturn Christian practice.

Since the body and the soul are so intimately connected, the soul ought not reject physical pleasures out of hand. “It is rather for her,” writes Montaigne, “to hatch them and foment them, to offer and invite herself to them, since the authority of ruling belongs to her; as it is also for her, in my opinion, in the pleasures that are her own, to inspire and infuse into the body all the feeling their nature allows, and to strive to make them sweet and salutary to it.”⁷⁰ Montaigne uses the word ‘salutary [salutaires]’ to describe both pain and pleasure, thus redeeming the latter and placing both terms on equal footing. In order to demonstrate that such pleasure is compatible with virtue and contributes to the perfection of the soul, he describes how love would “restore me to vigilance, sobriety, grace, care for my person” and “take me back to sane and wise studies, whereby I might make myself more loved, ridding my mind of despair of itself and its employment, and reacquainting it with itself.”⁷¹ While Epicurean philosophy was often maligned and misrepresented during the Renaissance, Montaigne carefully delineates his conception of pleasure from its more vulgar counterparts.⁷² Physical pleasures like sex and tickling, for

⁷⁰ “[C] C'est à elle plus tost de les couvrir et fomentier, de s'y presenter et convier, la charge de regir luy appartenant; comme c'est aussi, à mon advis, à elle, aux plaisirs qui luy sont propres, d'en inspirer et infondre au corps tout le ressentiment que porte leur condition, et de s'estudier qu'ils luy soient doux et salutaires” (III.5: V-S 893, F 681).

⁷¹ “[B] il me rendroit la vigilance, la sobriété, la grace, le soing de ma personne,” “[C] me remettrait aux estudes sains et sages, par où je me peusse randre plus estimé et plus aymé, ostant à mon esprit le desespoir de soy et de son usage, et le raccointant à soy” (III.5: V-S 893, F 681-682).

⁷² Epicurus himself responds to similar criticism with the following statement: “When we say that pleasure is the goal, we are not talking about the pleasures of profligates or that which lies in sensuality, as some ignorant persons think, or else those who do not agree with us or have followed our argument badly; rather, it is freedom from bodily pain and mental anguish. For it is not continuous drinking and revels, nor the enjoyment of women and young boys,

Montaigne, concern not only the basest desires of the body but also the highest capacities of the soul. They are integral rather than antithetical to virtue and ethics.

It suffices, I think, to situate Montaigne's treatment of laughter within this larger philosophical context. Although Epicurean arguments inform "On Some Verses of Virgil," Montaigne only makes recourse to them in order to develop his own sense of how body and mind, pleasure and pain, are interconnected. When searching for an exemplar of virtue and wisdom that might illustrate the uses and effects of pleasure in the same way that the saints illustrate the uses and effects of pain, he ultimately bypasses Epicurus for Socrates. Recounting how Socrates, "when older than I am," was flustered for days on end having accidentally brushed shoulders with a beautiful boy, Montaigne concludes that love must have a great power indeed "to inflame and alter a soul cooled and enervated by age, and the first of all human souls in reformation!"⁷³ As in "Of Physiognomy," Montaigne positions Socrates as a moral authority after whom he models his own life. However, this particular anecdote from Xenophon's *Symposium*, which so strongly foregrounds Socrates's eroticism, represents a more radical attitude toward pleasure than can be found in either the Platonic or the Epicurean tradition.⁷⁴ When Socrates claims that "I suddenly felt, without prevarication, a stinging in my shoulder like some animal's bite... and a continual itching flowed into my heart," he is not responding to a

nor of fish and other viands that a luxurious table holds, which make for a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, which examines the motives for every choice and avoidance, and drives away those opinions resulting in the greatest disturbance of the soul." Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus," in *The Essential Epicurus*, trans. Eugene O'Connor (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1993), 159.

⁷³ "[B] plus vieil que je ne suis," "[B] aller eschauffer et alterer une ame refroidie et esnervée par l'aage, et la premiere de toutes les humaines en reformation!" (III.5: V-S 892, F 680).

⁷⁴ See Xenophanes *Symposium* 4.27-28. Gabriel Danzig notes that "This is as far as I know the only place in the extant Socratic writings where Socrates is portrayed as coming into erotic physical contact with anyone." Danzig, *Apologizing for Socrates: How Plato and Xenophon Created Our Socrates* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), 167.

universal ideal of beauty but to this boy's actual body, to Critobulus's naked shoulder.⁷⁵ Even Epicureans abstain from sex and Epicurus himself defines pleasure in terms of absence or negation calling it "freedom from bodily pain and mental agitation" (Epicurus 160). Montaigne, by contrast, speaks of pleasure in terms of enjoyment and so assigns it a positive value.

If Montaigne's eroticized Socrates challenges, even in some limited sense, the conventional relationship between philosophy and pleasure, so too does his specific depiction of Socrates's laughter. "I heartily agree with Plato," writes Montaigne, "when he says that an easy or difficult humor is of great importance to the goodness or badness of the soul. Socrates had a settled expression, but serene and smiling, not settled like that of old Crassus who was never seen to laugh."⁷⁶ By emphasizing Socrates's countenance, Montaigne demonstrates an interest not only in the knowledge to which philosophy lays claim but in the philosopher himself as a knowing subject. Socrates's laughter reframes the larger question of the extent to which pleasure should inform the sage's life and serves as the basis for Montaigne's rejection of Neostoic constancy.

While the distinction that Montaigne draws between Socrates and Crassus, two symbolic faces of constancy, sheds light on Socrates's particular humoral disposition and mental or psychological state, it also intervenes in a specific philosophical debate that emerged during the 1580's. I would like to suggest that in this C addition Montaigne engages specifically with the arguments that Justus Lipsius advances in his 1584 treatise *De constantia in publicis malis*.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ "[B] je senty, sans mentir, soudein une piqueure dans l'espaule comme de quelque morsure de beste... et m'escoula dans le coeur une demangeaison continuelle" (III.5: V-S 892, F 680).

⁷⁶ "[C] Je croy Platon de bon ceur, qui dict les humeurs faciles ou difficiles estre un grand prejudice à la bonté ou mauvaistié de l'ame. Socrates eut un visage constant, mais serein et riant, non constant comme le vieil Crassus qu'on ne veit jamais rire. (III.5: V-S 845, F641).

⁷⁷ Lipsius defines constancy as follows: "Constancy is a right and immovable strength of the mind, neither lifted up nor pressed down with external or casual accidents. By strength I understand a steadfastness not from opinion, but from judgment and sound reason...But the true mother of constancy is patience, and lowliness of mind, which is a

Striving to make Stoic ethics, if not Stoic physics, compatible with Christian doctrine, Lipsius argues that if we allow reason to extirpate the emotions and so conquer false opinion, then we will be able to meet both public and private calamities with a peaceful mind that accepts the government of divine providence. Here, the question of classical reception bears much more on contemporary context than ancient text since Lipsius explicitly posits the Neostoic virtue of constancy as a practical way of coping with the harsh realities of civil war and religious strife. Montaigne's juxtaposition of Socrates and Crassus, however, suggests that constancy, the bedrock of Neostoic philosophy, is neither good nor beneficial unless it laughs. By supplanting 'un visage constant' with 'un visage riant,' Montaigne gestures toward a new kind of ethics.⁷⁸

While ancient Stoicism and Christianity have divergent views of such essential concepts as fate and free will, a large part of what unites them during the early modern period is a common attitude toward pain and suffering. Once Lipsius demonstrates the considerable richness of the Stoic tradition and succeeds in making it palatable to popular taste, ancient philosophy is poised to contribute significantly to the consolatory project of Christianity. Although Montaigne does not reject this initiative out of hand, his discourse on pleasure clearly flies in the face of Lipsius's stern pronouncements. In *De constantia*, for example, Langius reprimands his pupil Lipsius for desiring "wafer cakes or sweet wine at my hands" explaining that

My purpose is to teach, not to entice thee; to profit, not to please thee; to make thee blush, rather than smile; and to make thee penitent, not insolent. The school of a philosopher is as a physician's shop, so said Rufus once, whither we must repair for health, not for pleasure. That physician dallies not, neither flatters but pierces, pricks, razes, and with the savory salt of good talk sucks out the filthy corruption of the mind.

voluntary sufferance without grudging of all things whatsoever can happen to or in a man. This being regulated by the rule of right reason is the very root whereupon is settled the high and mighty body of that fair oak constancy." Lipsius, *His First Book of Constancy*, trans. John Stradling, (1594), I.V. See also Guillaume du Vair, *De la constance et consolation ès calamitez publiques* (1594) and Pierre de Charron, *De la sagesse* (1601).

⁷⁸ For more on Montaigne's critique of Stoic constancy see especially David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998) and Sébastien Prat, *Constance et inconstance chez Montaigne* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011).

Wherefore look not hereafter of me for roses, oils, or pepper, but for thorns, lancing tools, wormwood, and sharp vinegar⁷⁹

This representation of the philosopher-physician could not contrast more sharply with what we find in “Of the Education of Children.” Both Lipsius and Montaigne look to ancient philosophy to find a way of coping with present circumstances, but Lipsius’s syncretic approach to Stoicism reinscribes the very aspects of the Christian tradition that Montaigne deems excessive and cruel.⁸⁰ Yet this ethos, which makes of pain a necessary boon to the cultivation of virtue, provides the backdrop for Montaigne’s laughing philosopher. Insofar as Socrates becomes an object of meditation and emulation in the *Essays*, he differs radically from the suffering deity at the heart of the Christian tradition. I would even go so far as to read Montaigne’s laughing Socrates as a subversion of Christ in his passion, of Christ who, like Crassus, was never seen to laugh.⁸¹

Montaigne’s representation of laughter is consonant with his larger vision of a frolicsome philosophy as well as his own efforts to tickle himself.⁸² While each of these particular engagements may seem frivolous or inconsequential at first glance, taken together they attest to Montaigne’s sustained investment in laughter as both a practice and a theoretical concept. The moments where laughter surfaces in the *Essays* are moments when Montaigne is especially self-

⁷⁹ Lipsius, *Constancy*, I.10.

⁸⁰ In I.33 Montaigne similarly critiques “Stoical harshness” and “Christian moderation” by citing an extreme example of a Bishop who rejoices at the death of his wife and only daughter. See especially, Dora E. Polachek, “Of Fathers, Saints, and Dying Virgins: The Crisis of Exemplarity in ‘De fuir les voluptez au pris de la vie.’” *L’Esprit Créateur: Montaigne and the Question of Ethics*. Vol.46, No.1. (Spring 2006), 64-74.

⁸¹ For more on the theological debate over whether Jesus laughed, see M.A. Screech, *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

⁸² In “Of Experience,” Montaigne’s final essay, he returns to the theme of tickling, writing, “[B] Me trouve-je en quelque assiete tranquille? y a il quelque volupté qui me chatouille? je ne la laisse pas friponer aux sens, j’y associe mon ame, non pas pour s’y engager, mais pour s’y agréer, non pas pour s’y perdre, mais pour s’y trouver [Do I find myself in some tranquil state? Is there some voluptuous pleasure that tickles me? I do not let my sense pilfer it, I bring my soul into it, not to implicate herself, but to enjoy herself, not to lose herself but to find herself]” (III.13: V-S 112, F).

aware and often deliberately provoking his stern reader's sensibilities. Take for example the playfully defiant comment, "I like to beat their ears with that word [voluptuousness], which so goes against their grain" or, similarly, "When I seize on popular and gayer matters, it is so as to go my own way, for I do not love a solemn and gloomy wisdom, as does the world, and to cheer up myself."⁸³ These citations, both C additions to books one and two, suggest that Montaigne uses laughter to consciously differentiate himself from a majority that too readily embraces pain and disparages pleasure without cause. This is not to suggest that Montaigne himself is unacquainted with sorrow or physical suffering but that the very trials which make pleasures seem so fleeting, laughter so trivial, cause him to rally all the more in their defense.

David Quint similarly highlights Montaigne's attitude toward immoderate uses of pain, calling our attention to an especially critical representation of Christian martyrs and Stoic philosophers in the essay, "De l'ivrongnerie." He remarks that "Montaigne wants none of it: this religious conviction that is so easily confused with opinionated stubbornness, this passive-aggression that makes the martyr complicit with his own torture and turns a Stoic contempt for the body into cruelty against one's own limbs."⁸⁴ By revealing the extent to which Montaigne associates the severity of Neostoicism with the heroic and martial virtues esteemed by the *noblesse d'épée*, Quint argues convincingly that Montaigne's ethical humanism departs from both Christian and classical precedents. However, his emphasis on political acts of pardon or submission as well as the immediate context of the French civil wars tends to obscure Montaigne's emerging discourse on pleasure which, I argue, also carries great ethical

⁸³ "[C] Il me plaist de battre leurs oreilles de ce mot qui leur est si fort à contrecœur," "[C] Quand j'en saisis des populaires et plus gayer, c'est pour me suivre à moy qui n'aime point une sagesse ceremonieuse et triste, comme faict le monde, et pour m'esgayer" (I.20: V-S 81, F 56; II.17: V-S 637, F 483).

⁸⁴ Quint, *The Quality of Mercy*, 96.

significance. For instance, in the passage Quint references above, Montaigne not only condemns Stoic philosophers and saints for their “runaway courage” but for the shared assumption that it is better to be “insane than voluptuous” or “pierced through by pain than by sensual pleasure.”⁸⁵ Insofar as laughter tempers the Neostoic virtue of constancy and contributes to a larger defense of pleasure throughout the *Essays*, it fundamentally alters the way in which Montaigne relates both to himself and to others. The final section of this chapter will consider in further detail how laughter informs Montaigne’s ethics and transforms his understanding of Hellenistic philosophy.

IV “La Tranquillité Enjouée”: Montaigne’s Laughter and the Ethics of Self Care

Thus far, my readings of select passages from “Of the Education of Children” and “On Some Verses of Virgil” have posited laughter as a thematic concept that Montaigne develops over the course of several editions. As I transition to argue that laughter becomes an integral part of Montaigne’s larger ethical project, I will assume a level of textual coherence that has been the subject of debate since the (post)structuralist turn in Montaigne studies during the 1980’s. Work on ethics has aimed especially to reassert the intelligibility of Montaigne’s central claims while calling into question the privileged status of his skepticism. Quint for instance, states that “textual unity rests on the conclusion that, as Pierre Villey argued long ago, Montaigne got over his skeptical phase. He had something positive to say and something urgent.”⁸⁶ Bernard Sève echoes this sentiment in his more recent work when he comments that “Montaigne n’est pas toujours ondoyant et divers, mol et irrésolu, adoxastique et indifférent; nous pensons même qu’il

⁸⁵ “[A] un courage eslané,” “[A] J’ayme mieux estre furieux que voluptueux,” “[A] estre enferré de la douleur que de la volupté” (II.3: V-S 347, F 251).

⁸⁶ Quint, *The Quality of Mercy*, xiv.

l'est, en fait, rarement.”⁸⁷ While I do not share with Quint and Sève the belief that Montaigne’s categorical rejection of say, cruelty or lying, necessarily contradicts his skepticism, I do wish to follow their lead by rethinking the parameters of his skepticism in ethical rather than epistemological terms. Having already assessed the therapeutic function of laughter in the *Essays*, let us now consider the relationship between Montaigne’s skepticism and ethics of self care.

Although Montaigne offers a sustained treatment of Pyrrhonian skepticism in the “Apology for Raymond Sebond,” he disregards the school’s most distinguishing features when he states that “on this, there is general agreement among all the philosophers of all sects, that the sovereign good consists in tranquility of soul and body.”⁸⁸ By emphasizing the practical orientation of the Hellenistic schools, Montaigne strives to make skepticism relevant to a broader discourse on what constitutes human happiness and the good life. While some scholars have rejected Pyrrhonism’s contribution to ancient ethics on the grounds that skeptics have no concern for true knowledge or virtue, Montaigne shows that tranquility benefits the individual without causing harm to others and uses the concept to further his ethical discourse on laughter and pleasure.⁸⁹

One illustration from the “Apology” explicitly ties skepticism and tranquility to the pleasures of comedy. Although Montaigne describes *ataraxia* as “a peaceful and sedate

⁸⁷ “Montaigne is not always inconstant and diverse, soft and irresolute, incredulous and indifferent; we think this about him but, in fact, he rarely is.” Bernard Sève, *Des règles pour l'esprit*. (Paris: PUF, 2007), 12.

⁸⁸ “[A] En cecy y a il une generale convenance entre tous les philosophes de toutes sectes, que le souverain bien consiste en la tranquillité de l'ame et du corps” (II.12: V-S 488, 360).

⁸⁹ Gisela Striker, for example, maintains that “tranquillity was in fact not a serious contender for the position of ultimate good in ancient times.” If, she reasons, tranquillity consists in nothing more than a subjective state of mind, then “neither one’s moral character nor the truth or falsity of one’s convictions has anything to do with one’s happiness.” “*Ataraxia: Happiness as Tranquillity*,” in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 183,194. See also Jonathan Barnes, “Introduction.” *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Skepticism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), xxi-xxxii.

condition of life, exempt from the agitations we receive through the impression of the opinion and knowledge we think we have of things,” his illustration radically alters the connotation of this otherwise conventional definition.⁹⁰ Montaigne recounts an anecdote from Horace’s *Epistles* about a mad man who entertains himself by imagining that he is always at the theater. Much like Montaigne’s efforts to tickle his own imagination, this example features an individual who derives pleasure principally in and for himself. Montaigne writes,

Many philosophers would be of Lycas’ mind. This man, though otherwise of very regular conduct living quietly and peacefully in his family, failing in no part of his duty toward his own and toward strangers, preserving himself very well from harm, by some alteration of his senses had stamped in his imagination this hallucination: he thought he was perpetually at the amphitheaters watching entertainments, spectacles, and the finest comedies in the world. After being cured of this peccant humor by the doctors, he nearly sued them to make them restore him to the pleasures of these fancies.⁹¹

Montaigne recognizes that Lycas’s laughter and the “tranquility” he has attained constitutes a form of willful self-delusion, but he defends it nevertheless on two accounts. First, this pleasing delusion does no harm to others. Montaigne carefully specifies that the man in question cares for himself, his family, and strangers in the conventional manner. In other words, his private pleasures do not interfere with his public duties.

Second, the delusion provides Lycas with a source of real “contentment or consolation” that is otherwise unavailable to him.⁹² Making recourse once more to the metaphor of the philosopher physician, Montaigne comments, “where they cannot cure the wound they are

⁹⁰ “[A] une condition de vie paisible, rassise, exempte des agitations que nous recevons par l’impression de l’opinion et science que nous pensons avoir des choses” (II.12 V-S 503, F 372).

⁹¹ “[A] Il se trouveroit plusieurs philosophes de l’avis de Lycas: cettuy-cy ayant au demeurant ses meurs bien réglées, vivant doucement et paisiblement en sa famille, ne manquant à nul office de son devoir envers les siens et estrangiers, se conservant tres-bien des choses nuisibles, s’estoit, par quelque alteration de sens, imprimé en la fantasie une resverie: c’est qu’il pensoit estre perpetuellement aux theatres à y voir des passetemps, des spectacles et des plus belles comedies du monde. Guery qu’il fust par les medecins de cette humeur peccante, à peine qu’il ne les mit en proces pour le restablir en la douceur de ces imaginations” (II.12 V-S 495, F 366).

⁹² “[A] de contentement et de consolation” (II.12 V-S 495, F 365).

content to benumb it and alleviate it.”⁹³ Insofar as Lycas’s laughter is therapeutic, it responds to an irremediable condition, one that human efforts cannot reasonably hope to change. Indeed, this short anecdote follows in a sequence of others that touch upon the themes of suicide and despair, especially in response to futile pursuits of knowledge. Montaigne quotes Horace directly when he describes Lycas’s response to the doctors’ treatment, “Alas, you have not saved me, friends, quoth he, But murdered me, my pleasure snatched away, And that delusion that made life so gay.”⁹⁴ Montaigne’s Lycas demonstrates the extent to which ancient therapeutic philosophy addresses the concerns that we might today ascribe to modern psychology or psychiatry. Imagining the world as a comedy, as a spectacle worthy of laughter, enables the skeptic to regulate his emotions, to enjoy a state of inner calm, and to regain a sense of personal autonomy.

In a chapter titled “Skeptic Purgatives: Disturbances and the Life without Belief” Martha Nussbaum reflects on the conditions that lead skeptics to pursue tranquility before all other ends. She writes, “I think some rather intense longing for calm might be required to overcome the hold of dogma... An intense attachment to the absence of intensity is a funny sort of desire, a desire born of troubles.”⁹⁵ In the context of the “Apology,” one could easily cite the French civil wars, the death of La Boétie, or the decline of humanism as possible sources for such exhaustion and discontent. However, Montaigne’s retelling of the Lycas story gives new meaning to Nussbaum’s ‘funny sort of desire’ insofar as it posits skeptical laughter as a viable response to such troubles. Olivier Pot has even cited this anecdote as evidence of Montaigne’s effort to deconstruct the classical, pseudo-Aristotelian distinction between melancholy madness and melancholy genius (*Problem XXX.1*). He writes,

⁹³ “[A] Où ils ne peuvent guerir la playe, ils sont contents de l’endormir et pallier” (II.12 V-S 495, F 365).

⁹⁴ (II.12 V-S 495, F 366).

⁹⁵ Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 311.

le mélancolique Lycas découvre dans l'imagination qui renonce au surnaturel, le lieu d'une jouissance qui vaut bien une possession. En somme, la 'bonne mélancolie n'est plus celle qui chez Aristote discriminait la folie accidentelle et la folie naturellement 'géniale', mais la 'melancholia voluptuosa' (la 'folie douce') qui, pour avoir accepté sa singularité idiosyncrasique et joué pleinement le partage entre réalité et imaginaire, découvre dans le plaisir subjectif le mode le plus universel de la présence au monde.⁹⁶

Unlike Horace, Montaigne uses the example of a single mad man to generalize about the behaviors and attitudes of "plusieurs philosophes." While Pot's account of "bonne mélancolie" or "melancholia voluptuosa" convincingly shows how Montaigne challenges the traditional dichotomy between madness and wisdom, it does not adequately address the extent to which skepticism and a desire for tranquility make such a critique possible. By transposing this Horatian anecdote into his discourse on skepticism, Montaigne suggests that laughter, which mediates between judgement of the real and the imaginary in the same way that skepticism mediates between judgement of the known and the unknown, can transform the melancholic's pain into a source of pleasure.

Montaigne employs skepticism to unsettle normative distinctions between health and sickness, truth and falsehood, in order to assert tranquility as a legitimate end for the philosopher as opposed to the mad man. His specific use of the word '*fantasie*' invokes the ancient Greek term for appearance [φαντασία] and reflects the skeptic's tendency to distrust his senses. Unlike the mad man who has involuntarily lost the ability to distinguish between appearance and reality, the skeptic voluntarily suspends his judgement. This is not to say that the skeptic consciously indulges a lie, but that he lacks the epistemological basis to determine rationally what is true and

⁹⁶ "The melancholy Lycas discovers in his imagination, which renounces the supernatural, the site of a joy that also becomes a possession. To summarize, 'good melancholy' is no longer that which in Aristotle differentiates accidental madness and natural or genial madness but 'voluptuous melancholy' which, for having accepted its singularity and idiosyncrasy and having played fully with the division between reality and imagination, discovers in a subjective pleasure the most universal way of presence." Olivier Pot, "L'inquiétante étrangeté: la mélancholie de Montaigne." *Montaigne Studies*. Vol.3 No.2 (1991): 279.

what is false. Here, the theater serves as an especially apt metaphor for how skepticism not only authorizes doubt but a certain suspension of disbelief. As the doctors who succeed in purging Lycas's 'peccant humor' make clear, both laughter and tranquility are predicated on the skeptic's ability to entertain pleasing representations of everyday life.

Pot reads Lycas's imaginary theater as an example of "plaisir subjectif," but I would suggest that pleasure is actually integral to Montaigne's larger conception of tranquility and a primary motivation for his engagement with ancient skepticism. While many scholars have emphasized the ideological implications of Montaigne's skepticism, whether political or theological in orientation, few have adequately considered its therapeutic function. By that I mean the extent to which skepticism recommends strategies for regulating cognitive faculties like attention, memory, and perception in order to promote mental or emotional wellbeing. As Pot suggests, skepticism has the capacity to transform melancholy into a source of joy. Introducing the story of Lycas from Horace's *Epistles* into the "Apology" enables Montaigne to foreground the pursuit of pleasure within the context of skepticism and to explore its psychological implications. Although Montaigne's rendition remains faithful to the Latin in most respects, one crucial divergence alters the tenor of the passage overall. Horace specifies that Lycas believed himself to be attending "tragic spectacles [miros tragoedos]" whereas Montaigne substitutes 'the finest comedies in the world [des plus belles comedies du monde].'⁹⁷ In both cases, Lycas derives pleasure from theater but, by bringing the specific pleasures of comedy to

⁹⁷ "Fuit haud ignobilis Argis,/ qui se credebat miros audire tragoedos/ in uacuo laetus sessor plausorque theatro,/ cetera qui uitae seruaret munia recto/ more, bonus sane uicinus, amabilis hospes,/ comis in uxorem, posset qui ignoscere seruis/ et signo laeso non insanire lagoenae,/ posset qui rupem et puteum uitare patentem./ Hic ubi cognatorum opibus curisque refectus/ expulit elleboro morbum bilemque meraco/ et redit ad sese: 'Pol, me occidistis, amici,/ non seruastis' ait, 'cui sic extorta uoluptas/ et demptus per uim mentis gratissimus error'" Horace, BkII.EpII:126-154.

bear on skepticism, Montaigne reveals a fundamental connection between laughter and tranquility.

Thus, both Estienne and Montaigne frame skepticism in comic terms and associate therapeutic laughter with the desired end of tranquility. Drawing on the common *theatrum mundi* metaphor, Estienne casts himself as the lead player of a tragicomedy while Montaigne positions Lycas as a laughing spectator. In both cases, skepticism gives rise to a new way of seeing the world and locating oneself within it. In his reading of skepticism and Shakespearean tragedy, Stanley Cavell observes that Montaigne treats many of the same themes as the play *Othello* but ultimately comes to opposite conclusions. With respect to jealousy, sex, chastity, and marriage, Montaigne suggests, according to Cavell, “that all of these topics should be food for thought and moderation, not for torture and murder; as fit for rue and laughter as for pity and terror; that they are not tragic unless one makes them so.”⁹⁸ Although Cavell takes issue with Montaigne’s efforts to quell unpleasant emotions, insinuating that laughter itself may be dishonest or inhuman, I argue that the very subjectivism to which skepticism gives rise renders both comic and tragic appraisals of human experience equally viable. Literary scholars have, for the most part, like Cavell, assumed an intrinsic link between tragedy and skepticism but the passage I have examined from Montaigne’s “Apology” along with Estienne’s dedication suggest that this conclusion is by no means inevitable. Montaigne prefers comedy because skepticism grants him the freedom to choose pleasure before pain, self-affirmation before self-abnegation. In many ways, Montaigne’s skepticism is synonymous with this choice.

In later essays, Montaigne continues to theorize tranquility in affective terms, not only building on associations with laughter and pleasure but breaking more decisively with the

⁹⁸ Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 140.

Hellenistic tradition. In one *allongail*, Montaigne declares, “all the glory that I aspire to in my life is to have lived it tranquilly- tranquilly not according to Metrodorus or Arcesilaus or Aristippus, but according to me. Since philosophy has not been able to find a way to tranquility that is suitable to all, let everyone seek it individually.”⁹⁹ Here, Montaigne emphatically affirms tranquility as both the formal end of philosophy and the final end of a life well lived but rejects the universality of ancient prescriptions. Near the outset of “On Some Verses of Virgil” Montaigne specifies further that “I, who have no other aim but to live and be merry, would run from one end of the world to the other to seek out one good year of pleasant and cheerful tranquility. A somber and dull tranquility is easy enough to find for me, but it puts me to sleep and stupefies me; I am not content with it.”¹⁰⁰ While the Lycas story distinguishes between comic and tragic tranquility, this citation draws a similar distinction between a tranquility that is ‘plaisante et enjouée’ and one that is ‘sombre et stupide.’ Despite having offered a largely conventional definition of *ataraxia* in the “Apology,” Montaigne clearly desires more than a mind free from perturbation.

Although *tranquillité enjouée* may seem frivolous or even oxymoronic at first glance, Montaigne’s particular designation evinces his engagement with a sophisticated and longstanding philological debate. The Latin term *tranquillitas* encompasses an entire constellation of Greek concepts like *aponia* [freedom from pain], *ataraxia* [freedom from disturbance], and *apatheia* [freedom from emotion], all of which denote absence or negation with the prefix a-. Montaigne’s *tranquillité enjouée* recovers the more positive sense of

⁹⁹ “[C] Toute la gloire que je pretens de ma vie, c’est de l’avoir vescu tranquille: tranquille non selon Metrodorus, ou Arcesilas, ou Aristippus, mais selon moy. Puis que la philosophie n’a sçeu trouver aucune voye pour la tranquillité, qui fust bonne en commun, que chacun la cherche en son particulier!” (II.16: V-S, F 471).

¹⁰⁰ “[B] Je courrois d’un bout du monde à l’autre [Image 0376v] chercher un bon an de tranquillité plaisante et enjouée, moy qui n’ay autre fin que vivre et me resjouyr. La tranquillité sombre et stupide se trouve assez pour moy, mais elle m’endort et enteste: je ne m’en contente pas” (III.5: V-S 843, F 640).

Democritean *euthymia* [cheerfulness] which, like *eudaimonia* [happiness], builds upon the prefix *eu-* meaning good. Seneca suppresses this essential connotation when, in *De tranquillitate animi*, he renders *euthymia* as *tranquillitas*, maintaining that “there is no need to imitate and reproduce words in their Greek shape; the thing itself, which is under discussion, must be designated by some name which ought to have, not the form, but the force, of the Greek term.”¹⁰¹ Espousing an entirely different attitude toward translation and Greek culture, Montaigne retains the form of Seneca’s Latinized term but boldly contests its force. His French *tranquillité enjouée* bears the full weight of this semantic history and aims to restore the more affirmative sense of the Greek *euthymia*.

Marcel Conche has argued that Montaigne, especially in later essays and manuscript additions, espouses an attitude toward pleasure that exceeds even that of Epicurus. He explains that “il y a chez Montaigne un côté dionysiaque qui n’est pas dans l’épicurisme. Ce qui domine chez lui est le goût de la vie, et cela ne va pas sans le goût du désir, le désir du désir: d’un côté le désir du désir, de l’autre le désir du non-désir.”¹⁰² While Conche’s use of the Dionysian to distinguish Montaigne from Epicurus invokes a Nietzschean dialectic that, from my point of view, overstates the anarchic character of the *Essays*, his distinction between *désir* and *non-désir* deftly shows the extent to which Epicurean pleasure is still founded on ascetic practices of self-abnegation. Montaigne’s strategic investment in laughter, his “cheerful tranquility” and “frolicsome philosophy,” offer models of positive enjoyment that contrast sharply with both Christian and classical ideals. While Neostoics and Epicureans alike strive to meet fate with an

¹⁰¹ Seneca, *De tranquillitate*, II.3.

¹⁰² “Montaigne’s spirit is not the spirit of Epicurus because Montaigne has a Dionysian side that Epicureanism does not. That which dominates for him is a taste for life, and this is not possible without a taste for desire, a desire for desire: on the one side there is a desire for desire, on the other side, a desire for non-desire.” Conche, “Plaisir et communication,” *Perspectives critiques* 4 (2011): 92.

attitude of passive acceptance, Montaigne adopts an attitude of active affirmation and so demands a fuller account of human happiness.

If we are to speak of a Montaignian ethics, it must account for pleasure that is more than freedom from pain and tranquility that is more than freedom from perturbation. Indeed, I have located laughter in the midst of this surplus, in Montaigne's many expressions of 'more than' or 'not only but also.' In the final essay of book three, Montaigne recounts his own experience of cheerful tranquility during two separate periods of illness. First he writes, "my soul was then not only free from disturbance, but also full of satisfaction and gaiety" and second, "my mind still kept going not only peacefully but cheerfully."¹⁰³ By contrasting the vitality of his soul with the enervated state of his body, Montaigne affirms the soul's ability to fortify itself against external evils. However, the *satisfaction*, *feste*, and *plaisir* that he enjoys exceed the scope of existing ethical systems. These qualities result from good self-government and are intricately tied to Montaigne's particular conception of freedom and subjectivity.

While some scholars broach the question of Montaigne's ethics by reconsidering his debt to the moral philosophy of Seneca and Plutarch, others emphasize the historical context of the *Essays* and the socio-political realities of the late sixteenth century. Zahi Zalloua has recently suggested that the current 'ethical turn' in Montaigne studies marks a shift away from the twentieth century's "seemingly excessive investment" in language and textuality.¹⁰⁴ Still others, including Zalloua himself, bring Montaigne into conversation with more contemporary work on ethics by theorists like Jean-François Lyotard, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida. My own approach, which is indebted to Michel Foucault's late work on the care of the self, considers both

¹⁰³ "[B] non seulement exempte de trouble, mais encore pleine de satisfaction et de feste," "[B] l'esprit alla tousjours non paisiblement seulement, mais plaisamment" (III.13: S-V1098, F 842).

¹⁰⁴ Zahi Zalloua, *L'Esprit Créateur: Montaigne and the Question of Ethics* (Spring 2006), 1.

the Hellenistic and humanistic contexts of Montaigne's ethics as well as his place within this larger, theoretical debate. In particular, I argue that by making laughter integral to self-care, Montaigne renegotiates the relationship between pleasure and ethical subjectivity.

In the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault examines the conventional sexual practices of Greece and Rome in order to understand how ancient attitudes toward pleasure and self-regulation differ from our own. In so doing, he rediscovers the philosophical injunction "to care for oneself" which "emphasizes the importance of developing all the practices and all the exercises by which one can maintain self-control and eventually arrive at a pure enjoyment of oneself."¹⁰⁵ While much of Foucault's earlier work on governmentality examines how institutions of power constitute individuals as subjects, here he considers the extent to which subjects may constitute themselves. Thus, engaging with key texts by Seneca, Plutarch, and Epictetus, not only leads Foucault to fundamentally reconsider questions of agency and autonomy but to call for a (re)turn "to personal ethics, to the morality of everyday conduct, private life, and pleasure."¹⁰⁶ Hellenistic philosophy similarly informs Montaigne's ethics and Foucault, in a 1982 lecture at the *Collège de France*, rightly notes that the political discourse of *raison d'État* gave rise to a renewed interest in self-government and self-care during the sixteenth century. While I cannot respond in full to his compelling suggestion that "Montaigne should be reread in this perspective, as an attempt to reconstitute an aesthetics and an ethics of the self," I would claim that Montaigne's deliberate investment in laughter recasts the ideal relationship of the soul to itself and contributes significantly to his

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 237.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

larger project of self cultivation.¹⁰⁷ By way of conclusion, I will examine Montaigne's exhortation to laugh in "Of Solitude" and then turn briefly to his treatment of gallows humor in "That the Taste of Good and Evil Depends in Large Part on the Opinion We Have of Them."

In one of the most frequently cited passages of the *Essays*, Montaigne describes the *arrière-boutique* or back shop where the soul withdraws to care for itself. While many scholars have debated whether the *arrière-boutique* refers to Montaigne's tower library or a more metaphorical configuration of the soul, few have considered the actual practices that such a place accommodates. Montaigne writes,

We must reserve a back shop all our own, entirely free, in which to establish our real liberty and our principle retreat and solitude. Here our ordinary conversation must be between us and ourselves, and so private that no outside association or communication can find a place; here we must talk and laugh [*discourir et y rire*] as if without wife, without children, without possessions, without retinue and servants, so that, when the time comes to lose them, it will be nothing new to us to do without them.¹⁰⁸

In the *arrière-boutique*, Montaigne exercises his true freedom [*vraie liberté*] and mitigates the pain of future loss by employing a Stoic strategy called *praemeditatio malorum* or meditation on evils. In a lecture from *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* Foucault considers this strategy at length, explaining that "the *praemeditatio malorum* consists in training oneself in thought to assume that all possible evils, whatever they may be, are bound to occur."¹⁰⁹ Indeed,

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 251. For readings of Foucault's care of the self and the *Essays* see especially Zahi Zalloua, "Montaigne, Seneca, and 'le Soing de la Culture de l'Âme'." *Montaigne Studies*. Vol XXI, No. 1-2. (March 2009): 155-168 and *Montaigne and the Ethics of Skepticism* (Virginia: Rookwood Press, 2005), Marc Schatcher "'Qu'est-ce que la critique?' La Boétie, Montaigne, Foucault," in *Montaigne After Theory, Theory After Montaigne* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2009), Nicholas Paige, *Being Interior*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2001); and Alexander Nehamas, "A Face for Socrates' Reason: Montaigne's 'Of Physiognomy.'" *The Art of Living*. (Los Angeles: U of California P, 2000).

¹⁰⁸ "[A] Il se faut réserver une arriereboutique toute nostre, toute franche, en laquelle nous établissons nostre vraye liberté et principale retraicte et solitude. En cette-cy faut-il prendre nostre ordinaire entretien de nous à nous mesmes, et si privé que nulle acointance ou communication estrangiere y trouve place; discourir et y rire comme sans femme, sans enfans et sans biens, sans train et sans valetz, afin que, quand l'occasion adviendra de leur perte, il ne nous soit pas nouveau de nous en passer" (I.39: V-S 241, F177).

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 470.

Montaigne's specific references to the loss of wife, children, and possessions suggest a more than passing familiarity with the discourses of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus.¹¹⁰ Reading the *arrière-boutique* within this larger context of self care reveals the full extent to which Montaigne's consideration of interiority and subjectivity is motivated by the therapeutic aims of philosophy.

However, while Montaigne's explanation of how to fortify oneself against the loss of loved ones or material wealth is largely conventional, his specific exhortation to 'talk and laugh' is not.¹¹¹ Foucault cites the *praemeditation malorum* as one example of what he calls a technology of the self and I would suggest that Montaigne adds laughter to this arsenal.¹¹² Through laughter, Montaigne cultivates a relationship to himself that takes precedence over his relationship to others. Even the visual and aural similarity of the words *discourir* and *rire* make laughter essential to the soul's dialogue with itself. In the midst of external evils, laughter enables Montaigne to preserve that cheerful tranquility which is so constitutive of personal autonomy or 'vrai liberté' and which is otherwise unavailable to the Stoic philosopher.

While theorists of laughter, especially in the wake of Bakhtin, have been quick to dismiss any connection between laughter and freedom, they have failed to recognize crucial differences between an ethics of self care and a politics of revolution. In an interview that Foucault gave

¹¹⁰ The *Enchiridion*, for instance, contains several maxims like the following: "With regard to whatever objects give you delight, are useful, or are deeply loved, remember to tell yourself of what general nature they are, beginning from the most insignificant things. If, for example, you are fond of a specific ceramic cup, remind yourself that it is only ceramic cups in general of which you are fond. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your child, or your wife, say that you only kiss things which are human, and thus you will not be disturbed if either of them dies" Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, trans. Elizabeth Carter, 3.

¹¹¹ Epictetus actually proscribes laughter on the grounds that it is unbecoming of the Stoic sage: "don't allow your laughter [to] be much, not on many occasions, nor profuse" and "avoid, likewise an endeavor to excite laughter. For this is a slippery point, which may throw you into vulgar manners." *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹² Foucault contrasts technologies of power with technologies of the self which, he argues, "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality." *Ethics*, 225.

shortly before his death, he defines *le souci de soi* as a practice of freedom rather than a process of liberation. While liberation, according to Foucault, pertains to the actual acts of resistance and revolution that aim to free an oppressed people from subjugation, freedom pertains to the formation of an ethical subject that participates in relations of power in a non-authoritarian way. Thus, while critics like Stephen Greenblatt or Slavoj Žižek are perhaps right to reject the liberating capacity of carnivalesque laughter, Montaignian laughter may still be viable as a form of self care.¹¹³ Processes of liberation preserve human life but they cannot teach us how to live, to live knowing that we will die, to live a life that is good. As a practice of freedom, laughter enables the soul to gain mastery over itself and to deliver itself from unruly passions and base desire. While it may not be possible, strictly speaking, to be free without being liberated, it is perfectly possible to be liberated without being free. One of the clearest and most unexpected demonstrations of this capacity is Montaigne's treatment of gallows humor in "That the Taste of Good and Evil Depends in Large Part on the Opinion We Have of Them."

The title of this essay once again marks Montaigne's engagement with the writings of Epictetus since it alludes directly to a maxim from the *Enchiridion*, but here Montaigne rejects the exemplarity of the Stoic sage and even mocks his somber attitude toward death, pain, and poverty.¹¹⁴ In order to demonstrate how laughter allays even our greatest fears, Montaigne includes a catalogue of common or "low-born" people who, though condemned to die, are still

¹¹³ While Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal work *Rabelais and His World* was among the first to theorize carnivalesque laughter as a liberating force against absolutism, many critics have since questioned the viability of this interpretation as well as Bakhtin's own revolutionary politics. Stephen Greenblatt's reading of Falstaff, for example, in "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion" suggests that laughter is contained by the very power it appears to threaten and therefore cannot contribute to political resistance or critique of ideology. Slavoj Žižek's conception of "totalitarian laughter" in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* similarly argues that laughter is ultimately complicit with the system it aims to overturn.

¹¹⁴ Epictetus writes that "men are disturbed, not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things." *Enchiridion*, 5.

seen “settling their domestic affairs, commending themselves to their friends, singing, preaching, and keeping up conversation with the people; sometimes even joking [meslans quelque-fois des mots pour rire] and drinking with their friends, yielding in nothing to Socrates.”¹¹⁵ By way of example, Montaigne recounts the following anecdotes in quick succession:

One man who was being led to the gallows said they must not go by a certain street, since there was a danger that a certain merchant might have him collared for an old debt. Another told the hangman not to touch him on the throat for fear of making him shake with laughter, he was so ticklish. Another replied to his confessor, who was promising him that he should sup that day with Our Lord: “You go there yourself; for my part, I’m fasting.” Another, having asked for a drink and seeing the hangman drink first, said he would not drink after him for fear of catching the pox.”¹¹⁶

With each of these humorous examples, and there are several others, Montaigne illustrates the soul’s power to resist the provocations of the external world. By focusing on mundane and future-oriented concerns such as debt, the discomfort of being tickled, fasting, and the pox, the condemned men displace a more acute anxiety over their impending death which, of course, renders all such future concerns irrelevant. Although these men do not succeed in evading death, their capacity for humor provides consolation and enables them to recuperate a certain kind of pleasure while also exercising a limited form of autonomy.

When Montaigne writes about his own imminent death and experience of illness in “Of Experience,” he too endeavors to maintain a laughing disposition. “They see you sweat in agony,” he writes, “turn pale, turn red, tremble, vomit your very blood, suffer strange contractions and convulsions, sometimes shed great tears from your eyes, discharge thick, black,

¹¹⁵ “[A] establisans leurs affaires domestiques, se recommandans à leurs amis, chantans, preschans et entretenans le peuple: voire y meslans quelque-fois des mots pour rire, et beuvans à leurs cognoissans, aussi bien que Socrates” (I.14: V-S 51-52, F 34).

¹¹⁶ “[A] Un qu'on menoit au gibet, disoit que ce ne fut pas par telle rue, car il y avoit danger qu'un marchand luy fist mettre la main sur le collet, à cause d'un vieux debte. Un autre disoit au bourreau qu'il ne le touchast pas à la gorge, de peur de le faire tressaillir de rire, tant il estoit chatouilleux. L'autre respondit à son confesseur, qui luy promettoit qu'il soupperait ce jour là avec nostre Seigneur: Allez vous y en, vous, car de ma part je jeusne. Un autre, ayant demandé à boire, et le bourreau ayant beu le premier, dict ne vouloir boire apres luy, de peur de prendre la verolle” (I.14: V-S, F 34).

and frightful urine, or have it stopped up by some sharp rough stone that cruelly pricks and flays the neck of your penis; meanwhile keeping up conversation with your company with a normal countenance, jesting [bouffonnant] in the intervals with your servants, holding up your end in a sustained discussion, making excuses for your pain and minimizing your suffering.”¹¹⁷ While neither death nor pain are inherently laughable, Montaigne’s ability to jest while in their midst, suggests an unwillingness to be overcome by external circumstances. Like those affable men at the gallows, his soul exercises a freedom that aims not only at constancy or forbearance but at unassailable pleasure.¹¹⁸

As we move to the conclusion of this chapter, there may yet be concerns that even if Montaignian laughter constitutes an ethical form of self care, it ultimately precludes exhortations to care for others. Are the contempt and scorn associated with laughter incompatible with a Christian ethics based on pity and compassion? In order to address these claims, I will focus primarily on the two short essays in which Montaigne takes laughter as his central focus, first turning to “How We Cry and Laugh for the Same Thing” and then to “Of Democritus and Heraclitus.” While neither of these early essays deals explicitly with skepticism, both reject essentialist accounts of external appearances and frame the juxtaposition of laughter and tears in terms of the soul’s capacity for judgement.

In the essay “How We Cry and Laugh for the Same Thing” Montaigne develops the subjectivism that he first explores in “That the Taste of Good and Evil Depends in Large Part on

¹¹⁷ “[B] On te voit suer d’ahan, pallir, rougir, trembler, [Image 0492v] vomir jusques au sang, souffrir des contractions et convulsions estranges, degouter par foys de grosses larmes des yeux, rendre les urines espesses, noires, et effroyables, ou les avoir arrestées par quelque pierre espineuse et herissée qui te pouinct et escorche cruellement le col de la verge, entretenant cependant les assistans d’une contenance commune, bouffonnant à pauses avec tes gens, tenant ta partie en un discours tendu, excusant de parolle ta douleur et rabatant de ta souffrance” (III.13: V-S 1091, F 836-837).

¹¹⁸ For more on pleasure in III.13 see especially Jean Céard, “Le plaisir est des principales espèces du profit”: Montaigne et le plaisir.” *Le plaisir au temps de la Renaissance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 141-151.

the Opinion We Have of Them.” Having already depicted death as an object of laughter, Montaigne now describes the logic that makes such an appraisal possible. He explains that when we shift suddenly from laughter to tears, or from tears to laughter “there is nothing changed; but our soul looks on the thing with a different eye, and represents it to itself in another aspect, for each thing has many angles and many lights.”¹¹⁹ This *autre oeil* suggests an almost meditative perspectival shift but Montaigne directs its gaze inward rather than outward. Thus, a military commander who celebrates a victory simultaneously mourns the death of his enemy and a bride, rejoicing in her bridegroom, also despairs to leave mother and father behind.

In an especially intimate digression on domestic life, Montaigne explores how conflicting emotions and divers humors impact his relationships with others. He suggests that “when I scold my valet, I scold him with all my heart; my imprecations are real, not feigned... When I call him a clown or a calf, I do not undertake to sew those labels on him forever; nor do I think I contradict myself when I presently call him a fine fellow.”¹²⁰ That the same man could be both ‘un badin’ and an ‘honeste homme’ suggests that he is neither in essence. This bodes well for Montaigne who, in subsequent lines, regards himself in a similar manner. Reframing the implicit question, “What is my valet to me?” Montaigne asks “What am I to myself?” His response demonstrates a brand of self-deprecating humor that recurs throughout the *Essays*. Montaigne says, “if it did not seem crazy to talk to oneself, there is not a day when I would not be heard growling at myself: ‘Confounded fool [*bren du fat*]!’ And yet I do not intend that to be my definition.”¹²¹ While Donald Frame’s translation of the *Essays* is masterful in most respects, his

¹¹⁹ “[A] il n’y a rien de changé, mais nostre ame regarde la chose d’un autre oeil, et se la represente par un autre visage: car chaque chose a plusieurs biais et plusieurs lustres” (1.38: V-S 235, F 174).

¹²⁰ “[B] Quand je tance avec mon valet, je tance du meilleur courage que j’aye, ce sont vrayes et non feintes imprecations... [C] Quand je l’appelle un badin, un veau, je n’entreprend pas de luy coudre à jamais ces tiltres; ny ne pense me desdire pour le nommer tantost honeste homme (1.38: V-S 234, F 173).

¹²¹ “[C] Si ce n’estoit la contenance d’un fol de parler seul, il n’est jour au quel on ne m’ouist gronder en moy-mesme et contre moy: Bren du fat. Et si n’enten pas, que ce soit ma définition” (1.38: V-S 235, F 173).

conservative rendering of *bren du fat* fails to capture both the comic and crude nature of Montaigne's expression. I much prefer M.A. Screech's "You silly shit!" or even John Florio's "A () in the fooles teeth" which leaves something to the imagination (Screech 264; Florio X).

On the one hand, this expression exhibits Montaigne's willingness to laugh at his own shortcomings while illustrating the particular form of introspection which laughter makes possible. The use of colloquial language casts his discourse in a comic vein, representing, as it were, the conflicts of ordinary and perhaps ignoble people in domestic settings.¹²² On the other hand, Montaigne's stipulation that the expression does not actually reflect 'ma définition,' marks an important shift from an essential to a non-essential theory of the comic. Unlike many theorists from Aristotle to Bergson, Montaigne has little interest in objectively defining or cataloguing the laughable. Rather, his conception of laughter consists much more in a way of seeing or representing. That Montaigne shifts quickly from laughing at others, his valet or his wife, to laughing at himself communicates a sense of humility that promotes rather than detracts from fellow feeling. Since Montaigne does not exempt himself from laughter or unilaterally relegate any particular group to the laughable, I would argue that he does not truly risk alienating the other.

In the essay "Of Democritus and Heraclitus" Montaigne explains that the soul "treats a matter not according to itself, but according to herself" and reiterates the central idea that "things in themselves may have their own weights and measures and qualities; but once inside, within us, she [the soul] allots them their qualities as she sees fit."¹²³ The substantial C level additions

¹²² This observation draws upon an Aristotelian understanding of comedy which explicitly reserves for tragedy the representation of heroes, kings, and affairs of state. On comedy and the genre of intimate writing see Alison Calhoun, "Montaigne and the Comic: Exposing Private Life." *Philosophy and Literature*. 35.2 (2011): 303-319.

¹²³ "[C] Et la traitte, non selon elle, mais selon soy. Les choses à part elles ont peut estre leurs poids et mesures et conditions; mais au dedans, en nous, elle les leur taille comme elle l'entend" (I.51: V-S 302, F 220).

that Montaigne makes to this essay suggest that he became more and more invested in the idea of laughter as a faculty of the soul. The familiar myth of the laughing and weeping philosophers enables him to consider how a common human condition can drive men of different constitutions to opposite affective extremes. Montaigne recounts that Democritus, “finding the condition of man vain and ridiculous, never went out in public but with a mocking and laughing face; whereas Heraclitus, having pity and compassion on this same condition of ours, wore a face perpetually sad, and eyes filled with tears.”¹²⁴ Although Democritus and Heraclitus represent an irresolvable contradiction, Montaigne ultimately sides with the laughing philosopher whose ethical position he finds most instructive.¹²⁵

In an early modern context, Heraclitus complements a Christian conception of the world as a vale of tears and affirms the virtue of charity. Given Montaigne’s preference for Democritean laughter, critics like Daniel Ménager have suggested that this essay “est en fait une critique oblique du discours chrétien sur la misère de l’homme, un refus de la ‘pitié’ et de la ‘compassion.’”¹²⁶ Jean Balsamo argues similarly that “Montaigne ne suit pas l’interprétation donnée des pleurs d’Héraclite comme commisération, comme déploration de la *miseria hominis*; il ruine, par celle qui’il donne du rire de Démocrite, la prétention de l’homme à une prétendue dignitas, que tout dément en lui, et en particulier son irréductible vanité et son inanité.”¹²⁷ While

¹²⁴ “[A] Democritus et Heraclitus ont esté deux philosophes, desquels le premier, trouvant vaine et ridicule l’humaine condition, ne sortoit en public qu’avec un visage moqueur et riant; Heraclitus, ayant pitié et compassion de cette mesme condition nostre, en portoit le visage continuellement atristé, et les yeux chargez de larmes” (I.50: V-S 303, F 220).

¹²⁵ Other humanists, most notably Erasmus of Rotterdam, also prefer Democritus’s laughter to Heraclitus’s tears. See especially, *In Praise of Folly and Adagia*.

¹²⁶ Ménager writes that “This entire passage, which dates for the most part from 1580, is in fact a subtle critique of Christian discourse on the misery of man, a refusal of ‘pity’ and ‘compassion.’” *La Renaissance et le rire*, 85.

¹²⁷ Balsamo suggests that “Montaigne does not follow the given interpretation of Heraclitus’s tears as commisération, as a lament for the *miseria hominis*; the interpretation he gives to the laughter of Democritus destroys man’s pretension to a false *dignitas*, it refutes everything in him and, in particular, his irreducible vanity and inanity.” “Les rires de Montaigne,” in *Rire à la Renaissance: colloque international de Lille, Université Charles-de-Gaulle - Lille 3, 6-8 novembre 2003* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2010), 229.

I agree that Montaigne rejects this ethical position on the grounds that pity and compassion actually mask a greater form of presumption and evince a fundamental misconception of man's worth, I would not conclude by reducing his laughter to contempt or scorn. By replacing a moral discourse based on sin with one based on ignorance, not "*malice*" but "*sotise*," Montaigne offers a foundation for a new kind of ethics that employs laughter as a means to reorient our conception of self, world, and other.¹²⁸

In the essay's final line, "our own peculiar condition is that we are as fit to be laughed at [*ridicule*] as able to laugh [*risible*]," Montaigne nuances a longstanding debate over the misery and dignity of man.¹²⁹ Although he rejects the *miseria hominis* claim implicit in Heraclitus's constant lament, Montaigne also rejects the *dignitate hominis* claim set forth by earlier humanists like Pico della Mirandola and Giannozzo Manetti.¹³⁰ Throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, the capacity for laughter was considered as constitutive of mankind as speech or language because of the pseudo-Aristotelian precept that "no animal laughs save Man" (*De partibus animalium* III.10). François Rabelais, most famously, popularized a translation of this maxim in his preface to *Gargantua*: "Mieulx est de ris que de larmes escrire,/ Pour ce que rire est le propre de l'homme."¹³¹ Montaigne's careful choice of the word "*propre*," in this C addition, clearly invokes the Aristotelian tradition which uses laughter to confirm human exceptionalism. However, by emphasizing our ridiculousness as well as his own with the crucial addition of the word "*ridicule*," Montaigne qualifies any subsequent affirmation of human

¹²⁸ "[A] I do not think there is as much unhappiness in us as vanity, nor as much malice as stupidity. We are not so full of evil as of inanity; we are not as wretched as we are worthless" (I.50: V-S 303, F 221).

¹²⁹ "[C] Nostre propre et peculièr condition est autant ridicule que risible" (I.50 V-S 304, F 221).

¹³⁰ Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486); Giannozzo Manetti, *On Man's Dignity and Excellence* (1453); compare Poggio Bracciolini, *On the Misery of the Human Condition* (1455).

¹³¹ Rabelais, *Oeuvres de Rabelais*, 2.

dignity.¹³² While the Democritus of antiquity laughed only at the ignorance of others, Montaigne's Democritus, like Montaigne himself, laughs because he has knowledge of his own ignorance.

Despite its early date of composition, "Of Democritus and Heraclitus" prefigures Montaigne's more mature treatment of themes like *vanité* or *inanité* and enables us to consider what an ethics of skepticism might look like.¹³³ Ann Hartle has suggested that Montaigne "is closer to Democritus because the fundamental ontological category for him is contingency, and laughter is the fundamental human response to contingency."¹³⁴ I have shown that throughout the *Essays*, laughter shapes Montaigne's interpretation of frolicsome philosophy, pleasure, cheerful tranquillity, and the care of the self. While Zalloua asserts in *Montaigne and the Ethics of Skepticism* that Montaigne's ethical concerns eventually shift from self to other, from Stoic indifference to Christian charity, I would contend that self-care is actually quite removed from the charge of selfishness.¹³⁵ As Foucault makes clear in his late work, the Hellenistic tradition viewed philosophy as an exercise for real life rather than an escape from it; one cannot hope to care for others, unless one first cares for oneself.¹³⁶ Laughter consistently characterizes Montaigne's relationship to himself, his approach to learning, and the particular repose that he enjoys even in the midst of pain and suffering. Insofar as Montaigne's example encourages

¹³² The significance of the word "*propre*" is elaborated more fully in Screech, *Laughter at the Foot*, 1-5, Ménager, *La Renaissance et le rire*, 7-41, and Barbara Bowen, "*Rire est le propre de l'homme*," *Etudes rabelaisiennes*, XXI, (1988).

¹³³ See II.12, II.17, and III.9.

¹³⁴ Hartle, *Accidental Philosopher*, 172.

¹³⁵ See, for instance, Zalloua's claim that "the egocentric concerns of the sage (perfecting the self through philosophical or spiritual exercises) relegate a 'care for others,' then, to a secondary duty at best, or, at worst, cause him to remain indifferent to this care, excluding it altogether from ethical commitment." *Montaigne and the Ethics of Skepticism*, 63. For "Montaignian *caritas*" see *Ibid.*, 133-144.

¹³⁶ Alcibiades is Foucault's case in point here; the tyrant is the man who governs others but cannot govern himself. See *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 65-107.

others to care for themselves by also cultivating a laughing disposition, the *Essays* succeed as a work that responds to the exigencies of their time.

Laughter not only enables Montaigne to challenge the Neostoic's severity and the Epicurean's asceticism, so that ancient ethics may better suit his present circumstances and personal temperament, but it also informs his interactions with others. Since Montaigne chiefly laughs at himself and with others, he fosters a sense of fellowship that reconciles petty differences. Similarly, his comic debasement of human knowledge encourages humility and solidarity in the face of a shared condition. Contrasting our ambitions with our natural limitations, Montaigne gently reminds us in the final pages of his final essay that even "on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own rump."¹³⁷ This joke, the perfect blend of comedy and skepticism, illustrates Montaigne's "gay and sociable wisdom."¹³⁸ It also suggests that taking oneself too seriously may detract from both private happiness and public peace.

¹³⁷ "[C] Et au plus eslevé throne du monde si ne sommes assis que sus nostre cul" (III.13: V-S, F 857).

¹³⁸ "sagesse, mais gaye et sociale" (III.13: V-S, F 857).

Chapter 2

“Therapy for My Intellect”: Democritus Jr. and The *Anatomy of Melancholy*

Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, a tome in many ways as vast and varied as Montaigne’s *Essays*, has been the subject of renewed critical interest since the nineties when pivotal works like Gail Kern Paster’s *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (1993) and Michael C. Schoenfeldt’s *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (1999) made humoral theory integral to literary considerations of early modern affect and embodiment. Although the generic designation of Burton’s work has long been debated, New Historicist and cultural materialist approaches to the *Anatomy* have treated it mainly as a medical treatise and source text for neo-Galenic theory. This marks a drastic departure from the genre criticism and reader-response theory that prevailed in Burton studies a generation ago.¹ Northrop Frye, for instance, famously read the *Anatomy* as an exemplar of Menippean satire, while Stanley Fish hailed it as one of his self-consuming artifacts.² While the most recent work on the *Anatomy*, two single-author studies by Angus Gowland and Mary Ann Lund, has considerably enriched our understanding of how Burton engages with the political and especially the religious controversies of his day, it too has prioritized historical context above the

¹ Lawrence Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy* (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1959), Ruth Fox, *The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in the Anatomy of Melancholy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), Bridget Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England* (London: Routledge, 1971).

² Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

text's more rhetorical and stylistic features.³ Describing the *Anatomy* as a work “shot through with an array of deviously ironic and openly satirical devices, in its style, its method, and its formal presentation” Gowland suggests that “the question of exactly what Burton was up to when he wrote the book is still relatively open.”⁴

In this second chapter, I offer a reading of the *Anatomy* as a discourse on laughter. This suggests neither a return to new critical preoccupations with paradox and parody, nor a departure from historical/new historicist concerns. Rather, I argue that understanding the function of laughter in the *Anatomy* helps to reconcile both Burton's skeptical and therapeutic aims. Since laughter not only pertains to the work's generic designation but to Burton's fundamental conception of melancholy, it also stands to deepen current understandings of the passions during the early modern period. Part one will argue for the centrality of Hellenistic philosophy in Burton's approach to therapy by considering his self-presentation in the satirical preface “Democritus Jr. to the Reader.” Part two considers the historical relationship between skepticism and ancient medicine in order to read Burton's ironic presentation of the symptom and parodic use of authorities as part of a larger critique of neo-Galenic theory. Finally, part three suggests that by making diversion and recreation fundamental to his therapeutic program, Burton offers laughter as a response to both melancholy, which he considers a universal malady, and the more particular form of despair resulting from spiritual enthusiasm.

I. Robert Burton and the Laughing Philosopher

³ Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading the Anatomy of Melancholy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴ Gowland, *Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 1.

At first glance the *Anatomy*, with its detailed textual apparatus and neat tripartite structure, appears to be a practical guide to various species of melancholy, perhaps even an early modern counterpart to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Burton's title and frontispiece likewise suggest the surgical precision with which he will present the "causes, symptomes, and severall cures" of the disease.⁵ Still, Burton was not regarded as a medical authority in his own day and his claim to medical knowledge is tenuous at best. Though he calls himself a physician "by my inclination," he is a divine "by my profession" and scholars have long noted Burton's failure to engage with even the most obvious scientific discoveries of the period (37). He references, for example, Vesalius's groundbreaking work on human anatomy only in passing and seems to be wholly unaware of Harvey's theory of blood circulation.⁶ Furthermore, as Patricia Vicari states, "after 1621 he did not add substantially to the medical information in his book, although he expanded hugely on other topics."⁷ If the *Anatomy* contributes little to scientific learning, especially to the extent that such learning had already been consolidated by the continental Latin sources Burton cites most frequently, then why did it enjoy such a vast readership? Burton himself lays little claim to originality exclaiming, "How many excellent physicians have written just volumes and elaborate tracts of this subject! No news here; that which I have is stolen from others" (*Anatomy* 22).

That the ever-expanding *Anatomy* passed through five editions during Burton's lifetime suggests that the work's literary qualities, perhaps its humorous style above all, engaged early

⁵ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melacholy* (New York: NYRB, 2001), 9. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent citations of this text will be given parenthetically by page number.

⁶ In the introduction to the Oxford edition of Burton's text, J.B. Bamborough comments that "Curiously, the advances in science of which he shows little knowledge are in anatomy itself. His account of the human body is conventional, and critics have noted that he seems not much interested in it. He mentions Vesalius, although on only three occasions, and he refers only cursorily to other 'modern' anatomists, basing himself on the *Historica Anatomica* (first published 1595) of 'Laurentius' i.e. the conservative French physician André du Laurens." Burton, *The Anatomy of Melenacholy Vol.I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989), xxi.

⁷ Patricia Vicari, *The View from Minerva's Tower* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1989), 5.

modern readers much more than its medical contents. Quite unlike André Du Laurens' *Discours de la conservation de la veuë: des maladies melancoliques* (1594) or Jacques Ferrand's *Traicte de l'essence et guerison de l'amour ou de la melancholie erotique* (1610), the *Anatomy* aims to entertain as much as educate and the antic persona that Burton cultivates over the course of more than a thousand pages captivates readers, whether they are melancholy or not. Indeed, scholars like Vicary, Lund, and Gowland, who each defend the seriousness of Burton's larger moral purpose, locate his work primarily in the textual traditions of consolation, homily, and socio-political commentary rather than medicine. Gowland specifically identifies "a type of *parodia* in the *Anatomy*, insofar as what looked from the structural 'outside' like a medical treatise turned out to be an adaptation of a medical treatise."⁸ As I turn now to Burton's satirical preface, I too wish to focus on the *Anatomy*'s 'inside' but shall insist much more than Gowland on the work's subversive and humorous nature. Burton's role as a physician-divine has been treated at length but his identification with the figure of Democritus evinces a deeper engagement with ancient moral philosophy than has previously been recognized and positions the *Anatomy* as part of an emerging early modern discourse on laughter.

While I want to suggest that laughter contributes to the *Anatomy*'s most salient therapeutic and moral objectives, some critics have expressed concern that giving too much heed to Burton's satirical impulses undermines his sincere efforts to administer to the reader. Lund, for example, feels compelled to state early in her work that "at a broader level, the *Anatomy* is not (as a few have claimed) a vast academic joke."⁹ She later claims, "the Democritean role represents only one 'passion' among many present in the text, and hence laughter only offers a narrow

⁸ Gowland, *Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 133.

⁹ Lund, 32.

perspective... not only is laughter a limited reaction, but also an unsustainable one.”¹⁰ Lund’s objections, perhaps warranted in the face of readings as overtly pessimistic as Fish’s, still evince fear that laughter will give rise to an unrelenting nihilism whose corrosive effects cannot be contained. Likewise, Lund assumes that Burton’s relationship to the figure of the laughing philosopher is superficial at best, a mask that does not correspond to the author’s true identity and that can be removed at will. If Democritus Jr.’s laughter were merely symptomatic of his melancholy madness, then such conclusions would be just but, as I hope to show, the relationship between the serious and the ludic dimensions of the *Anatomy* is both more complex than this and more essential to Burton’s larger purpose.

Much of the *Anatomy*’s 125 page preface provides justification for why Burton has chosen to compose a work on melancholy and to publish it under the pseudonym of Democritus Jr. However, it also serves as a jarring introduction to the strange persona and belabored prose that so mark the reader’s experience of the text as a whole. Burton begins, “Gentle Reader, I presume thou wilt be very inquisitive to know what antic or personate actor this is, that so insolently intrudes upon this common theatre to the world’s view, arrogating another man’s name; whence he is, why he doth it and what he hath to say” (15). It soon becomes apparent, as Burton attempts to dismiss certain associations with the name of Democritus, “lest any man by reason of it should be deceived, expecting a pasquil, a satire, some ridiculous treatise (as I myself should have done), some prodigious tenent, or a paradox of the earth’s motion, of infinite worlds,” that the problem of conflicting authorities is intimately tied to the problems of authorship and authorial identity. While the suffix Jr. leads one to expect a clear filial relationship between Burton and the

¹⁰ Lund, 158-159.

Democritus of antiquity, the absence of a single Democritus or a stable source renders such traditional forms of imitation untenable.

Burton next proceeds to “set down a brief character of this our Democritus” but ultimately fails to reconcile the disparate biographical accounts offered by Hippocrates, Diogenes Laertius, and Columella, among others, as well as to differentiate between historical fact and fiction. Although we first learn that Democritus was “a little wearish old man, very melancholy by nature... wholly addicted to his studies at the last, and to a private life,” all details that correspond to Burton’s own life at Oxford, the reader is ultimately left unable to determine Democritus’s profession or even his area of expertise since Burton lists everything from “famous philosopher” to “politician,” “expert physician” to “excellent mathematician” (16). Fish rightly notes that “in the end, even the pretense of accuracy and objectivity is abandoned. After a wandering life, Democritus settled at Abdera where he was ‘sent for to be their law-maker.’ Or was it their ‘recorder’?... Clearly Burton’s ‘ors’ are to be translated ‘it doesn’t matter which.’”¹¹ While Fish grows increasingly frustrated with Burton’s rhetorical style, suggesting that “given the number of available Democrituses and the spectacular lack of verifiable information about any one of them, this is less a conclusion than a joke,” the composite figure of Democritus Jr. clearly demonstrates the way in which Burton approaches traditions of past learning. His authorities are not meant to authorize in the conventional sense but to provide the basis for creative license and free play. Burton looks to the “vast chaos and confusion of books” for inspiration much more than information.

Later in the preface Burton describes his own method of composition in greater detail both with respect to the figure of Democritus and melancholy more generally. Ironically defending his

¹¹ Fish, 308.

own practice of imitation with a series of classical tropes about imitation, Burton exclaims, “I do not deny it. I have only this of Macrobius to say for myself, *Omne meum, nihil meum*, ’tis all mine, and none mine. As a good housewife out of divers fleeces weaves one piece of cloth, a bee gathers wax and honey out of many flowers, and makes a new bundle of all” (24). As Joan Webber has argued, the authorial “I” of the *Anatomy* is often subsumed by a polyphony of quotations, but here Burton deliberately calls attention to his awareness of this process.¹² Burton undercuts his own voice even as he exercises it and yet this only contributes to the comedy of his performance and characterization of Democritus Jr. In a final move to exult “composition and method” above original content, Burton concedes that “the matter is theirs most part, and yet mine, *apparet unde sumptum sit* (which Seneca approves), *aliud tamen quam unde sumptum sit apparet*; which nature doth with the aliment of our bodies incorporate, digest, assimilate, I do *concoquere quod hausit*, dispose of what I take.”¹³ Citing a passage from Seneca’s “On Gathering Ideas,” Burton makes a self-deprecating jest that plays off of the well-worn metaphors of reading as digestion and writing as honey. He lifts the first two quotations directly from the source text while the third paraphrase brazenly demonstrates the exact opposite of what it purports. Burton has not digested any of Seneca’s ideas; he has not even bothered to properly translate them from Latin. Nevertheless, the humor, as it were, is in the honey.

When Seneca exhorts Lucilius to thoroughly digest the works he has consumed lest they fail to provide intellectual nourishment, he offers a wholesome vision of literary production to

¹² Joan Webber, *The Eloquent “I”: Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose* (Madison, 1968), 84.

¹³ Cf. Seneca *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* Vol. 2.84. On Burton’s treatment of the digestive metaphor see especially Michael Schoenfeldt, “Reading Bodies,” *Reading, Society, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 220 and Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton: Princeton, UP 1990), 164.

which Democritus Jr., a melancholy scholar, cannot fully ascribe.¹⁴ Burton quickly transforms recommendations for a regimen of healthy reading into a grotesque portrait of alimentary perversion that recalls Bakhtin's conception of the lower bodily stratum. Invoking crude, physiological images of vomit and feces, Burton first suggests that "our poets steal from Homer; he spews saith Aelian, they lick it up" and later describes the *Anatomy* as "a rhapsody of rags gathered together from several dung-hills, excrements of authors... raw, rude... ill-composed, indigested" (26). Although Burton's coprophagia intentionally debases a vast tradition of past learning as well as the prospect of future scholarly endeavors, his prose revels in its own exuberance and does not leave the reader with a sense of despair. Rather, as Bakhtin argues, the very notions that are desecrated and uncrowned on the level of the material bodily stratum are later renewed or reborn: "things are tested and reevaluated in the dimensions of laughter."¹⁵ Throughout the *Anatomy*, Burton's laughter serves this dual purpose of wrecking that which is sacred and reconstituting it as gay farce.

About midway through the preface, Burton expands on the more philosophical dimensions of laughter by turning his attention to a short apocryphal work called the *Epistle to Damagetus* which details an encounter between Democritus and Hippocrates, perhaps the most renowned of ancient physicians. The letter, which "because it is not impertinent to this discourse," Burton inserts "verbatim almost" into the preface, is the single most important source accounting for why Democritus became known as "the laughing philosopher" during the Renaissance when he had no such reputation in antiquity (47). Furthermore, it sheds light on the historical relationship

¹⁴ Seneca writes, "The food we have eaten, as long as it retains its original quality and floats, in our stomachs as an undiluted mass, is a burden; but it passes into tissue and blood only when it has been changed from its original form. So it is with the food which nourishes our higher nature, – we should see to it that whatever we have absorbed should not be allowed to remain unchanged, or it will be no part of us" *Epistles*, trans. Richard M. Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 279-281.

¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 376.

between laughter and melancholy, specifically showing how laughter became assimilated into both the Hippocratic corpus and the early modern medical tradition, and furnishes Burton with inspiration for his own project. One of a series of apocryphal letters, the *Epistle to Damagetus* was recovered during the second half of the fifteenth century by the Italian humanist and papal secretary Rinuccio Aretino. Although the letters were initially attributed to Hippocrates, scholars today date them to the first century CE, more than 400 years after Hippocrates actually lived. Due to its inclusion in Fabio Calvo's 1525 Latin edition of the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, the *Epistle to Damagetus* was widely disseminated across Europe and contributed to what Claudia Zatta has called "a flourishing revival."¹⁶ Democritus's laughter, which became a common trope for Renaissance humanists like Montaigne and Erasmus, was also depicted in paintings by Velasquez, Rubens, and Rembrandt. The depth of Burton's engagement with the Hippocratic source material and its moral-philosophical contents, however, is unparalleled.

The pseudepigrapha, which are composed as an epistolary novella, tell the story of how the citizens of Abdera sent for Hippocrates to cure Democritus, their foremost philosopher, who had supposedly gone mad. W.D. Smith suggests in his translator's preface that the letters are "largely based on airy fancies" while Stephen Halliwell calls them "a far reaching existential drama."¹⁷ Nevertheless, those who edited, translated, and circulated these letters during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries believed them to be authentic works by Hippocrates. Nancy Siraisi stresses that, during the Renaissance, the Hippocratic corpus was "received as totally authentic

¹⁶ Claudia Zatta, "Democritus and Folly: The Two Wise Fools." *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 63.3 (2002): 536. For more on the textual history and reception of this letter see also Wesley Smith, *Pseudepigraphic Writings* (Leiden, 1990), Daniel Ménager, *La Renaissance et le rire*, (Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), Jean Salem, *La Légende de Démocrite*, (Éditions Kimé, 1996), Jean Jehasse, "Démocrite et la renaissance de la critique," *Études seiziémistes* (Genève: Droz, 1980): 43-63.

¹⁷ Smith, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1, Stephen Halliwell, "Greek Laughter and the Problem of the Absurd" *Arion* 13.2 (Fall 2005): 132.

documentation of the career and personality of Hippocrates, including not only episodes from his biography but his personal correspondence.”¹⁸ The Abderites initially posit “great learning” as the cause of Democritus’s illness, the symptoms of which include insomnia, social withdrawal, and profuse laughter.¹⁹ Here, laughter is framed explicitly in humoral terms and tied to the type of melancholy that Aristotle associates with genius.²⁰ When Hippocrates finally meets Democritus, however, in the *Epistle to Damagetus*, he determines that the laughing philosopher is of perfectly sound mind and body. Burton concludes his own retelling of the story with the corrective statement that “the world had not a wiser, a more learned, a more honest man, and they were much deceived to say that he was mad” (52).

Within the context of the *Anatomy*, the *Epistle to Damagetus* is especially striking because it places laughter at the crux of a larger conflict between medicine and philosophy. After relating a long diatribe against vanity and folly, Burton describes how Democritus “laughed, again aloud” at Hippocrates who “did not well understand what he had said concerning perturbations and tranquillity of mind” (49). In the original text, Democritus twice employs the key term *ataraxia*, which Burton renders as *tranquillity*, in order to justify his contempt for the Abderites.²¹ Although Democritus actually predates Pyrrho and Epicurus who first developed this concept, the pseudepigrapha eclectically assimilate his laughter to the therapeutic ends of Hellenistic philosophy. By publishing the *Epistle to Damagetus* in the vernacular, Burton makes the philosophical depths of Democritus’s laughter accessible to English lay readers for the first

¹⁸ Siraisi, "Anatomizing the Past: Physicians and History in Renaissance Culture," *Renaissance Quarterly* (2000): 9.

¹⁹ Smith, *Pseudepigrapha*, 57.

²⁰ Burton only includes letter 17 in his preface but letter 12 provides further context for Democritus’s supposed melancholy: “Such things are generally characteristic of melancholics [μελαγχολικοῖσι]. Sometimes they are quiet, solitary, and like deserted places. And they avoid people, considering the face of their own tribe alien. But it is not unlikely that when people are serious about learning, other concerns are put to flight by that orientation to wisdom... It is not wholly madmen who want caves and quiet, but also those who scorn human affairs in their desire for freedom from perturbation [ἀταραξίης].” Smith, 63.

²¹ Cf. Smith, 63 and 85.

time while also equipping them with the context necessary to grasp his own appropriation of it.

Burton's translation describes how Democritus laughs at those who bring about their own misery by disregarding

The mutability of this world, and how it wheels about, nothing being firm and sure. He that is now above, to-morrow is beneath; he that sate on this side to-day, to-morrow is hurled on the other; and not considering these matters, they fall into many inconveniences and troubles coveting things of no profit and thirsting after them, tumbling headlong into many calamities. So that if men would attempt no more than what they can bear, they should lead contented lives, and learning to know themselves, would limit their ambition; they would perceive then that nature hath enough without seeking such superfluities and unprofitable things, which bring nothing with them but grief and molestation.

Although Hippocrates initially came to Abdera in order to treat Democritus's melancholy with hellebore, he leaves taking Democritus's laughter as a cure that he will administer both to himself and others. Having been forewarned that "you will take on a better cargo than you brought on your embassy, my laughter, and carry it back as therapy [θεραπείην] for your country and yourself," Hippocrates closes the narrative by affirming Democritus's claim.²² "Taking from you the therapy [θεραπείην] for my intellect" he says, "I shall go away... for I have seen Democritus, wisest of men, alone most capable of teaching mankind virtue."²³ Burton does not include these passages in his preface, but I have glossed the Greek word for therapy because, in refusing to represent Democritus's laughter as pathological, the pseudepigrapha establish a precedent for Burton to assert laughter's restorative properties. In place of a medicinal cure like hellebore, the *Anatomy* too offers therapeutic laughter as a treatment for melancholy madness.

The *Epistle to Damagetus* sheds light on the persona that Burton crafts under the pseudonym of Democritus Jr., but it also reveals a great deal about his general approach to the Greco-Roman medical tradition. Although some may argue that Burton was completely unaware

²² Smith, 81.

²³ *Ibid.*, 93.

of the letter's inauthenticity, I would contend that his haphazard treatment of conflicting biographical sources earlier in the preface already suggests a general disregard for historical accuracy. Like the actual author or authors of the pseudepigrapha, Burton responds to the fragmented nature of Democritus's extant works and lack of factual information about him by fabricating new stories. Both the first century epistolary novella and the seventeenth century character Democritus Jr. evince a desire to grasp an already fading classical past and a readiness to supplement or invent what cannot be recovered. In his introduction to *Classics and the Uses of Reception* Charles Martindale argues that, in cases where the "truth" of a particular figure, idea, or text under scrutiny is no longer recoverable, the various "accretions" or "layers of anachronism" that so many want to strip away may actually be richer and more substantial than the source itself.²⁴ "We shall not for example," he writes, "find a 'real' Sappho if by that we mean one for which there is convincing corroborating evidence from her own time (we have anyway only about 3 percent of what she wrote)."²⁵ For the purposes of the present chapter, I too am more interested in these so-called "accretions" since the Democritus who was most important to early modern thinkers like Burton, the Democritus known as the "laughing philosopher," shares little in common with the Democritus of the fifth century BCE.²⁶

Democritean laughter, despite its "classical" sources, is an imaginary construct in much the same way that Democritus Jr. is an imaginary construct, born not of ignorance but of desire, curiosity, and convenience. While early modernists have been slow to engage with the methodology of classical reception studies, there are many ways in which our historical

²⁴ Charles Martindale and Richard Thomas, ed., *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 12.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For more on Democritus's competing legacies, see Christoph Lüthy, "The Fourfold Democritus on the Stage of Early Modern Science," *Isis*, Vol.91.3 (Sep., 2000), 443-479.

objectives could be furthered by it, especially with respect to the Hippocratic and Galenic traditions within which Burton and others operate. Contemporary work on the early modern passions, for example, which has reclaimed Burton's *Anatomy* as a foundational text, often represents neo-Galenic theory as a relatively stable and unified body of knowledge that is somehow uncontaminated by history. Although neo-Galenic theory itself asserts an unbroken continuity with the past and the existence of a universal truth perfected over time, early modern scholars cannot take this claim at face value. Despite the fact that the medical curriculum at Cambridge and Oxford was comprised mainly of Galenic books well into the seventeenth century, the Latin canon that came to represent the medical wisdom of the ancients serves only as monolithic orthodoxy to the extent that it has forgotten its various component parts. If we were to regard humoral theory as a synthetic product of cross-cultural exchange, centuries of translation, and continual innovation rather than a fixed model that one applies to literary texts, we could produce readings that are less schematic, both more historically nuanced and more theoretically sophisticated.

That studies of Renaissance physiology and psychology have traditionally focused on melancholy is not surprising given the ubiquity of the disease and its representation in literature, especially in England, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Lawrence Babb's *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of English Melancholia from 1580 to 1642* and Bridget Gellert Lyons' *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England* are still the most valuable and illustrative examples of this particular form of literary-historical criticism. Nevertheless, even these works have overlooked the surprising overlap between early modern medical discourses on melancholy and those on laughter, the latter of which responds strategically to the former. Thus, while many have identified Timothy

Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586) as an important thematic source for Burton's *Anatomy*, few have done likewise with Laurent Joubert's *Traité du ris* or *Treatise on Laughter* (1579) which provides a detailed physiological explanation of how laughter works to purge excess melancholy humors.²⁷

Like Burton, Joubert appended to his work a vernacular (Greek-French) translation of the *Epistle to Damagetus* which he received from his friend and fellow court physician Jean Guichard. In a brief prefatory note, Guichard explains that "Je m'asseure que plusieurs prandront bien plaisir de lire celà, pour sçavoir à la verité, que le Ris Democritique n'estoit pas de folie ou resverie, ains d'extreme sagesse et parfaite philosophie"²⁸ In the context of *The Treatise on Laughter*, the pseudepigraphic letter supports Joubert's larger thesis that laughter is essential to the regulation of the humoral body and the preservation of good overall health. In particular, Joubert argues that laughter may serve as a natural remedy for those who, like Democritus, become melancholy from too much study. In the dedication, Joubert affirms Quintilian's statement that laughter "restores the mind overworked by cares, turning it away from dismal thoughts, satiating and renewing it after a great and tormenting burden, as it chases out all melancholy. Sick people have been cured by this remedy alone."²⁹ Given the pervasiveness of melancholy during the early modern period and its broader cultural relevance, Joubert's efforts to medicalize such accounts fulfills both a scholarly and a popular demand.

²⁷ Bright himself defers to Joubert on the question of laughter in a section called "Why and howe one weepeth for joy, and laugheth for grieffe why tears and weeping indure not all the time of the cause and why the finger is put in the eye." *A Treatise on Melancholie*, (New York: The Facsimile Text Society by Columbia University Press, 1940), 149.

²⁸ "I assure you that many will take great pleasure in reading this, to arrive at the truth that the laughter of Democritus is not madness or folly but the height of wisdom and perfect philosophy (my translation)." Joubert, *Traité du ris* (1579): 354.

²⁹ Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter*, trans. Gregory de Rocher (Birmingham, University of Alabama Press, 1980), 16.

When Joubert turns his attention to human anatomy, he emphasizes the role of the spleen as the shared seat of both laughter and melancholy. He explains that the primary function of the spleen, spongy and limp, is to filter the blood, the purity of which corresponds directly to the presence of “shining, fine, and very active” humors.³⁰ Although the spleen is not the proper seat of laughter, it makes laughter possible by eliminating the toxins that would naturally suppress it. Joubert explains that “melancholic humor is like filthy dregs, very remote from the principals of life, mortal enemy of delight and liberality, first cousin of death and sickness. If the spleen absorbs it well, the mind becomes more joyous, otherwise it is sad and pensive, as is seen in those who philosophize.”³¹ Even though Joubert’s treatise is largely descriptive, his investment in the idea of “true” laughter, as opposed to “bastard” laughter, suggests a desire to ascribe new value to an entire constellation of positive emotions like joy, wonder, pleasure, surprise, and delight.³²

As Quentin Skinner has argued, this approach to laughter marks a significant and decisive break with the past: “a number of Renaissance writers began to express doubts about the governing assumption of the classical theory, the assumption that laughter is invariably an expression of contempt for vice. They began to ask themselves whether this argument, if not entirely mistaken, may not be considerably exaggerated.”³³ Although Joubert, much like Burton, draws upon a critical mass of authorities ranging from Aristotle to Galen and Erasmus, he is still right to claim that “the subject of laughter is so vast and deep that few philosophers have

³⁰ Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter*, 35.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

³² See also Celso Macini, *De risu, ac ridiculis* (1598) and Girolamo Fracastoro, *De sympathia et antipathia rerum* (1546).

³³ Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes and the Classical Theory of Laughter,” 150.

attempted it, and none has won the prize of treating it properly.”³⁴ By demonstrating the physiological effects of laughter on the melancholic body, Joubert transforms, in a profoundly practical and material way, the pseudo-Hippocratic notion of laughter as “therapy for my intellect.”³⁵ Thus, we are able to deduce that by laughing at the vanity and folly of the world, Democritus engages the regulatory function of the spleen to effectively expel an excessive production of black bile. Since laughter and melancholy share the very same physical origins, they are intrinsically linked in much the same way that the medical discourses surrounding them are also intrinsically linked.

Although some have suggested that Burton’s identification with Democritus is paradoxical given his humoral disposition, Burton’s own epitaph, which reads: “Paucis notus, paucioribus ignotus, hic jacet Democritus Junior, cui vitam dedit et mortem Melancholia,” affirms the inseparability of the melancholy scholar and laughing philosopher. In his preface, Burton claims to usurp the identity of Democritus, but it is ultimately the pseudonym of Democritus Jr. that supplants his own name; it is the mask that makes the man. Near the end of the preface, Burton asserts the absolute and universal nature of melancholy with a joke borrowed from the German humanist Ulrich von Hutten. “Whom shall I then exempt?” Burton asks, “Ulricus Huttenus? *Nemo; nam, Nemo omnibus horis sapit, Nemo nascitur sine vitiis, Crimine Nemo caret, Nemo sorte sua vivit contentus, Nemo in amore sapit, Nemo bonus, Nemo sapiens, Nemo est ex omni parti beatus*, etc. and therefore Nicholas Nemo, or Monsieur Nobody, shall go free” (117, 122). A later pun on the Greek word for nobody [οὐτις] suggests that Burton understands this jest as an allusion to the scene in Homer’s *Odyssey* where Odysseus outsmarts

³⁴ Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter*, 11.

³⁵ The proliferation of jest books during the seventeenth century with titles such as “*Democritus or Doctor Merry-Man: his Medicines, against Melancholy Humors* (1607) suggest how thoroughly laughter would be assimilated in the popular imagination as practical cure for melancholy.

the blinded cyclops Polyphemus by giving a pseudonym in place of his actual name. In the context of the *Anatomy*, the jest perfectly demonstrates Burton's unique capacity to take negation itself as the object of laughter. The cynical declaration that nobody is happy, or good, or wise, does not usually give rise to laughter, but Burton's particular formulation of the jest effectively casts anyone who does not laugh in the role of the stupid and literal-minded giant. As I turn now to examine the nature and purpose of skepticism in the *Anatomy*, I wish to keep in mind the therapeutic function of Democritus Jr.'s existential, sometimes grim, laughter.

II. The Philosopher-Physician: Skepticism and the Galenic Tradition

Many critics have invoked the term "skepticism," alongside satire or irony, to broadly characterize Burton's attitudes toward medical and humanistic traditions of learning. Commenting on the relationship between scholarly melancholy and early modern print culture, for example, Michael O'Connell suggests that in the *Anatomy* "what we are witnessing is the *copia* of Renaissance humanism becoming skepticism by its own most cherished method."³⁶ Skepticism here denotes a form of epistemological crisis precipitated by a collapse of textual authority, classical exemplarity, and the ideal of a unified truth perfected over time. It complements Burton's larger theme and speaks to a decisive moment in early modern intellectual history. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that this commonplace usage of "skepticism" is limiting, if not wholly misleading, for two essential reasons. First, it overlooks Burton's specific engagement with ancient Pyrrhonism and, in so doing, fails to position the *Anatomy* as a text that challenges our current understanding of skepticism in early modern England. Second,

³⁶ O'Connell, *Robert Burton* (Twayne Publishing, 1986), 45.

by casting doubt as a symptom or cause of melancholy, it forecloses upon the possibility that skepticism actually advances Burton's larger moral objectives.

In the section that follows, I would like to employ the concept of therapeutic laughter as a means to theorize the relationship between Burton's satirical and skeptical modes. My objective here is both to offer an alternate interpretation of early modern skepticism and to call new attention to the philosophical dimensions of the *Anatomy*. I will first argue that Burton exploits a preexisting association between Democritus and ancient Pyrrhonism in order to cast his rendition of the laughing philosopher as an exemplar of early modern skepticism. I will then demonstrate how the historical relationship between Pyrrhonian philosophy and Galenic theory provides Burton with the means to fashion therapeutic laughter as a provisional cure for melancholy. Although the *Anatomy* contains no skeptical masterwork to rival "An Apology for Raymond Sebond," Burton was, like Shakespeare, an avid reader of Montaigne and a writer whose rhetorical style exposes the limits of human reason even as it undertakes to expand them. His *Anatomy* not only develops an essential connection between laughter and skepticism but does more than any other early modern work to direct its therapeutic ends toward the specific problem of melancholy.

When Burton claims in the satirical preface that "our whole course of life is but matter of laughter: we are not soberly wise," he accurately captures what Stephen Halliwell has called the absurdist and existential dimensions of Democritean laughter (45). Although some classicists have been reluctant to relate Democritus's ethics to his physics, the apocryphal tradition from which Burton draws explicitly fashions laughter as a response to a materialist conception of a universe that lacks transcendental meaning and this lays the groundwork, precarious though it may be, for Democritus Jr.'s skepticism. In Lucian's *Philosophies for Sale*, for example,

Democritus defends his incessant laughter by explaining that, with respect to human affairs, “there is nothing in them to be taken seriously. The whole world is merely void, infinity, and atoms in motion.”³⁷ What is laughable then, is the human attempt to ascribe meaning and value where there is none. Although Burton ultimately rejects atomism, warning readers at the outset of the preface not to expect some treatise on infinite worlds: “*in infinitio vacuo, ex fortuita atomorum collisione*, in an infinite waste, so caused by an accidental collision of motes in the sun, all which Democritus held, Epicurus and their master Leucippus of old maintained, and are lately revived by Copernicus, Brunus, and some others,” he nevertheless laughs at the seeming futility of events taking shape in a cosmic void (*Anatomy* 15). Burton’s frequent play on Latin words of negation like *nemo*, *nihil*, *neminis*, *non*, and *nil*, makes a trope of nothingness that has led even critics like Richard Strier who contend that the *Anatomy* “espouses values” and is not “endlessly ironic” to concede that the text “does often seem close to nihilism.”³⁸

While appearances may give rise to any number of perturbations of mind, laughter enables Democritus to reassert the reality of a cosmos that renders such matters inconsequential and thus serves as a form of consolation. As Democritus Jr., Burton routinely adopts this detached, cosmic vantage point in order to put contemporary concerns into new relief as when he laments how “we commonly molest and tire ourselves about things unfit and unnecessary... be it in religion, humanity, magic, philosophy, policy, any action or study, ’tis a needless trouble, a mere torment” (I.366). Although Democritean laughter is a posthumous fabrication, it accurately distills an affinity between affect and epistemology that begins to account for why skepticism could

³⁷ Lucian, *Selected Satires of Lucian*, trans. and ed. Lione Casson (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1962), 321. See also the anonymous poem: “Everything is laughter everything dust, everything nothing./ The explanation: everything comes from the meaningless.”

³⁸ Strier, *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 40, 36.

feasibly contribute to a medical cure for melancholy. Democritus's conception of *euthymia* [εὐθυμία], a term meaning cheerfulness or contentment, played a vital role in reorienting ancient philosophy toward the ends of therapy. We have already seen the curious conflation of Democritean laughter and *ataraxia* in the *Epistle to Damagetus*, but this only reflects a more widespread tendency to associate Democritus with much later schools of Hellenistic philosophy, the Sceptics and Epicureans above all.³⁹

For Burton, Democritus's unofficial status as a skeptic would have been common knowledge since Diogenes Laertius and even Sextus Empiricus address the apparent similarities between Democritean philosophy and Pyrrhonian skepticism, especially to the extent that both call sensory perception and human reason into question.⁴⁰ In his "Life of Pyrrho," Diogenes Laertius calls Democritus "sceptically-minded" because "he rejects qualities, saying, 'Opinion says hot or cold, but the reality is atoms and empty space' and again, 'Of a truth we know nothing, for truth is in a well.'" ⁴¹ Sextus likewise concedes that Democritean philosophy "seems to use the same material as we; for from the fact that honey appears sweet to some and bitter to others, Democritus, as they say, infers that it really is neither sweet nor bitter, and pronounces in consequence the formula 'Not more' which is a Sceptic formula."⁴² That the precise relationship between later Hellenistic philosophers like Pyrrho or Epicurus and Democritus cannot be determined is immaterial for the purposes of the present study since these extant works are

³⁹ For more on the precise relationship between Democritean *euthymia* and *ataraxia* see James Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archeology of Ataraxia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

⁴⁰ See especially Richard Bett, "Pyrrho and Democritus." *Pyrrho, his Antecedents, and his Legacy*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 152-159.

⁴¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* Vol.2, trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), IX.71-72, 485.

⁴² Sextus, *The Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), XXX.213, 129.

sufficient to provide a “historical,” if not strictly “factual,” basis for regarding Burton’s Democritus Jr. as a skeptic and the *Anatomy* as a skeptical work.

In much the same way that the *Letter to Damagetus* pits Democritus’s laughter against Hippocrates’s medicinal arts, so too does the *Anatomy* contend with neo-Galenic theory in order to advance an extra-medical conception of therapy. To the extent that Democritus Jr. is affiliated with the philosophical tradition of skepticism, he provides Burton with a convenient vantage point from which to critique the practice of physic in his own day as well as the institutional orthodoxies that govern it. Although the *Anatomy* aspires in many ways to be a summa of medical learning, it fails deliberately in its objective to anatomize melancholy, and does not ultimately provide the melancholic reader with any substantive medical treatment. The more Burton attempts to prescribe particular cures for the manifest symptoms of the malady, the more he obscures their true cause, which only leads to the conclusion that “there is no catholic medicine to be had: that which helps one, is pernicious to another” (II.248). Galenic medicine, especially as it had been consolidated in medical textbooks by the seventeenth century, necessarily assumes the reliability of sensory knowledge and causal reasoning and these are the very precepts that the *Anatomy* aims comically to deconstruct.

Although the medical schools at Oxford and Cambridge represented neo-Galenic theory as a unified and continuous body of knowledge, Burton is keenly aware of the internal contradictions that threaten to undermine the rational foundations of both his work in particular and of humoralism more generally.⁴³ Rather than making recourse to the ancient authority of Hippocrates, “the first that ever wrote in physic” or Galen, “his disciple and commentator,”

⁴³ Gowland writes that “in medicine there had been no self-conscious break with the past... many medical texts paraded a timeless conception of knowledge and inquiry, in which the task of the scholar was centrally constituted as the harmonization of the doctrines of different authorities.” *Words of Renaissance Melancholy*, 40.

Burton rejects both, calling them “immethodical and obscure, as all those old ones are, their precepts confused, their medicines obsolete, and now most part rejected” (II. 209).

Contemporary scholarship, even as it attempts to historicize early modern conceptions of the body, has often confirmed a monolithic and static vision of medical orthodoxy. Burton, by contrast, views humoralism as a synthetic product of cross-cultural exchange and centuries of translation. Commenting on the skill of ancient physicians, “which was very small,” he argues that,

The Arabians received it from the Greeks, and so the Latins, adding new precepts and medicines of their own, but so imperfect still, that through ignorance of professors, impostors, mountebanks, empirics, disagreeing sectaries (which are as many as almost as there be diseases), envy, covetousness, and the like, they do much harm among us. They are so different in their consultations, prescriptions, mistaking many times the party’s constitution, disease, and causes of it, they give quite contrary physic. ‘One saith this, another that,’ . . . more danger there is from the physician than the disease. (Ibid.)

While Burton’s skepticism here is consistent, in part, with what Gowland calls the “humanist critique of medicine,” it also recalls an internal conflict within the medical tradition itself between Galen and the skeptics. Sextus Empiricus who, like many followers of Pyrrho, was also a practicing physician, acquired his epithet through association with the Empiricists, a medical school that opposed the rationalist assumptions of Dogmatists like Hippocrates and Galen.⁴⁴ Burton’s assertion, with respect to contemporary physicians, that “it is their ignorance that doth more harm than rashness; their art is wholly conjectural, if it be an art, uncertain, imperfect,” evinces a similar reluctance to infer latent causes from manifest observations (II.210).

That Galen’s *On Sects* and the *Outlines of Empiricism* are the only extant sources we have on the Empiricists might be regarded as a cruel twist of literary fate since, as R.J. Hankinson has

⁴⁴ See Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede. *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1997) and James Allen, “Pyrrhonism and Medicine,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010), 232-248.

remarked about Galen, “his contempt for scepticism is boundless.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, understanding the close historical relationship between Pyrrhonian skepticism and Galenic theory provides a new context for approaching the *Anatomy* as a text that questions the epistemological basis of medical knowledge and enables us to consider how the skeptical strategies Burton regularly employs might contribute to a larger therapeutic objective. While some critics have argued that Burton’s skepticism undermines his sincere concern for the melancholy reader or forecloses upon the hope of an ultimate cure, the fact that Empiricists regularly administered to patients suggests that skepticism can in fact facilitate a practical and effective form of treatment. Burton’s presentation of the various causes and symptoms of melancholy in Partition I appears initially to lay a requisite foundation for the administration of cures outlined in Partition II, but this rational edifice quickly erodes as the reader delves deeper and deeper into the work.

Having committed to the task of anatomizing melancholy so “every man that is in any measure affected with this malady may know how to examine it in himself, and apply remedies unto it,” Burton endeavors to help readers navigate “through the midst of these perplexities” and “out of a labyrinth of doubts and errors” (I.176-77). However, as the causes of melancholy, which are either general or particular, supernatural or natural, primary or secondary, evident or contingent, inward or outward, become more fragmented with each passing member and subsection, readers rightly begin to question the reliability of their guide. Indeed, more than 150 pages later, we are still lost in “this labyrinth of accidental causes” and Burton confesses that “the farther I wander, the more intricate I find the passage; *multae ambages* [there are many windings], and new causes as so many by-paths offer themselves to be discussed. To search out all, were an Herculean work, and fitter for Theseus” (I.357). At this point, Burton forfeits any

⁴⁵ R.J. Hankinson, *The Cambridge Companion to Galen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 157. See also, “Scepticism in the Medical Schools,” *The Sceptics*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 225-236.

aspirations he may have had to intellectual mastery and such haphazard subsection headings as “An heap of other Accidents causing Melancholy, Death of Friends, Losses, etc.” comically accentuate his exasperation with the task at hand (Ibid.).

Grant Williams’ recent work on semiotic excess and tropes of linguistic disorientation in the *Anatomy* provides the most nuanced and theoretically sophisticated consideration of Burton’s labyrinth imagery, but his claim that Burton “has become a failed Theseus or a bemused Daedalus rather the master of his own domain” mistakes an essentially mock-heroic discourse for a tragic one.⁴⁶ In fact, critics have often cited Burton’s inability to exert control over his material or the failure of his organizational schema as evidence that the *Anatomy* collapses beneath its own weight and succeeds only in affirming the melancholy disposition of its creator or the inescapability of melancholy as a universal condition.⁴⁷ While compelling, I do not believe that this account accurately represents Burton’s epistemology or the reader’s experience of the text, hard as it may be to generalize about the latter. By distancing himself from the legendary Theseus, Burton comically disparages his own intellectual abilities, but he also calls into question the very notion of knowledge as a heroic quest.

Buried in the “etc.” portion of “An heap of other Accidents causing Melancholy,” Burton offers a consideration of “superfluous industry” that entirely recasts his previous depictions of the labyrinth. Here, he specifically censures intellectual endeavors ranging from physics to logic and philology as futile pursuits that cause needless suffering. “For what else is school divinity?” demands Burton the divine, “How many doth it puzzle! what fruitless questions about the

⁴⁶ Grant Williams, “‘The Babel Event’: Language, Rhetoric, and Burton’s Infinite Symptom,” in *Rhetoric and Medicine in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Stephen Pender and Nancy S. Struever (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 244.

⁴⁷ Fish, for example, argues that the *Anatomy* inadvertently stages a complete breakdown of textual coherence while Williams suggests that what Reinhard Friederich concludes about the preface, that “the whole discourse turns out to have been a madman’s melancholy seizure,” can also “be applied to the three partitions too.” Williams, “‘The Babel Event,’” 239.

Trinity, resurrection, election, predestination, reprobation, hell-fire, etc., how many shall be saved, damned! What else is all superstition, but an endless observation of idle ceremonies, traditions? What is most of our philosophy but a *labyrinth of opinions, idle questions, propositions, metaphysical terms?*” (my emphasis I.366). While in the very midst of a labyrinth, Burton ironically censures those who lose themselves in idle speculation and thus fully implicates both himself and the reader. However, this is more a source of amusement than cause for concern since Burton’s whole purpose is to make light of scholarly presumption. He does not intend to leave readers stranded in his “labyrinth of accidental causes” but to expose the labyrinth itself as a source of anguish, and one entirely of our own making. Earlier in a subsection on solitariness as a cause of melancholy, Burton charges the reader with the accusation that “thou has lost thyself wilfully, cast away thyself, thou thyself art the efficient cause of thine own misery, by not resisting such vain cogitations, but giving way unto them” (I.249).

As if to demonstrate awareness of the paradox that is his own *Anatomy*, Burton asks, “To what end are such great tomes? why do we spend so many years in their studies? Much better to know nothing at all, as those barbarous Indians are wholly ignorant, than, as some of us, to be sore vexed about unprofitable toys: *stultus labor est ineptiarum* [it is foolish to labour at trifles], to build a house without pins, make a rope of sand, to what end? *cui bono?*” (I.366). Although Burton himself participates in such vain pursuits, he does so knowingly and his work differs essentially from other ‘great tomes’ to the extent that it aims deliberately to reveal the vanity of these pursuits to the reader. Like Montaigne, whose cannibals expose the decadence of European learning, Burton prescribes ignorance to readers overwrought with an immoderate desire for knowledge. His own self-deprecating humor encourages readers to laugh at the conceit of

scholars while also forcing us to reevaluate our own investment in the *Anatomy*'s rational objectives.

Although many critics have suggested that Burton's skepticism prevents him from adequately distinguishing between the causes, symptoms, and cures of melancholy and so conforming to the logical strictures implicit in the Galenic method, I would argue that, like the Empiricists, Burton deliberately undermines Dogmatic claims in order to advance an alternative therapeutic program. Thus, it is not that the *Anatomy* inadvertently fails to fulfill its medical obligations, but that it deliberately stages the collapse of the most basic neo-Galenic precepts in order to disabuse readers of their Dogmatic aspirations. While Williams concedes that Burton's account of the symptom reaches "an empiricist-sounding conclusion inconsistent with the deployment of the method characterizing medical dogmatism or rationalism," he ultimately insists that Burton is not an Empiricist but "a reluctant skeptic and a failed rationalist."⁴⁸ As Burton transitions to recount the symptoms of melancholy, he again represents medical knowledge as a source of chaos and confusion, further obscuring the possibility of an accurate diagnosis followed by an appropriate treatment.

His initial claim that "the tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues, as the chaos of melancholy doth variety of symptomes" is perhaps enough to cause some readers to despair of ever finding a cure, but since Burton cheerfully agrees to "adventure yet in such a vast confusion and generality to bring them into some order," we are invited once more to practice moderating our rationalist tendencies (I.397). Although Burton's presentation of the symptom may seem like a cruel joke, I want to suggest that it actually encourages readers to recognize the foolishness of their own pretensions to knowledge and to relinquish their commitments to the

⁴⁸ Williams, "The Babel Event," 235, 248.

dogmatic precepts that undergird neo-Galenic theory. As Pierre Pellegrin has argued, “dogmatism is thus not a doctrine but rather an attitude- we might even say a faith in human reason’s capacity to make discoveries”⁴⁹ It is one thing to undertake scholarship as a “playing labour,” which Burton claims to have done with his *Anatomy*, or to use it as a means of curing “idleness with idleness,” but to pursue knowledge without restraint, certainty where there is none, only incurs undue suffering” (20-21).

Quite unlike other skeptical texts of the period, Burton’s *Anatomy* not only describes but also demonstrates how “through our foolish curiosity do we macerate ourselves, tire our souls, and run headlong... into many needless cares and troubles, vain expenses, tedious journeys, painful hours” (I.368). If Burton’s main objective was to critique neo-Galenic theory and early modern medical practices, then he could easily have composed an invective in the style of Cornelius Agrippa’s well known *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum atque artium declamatio invectiva* (1530). Indeed, Burton’s *Philosophaster* satirizes the attenuated state of learning in his own day and academic culture more broadly. However, this type of skeptical work, although entertaining and witty in its own right, would essentially fail to enact the type of therapeutic treatment that is specific to Pyrrhonian skepticism. By repeatedly showing how the epistemological basis of medical knowledge fails, Burton wishes to persuade his readers that dogmatism is the cause rather the cure of their disease. Far from being symptomatic of melancholy, skepticism counteracts the dogmatism that produces it.

Casting doubt on the feasibility of his own plan to “order” the symptoms of melancholy, Burton systematically undermines the stable chain of signification from symptom to cure that makes diagnosis and treatment possible. He writes,

⁴⁹ Pierre Pellegrin, “Ancient Medicine and Its Contribution to the Philosophical Tradition,” in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 670.

The four-and-twenty letters make no more variety of words in divers languages than melancholy conceits produce diversity of symptoms in several persons. They are irregular, obscure, various, so infinite. Proteus himself is not so diverse; you may as well make the moon a new coat as a true character of a melancholy man; as soon find the motion of a bird in the air as the heart of man, a melancholy man.” (I.408)

Williams has persuasively argued that this passage invokes Galen’s efforts to refute the Empiricists in *On the Therapeutic Method* which states: “There are seven vowels in our language, and twenty-four elements of the alphabet in all, and not individual tokens of them written on papyrus, wood, parchment, and stone, and which are indefinitely numerous, incapable of enumeration, indeed which stretch virtually to infinity.”⁵⁰ While Galen invokes the metaphor of the alphabet as a reliable way of delimiting meaning so as to enable intelligible speech and rational communication, Burton reasserts the unbounded and interminable possibilities of language. Williams, like Galen himself, interprets this gesture as a rejection of *logos* and chooses to emphasize the “pathological dimension” of Burton’s prose, but I want to suggest that Burton’s implicit defense of the Empiricist position releases him from an oppressive logocentrism.⁵¹

If Burton’s failed attempts to impose order on chaos cause the reader distress, then his willingness to relent, even temporarily, and to divert attention from the subject of melancholy has salutary effects. Burton’s formal digressions certainly perform this function and I will attend specifically to his “Digression on Air” in a later section, but first I want examine his extended consideration of diet. As one of the six Galenic “non-naturals,” diet ought to be one of the least controversial and most straightforward elements of health to regulate and Burton does an admirable job of synthesizing all that has been prescribed for melancholy with respect to the

⁵⁰ Galen, *On The Therapeutic Method: Books One and Two*, trans. R.J. Hankinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 66.

⁵¹ Williams, “The Babel Event,” 248.

substance, quantity, and quality of meat and drink.⁵² Nevertheless, by the end of an elaborate two part discourse on the causes and cures of a bad diet, the reader has gleaned very little in terms of practical advice. We do, however, gain insight into Burton's sense of humor, his comic suspension of judgement, and his easy reliance on custom.

Burton opens his subsection on melancholy meats by making fun of the hair-splitting jargon associated with the Galenic theory of causation.⁵³ As if with a sigh of resignation, he begins:

According to my proposed method, having opened hitherto these secondary causes, which are inbred with us, I must now proceed to the outward and adventitious, which happen unto us after we are born. And those are either evident, remote, or inward, antecedent, and the nearest: continent causes some call them. These outward, remote, precedent causes are subdivided again into necessary and not necessary. Necessary (because we cannot avoid them, but they will alter us, as they are used or abused) are those six non-natural things, so much spoken of amongst physicians, which are principal causes of this disease. (I.216)

Despite the pedantic register of his prose and apparent attempt to parody common practices of taxonomic division, Burton soon begins to take true pleasure in constructing a catalogue of offensive foods and recording the dissenting opinions among the "many physicians" whom he says, "I confess, have written copious volumes of this one subject alone" (I.217). After listing twenty-five such continental authors and noting that there are "besides many other in English," Burton rationalizes his own work by arguing that "these books are not at hand to every man" (Ibid.). In other words, the information he is about to present will be useful and applicable to those wishing to avoid melancholy.

⁵² The six Galenic non-naturals are diet, retention and evacuation, air, exercise, sleeping and waking, perturbations of mind; the seven naturals are the elements, temperature, humors, members, operations, and spirits.

⁵³ Both "method" and "cause" are polemical subjects in Galen's writings. Since the Empiricists and the Methodists alike reject the relevance of causal explanation, Galen often accuses them of proceeding without method. As Philip J. Van Der Eijk has argued, "Galen was strongly interested in causal analysis, and he wrote separate treatises on 'antecedent' and 'synectic' causes, adopting terminology from earlier, possibly Stoic or Pneumatic, origin." *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health, and Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 288-291.

Thus, we learn that while beef, especially “Portugal beef,” is good for “labouring men,” it generally “breed[s] gross melancholy” (I.218). Similarly to be avoided are the following: pork, being “too moist, full of humours,” goat’s flesh; hart and deer; all venison; hare; conies; “milk and all that comes of milk;” peacocks and pigeons; fenny fowl; ducks, geese, swans, herons, cranes, coots, didapers, waterhends, teals, currs, sheldrakes, peckled fowls; all fish, or perhaps only eel, tench, lamprey, crawfish... and such as are bred in muddy and standing waters” (I.220-21). The only meat Burton recommends without reservation are “young rabbits” which “by all men are approved to be good” (I.218). Lest the earnest reader think that a vegetarian diet is to be preferred, he or she will find similar contraindications for many herbs, most legumes, roots, “all manner of fruits,” spices, bread, and sauce. English delicacies such as “pudding stuffed with blood, or otherwise composed; baked meats, soused indurate meats, fried and broiled, buttered meats, conduit, powdered, and over-dried; all cakes, simnels, buns, cracknels, and those several sauces, sharp, or over-sweet” are likewise proscribed (I.225).

Although the ostensible purpose of Burton’s catalogue is to communicate all the foods from which the melancholy reader should abstain, the text ironically participates in the very indulgence that it aims to suppress. Even as Burton warns, for example, that venison “begets bad blood,” he brings to mind the enjoyment of consuming it by remarking that venison is “a pleasant meat: in great esteem with us (for we have more parks in England than there are in all Europe besides)” (I.218). Moreover, the inverse relationship that persists between culinary and textual excess suggests an affinity between the *Anatomy* and other cornucopian texts of the period, Rabelais’s *Quart livre* above all.⁵⁴ Like the French physician and satirist, Burton seems

⁵⁴ Here is an example of just one list from the meat-day celebration: “Eslanches à l’aillande/ Pastez à la saulse chaulde/ Coustelettes de porc à l’oignonade/ Chappons roustiz avecque leur degout/ Hutaudeux/ Becars, Cabirotz/ Bishars, Dains/ Lievres, Levraulx/ Perdris, Perdriaux/ Faisans, Faisandeaux/ Pans, Panneaux/ Ciguoignes,

to regard list-making as a form of linguistic play and his extensive account of melancholy meats is second only to Rabelais's catalogue of fishes and fowl that the belly worshippers sacrifice to their god Gaster, on lenten and feast days, respectively.⁵⁵ While some scholars have interpreted Rabelais's gastronomic compendium as a moral critique of gluttony or a subversive parody of the Catholic mass, others have read it as an exuberant celebration of both language and French cuisine.⁵⁶ Burton's discourse on melancholy meats, I want to suggest, is likewise driven by pleasure, even if it seems to be in the service of temperance and moderation. Had Burton really been interested in providing the reader with a practical guide, he could have listed only those few wholesome foods upon which his authorities unanimously agree; apart from young rabbits, they

Ciguoigneaux/ Becasses, Becassins/ Hortolans/ Cocqs, poules et poulletz d'Inde/ Ramiers, Ramerotz/ Cochons au moust/ Canards à la dodine/ Merles/ Poulles d'eau/ Tardournes/ Aigrettes/ Cervelles/ Butors, palles/ Courlis/ Plongeurs/ Gelinottes de boys/ Rasles/ Connils/ Espaulles de mouton aux cappres/ Pièces de boeuf royales/ Poictines de veau/ Poulles bouillies et gras chappons au blanc manger/ Poulletz/ Gelinottes/ Risses, Chevreaux/ Lappius, Lapperaux/ Cailles, Cailletaux/ Pigeons, Pigeonnaux/ Herons, Heronneaux/ Otards, Otardeaux/ Pluviers/ Becfigues/ Guynettes/ Bizets/ Oyes, Oyzons/ Foulques aux pourreaux/ Maulvys/ Hallebrans/ Pocheuillières/ Courtes, Grues/ Tyansons/ Flamans, Cygnes/ Corbigeaux/ Francouris/ Tourterelles/ Girardines/ Porcepicz." *Oeuvres de Rabelais*, (Paris: Chez E. Picard, Librairie, 1867), 225-226.

"shoulder of mutton in garlic/ meat pies in hot sauce/ pork chops with onions/ roast capons in gravy/ chickens/ ducks/goats/fawns and bucks/rabbits and hares/ partridges and chicks/pheasants and chicks/ peacocks and peahens/ storks and storklings/ woodcock and snipe/ortolans/ Indian cocks, hens, and chicks/ pigeons and doves/ pigs in wine sauce/ duck with onions/ blackbirds and marsh quail/ waterfowl/ wild ducks/ egrets/ river ducks/ loons/ bittern and spoonbills/ curlews/ hazel grouse/ coots in pear sauce/ robins and kids/ shoulder of mutton and capers/ beef royale, sliced/ breast of veal/ broiled chicken and fat capons with blancmange/ grouse/ pullets/ rabbits and young rabbits/ quail and young quail/ pigeons and young pigeons/ heron and young heron/ bustards and young bustards/ warblers/ guinea fowl/ plover/ geese and gosling/ wild pigeons/ young wild ducks/ snipe and crane/ sandpipers/ great plovers/ francolin quail/ turtledoves/ rabbits/ spiced pork/ brook ouzel." *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. Burton (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), 503-504.

⁵⁵ Although it is not likely that Burton would have been intimately familiar with Rabelais's work since it was not translated into English until 1653, and then only partially, he does mention Rabelais by name on a number of occasions, calling him "that French Lucian" and referring to his reputation as a physician, satirist, and atheist: I.119, I.229, I.339, III.384.

⁵⁶ See especially, Timothy Tomasik, "Fishes, Fowl, and *La fleur de toute cuisine*: Gaster and Gastronomy in Rabelais's *Quart livre*." *Renaissance Food from Rabelais to Shakespeare: Culinary Readings and Culinary Histories*. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 25-51, Also: Michel Jeanneret, "Diet." and "Medicine v. Cookery." *A Feast of Words: Banquet and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 73-89, Floyd Gray, *Rabelais et l'écriture* (Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1974), François Rigolot, *Les Langages de Rabelais* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996), Edwin Duval, *The Design of the Rabelais's Quart Livre de Pantagruel* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998).

are lettuce and pure water. Instead, readers are treated to a sort of negation of a banquet where the plurality of interdicted foods is matched only by the learned opinions about them.

The manifold character of Burton's skepticism becomes apparent when he returns to the subject of bad diet in the cures section of Partition II. On the one hand, Burton generally finds it impossible to reconcile the conflicting opinions found in medical works on diet and hygiene: "Arabians commend brains, but Laurentius, *cap 8*, excepts against them" (II.23). One humorous exception to this rule concerns the carp which Burton first calls "a fish of which I know not what to determine" but later defends, stating that "Hippolytus Salvianus takes exception at carp; but I dare boldly say with Dubravius, it is an excellent meat, if it come not from muddy pools" (I.220, II.25). On the other hand, Burton also doubts that applicability of general principles, to the extent that he is able to generate any, to particular cases. The final page of his section on "diet rectified" undermines all of the specific prescriptions given previously. "I conclude," says Burton, "our own experience is the best physician; that diet which is most propitious to one is often pernicious to another; such is the variety of palates, humours, and temperatures, let every man observe, and be a law unto himself. Tiberius, in Tacitus, did laugh at all such, that after thirty years of age would ask counsel of others concerning matters of diet; I say the same" (II.29). Having taken pains himself to offer counsel on dietary matters, Burton now laughs at the very notion of dietary counsel and at those reader who have presumably turned to the *Anatomy* to seek it out. Still, Burton's laughter, insofar as it coincides with his skepticism, retains a surprisingly light and convivial tone.

Rather than despairing at the fact that his immediate scholarly objectives have failed, or at least proven unhelpful to the melancholy reader, Burton seems to revel in the relativism that undoes his alimentary guide and comes to supplant the medical authority of the physician with

the cultural authority of custom. Thus, what began as a conventional exercise in the discrete classification of wholesome and unwholesome foods devolves, or perhaps evolves, into an ethnographic survey of dietary habits in regions as diverse as “some shires in England,” Normandy, “Guipuscoa in Spain,” Greece, Ethiopia, Iceland, and America (I.232). Although recounting from various Jesuit travel narratives how “the Tartars eat raw meat, and most commonly horse-flesh, drink milk and blood” or how, to the wealthiest Chinese, “the horse, ass, dog’s, cat-flesh, is as delightful as the rest,” may seem to detract from the practical ends of Burton’s discourse, such curious diversions advance his therapeutic objectives (I.231).

By excerpting those details that an English reader would find most shocking and strange, like the discovery that “in divers places they eat man’s flesh raw and roasted,” Burton aspires both to inform and amuse (Ibid.). To the extent that this sense of amusement diverts the reader’s attention away from the subject of melancholy and encourages us to adopt a less rigorous attitude toward dietary regimen, it also helps to restore and maintain physical health. Burton warns against the dangers of “over-fasting” much more than gluttony and his discourse on diet, which relates the pleasures of reading and writing to the pleasures of eating, suggests a general disdain for asceticism (I.230). Quoting Hippocrates, Burton suggests that “they often more offend in too sparing diet, and are worse damnified, than they that feed liberally and are ready to surfeit” (Ibid.). While moderation and temperance are for the most part recommended, the variability of custom allows Burton to rationalize indulgence. “Many reasons I could give,” he writes, “but when all is said pro and con, Cardan’s rule is best, to keep that we are accustomed unto, though it be naught; and to follow our disposition and appetite in some things amiss; to eat sometimes a dish which is hurtful, *if we have an extraordinary liking to it*” (my emphasis II.29). Burton’s skepticism with respect to conflicting medical advice on diet and the applicability of general

rules to particular cases, leads him to place custom and delight before dogmatic prescriptions and this constitutes a radically different approach to therapy.

Taking the place of axiomatic principals, Burton's appeals to custom, which "doth alter nature itself," and "common experience," contradict the rationalist assumptions of Galenic theory and point to a much deeper investment in the twin schools of philosophical skepticism and medical Empiricism than has previously been recognized (I.230, 232). While Burton sometimes disparages the Empiricists, whom he compares to "imposters" and "mountebanks," he also disparages dogmatic physicians, citing Tholosanus's statement that "I had rather believe and commit myself to a mere empiric than to a mere doctor" (II.210). Burton's frequent refrain that "custom is all in all" exemplifies the Pyrrhonian practice of assenting to common observance where certain knowledge is unattainable and suggests that suspension of judgement is not only epistemologically warranted but also medically necessary (I.232). Like Estienne, Burton posits dogmatism as the true cause of melancholy and skepticism as its cure but Burton's quasi-medical discourse does much more to develop the practical dimensions of this form of treatment.

Indeed, what distinguishes the *Anatomy* from other skeptical texts of the period is the way in which Burton aims not only to describe or defend the therapeutic objectives of Pyrrhonism but to enact them on the unsuspecting reader. By regaling us with contradictory prescriptions for diet and the endlessly diverse customs of different cultures, Burton breaks the spell of dogmatism and effectively administers a cure that the melancholy reader did not even know that he or she needed. Burton's laughter at the precepts of neo-Galenic theory, at the vain questions and idle speculation that motivate medical discourse, is integral to this form of therapy and further nuances his performance of the role of Democritus Jr.. Commenting on the skeptical strategies that Burton employs throughout his work, Angus Gowland perceptively notes his "palpable

delight in reproducing part of the typical structure of scholastic disputation, citing authorities *pro* and *contra*” and “his persistent mockery of *philosophia speculativa*- of medical-philosophical theory.”⁵⁷ These observations hint at an underlying relationship between Burton’s laughter and his skepticism, however, they do not posit either as integral to the expurgation of melancholy humors.

By emphasizing the historical role of skepticism in the Galenic tradition, I do not wish to label Burton an Empiricist, especially since he adamantly opposes all forms of medical, philosophical, and theological sectarianism, but to argue instead that his sometimes playful, sometimes scathing critique of medical orthodoxy contributes to a larger therapeutic purpose. So often, critics interpret Burton’s skepticism as self-defeating or pathological, but I argue that, like the laughter of Democritus, it fundamentally reorients our attitude toward health and well-being. Burton’s entertaining treatment of diet, which actively resists synthesis and definitive resolution, demonstrates how skepticism can serve as an applied remedy for melancholy, as “therapy for my intellect.” Although we have already addressed the longstanding posthumous association between Democritus and Pyrrho which, I have argued, provides a basis for theorizing affect and epistemology together, it still remains to be seen how skepticism informs the laughter of Democritus Jr. and the moral-philosophical function of the *Anatomy* as a whole.

Burton’s skeptical humor is perhaps best showcased when, in a brief passage from the section on love melancholy in Partition III, he addresses the question of whether or not a scholar should marry. Much like the discourse on diet, Burton concludes his treatment of love melancholy by undermining his own counsel and condoning indulgence where abstinence would

⁵⁷ Gowland, *Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 116, 122.

seem more fitting.⁵⁸ In the final subsection titled “The last and best Cure of Love-Melancholy is, to let them have their Desire,” Burton endeavors to contradict a list of twelve arguments commending marriage by Jacobus de Voragine whom he cites first in Latin and then translates into English.⁵⁹ While the actual contents of Burton’s list are amusing in their own right, his rationale for compiling the list in the first place is of much greater importance since it bears on the compositional method of the *Anatomy* as a whole. In response to Jacobus’s work, Burton addresses the reader directly as follows: “All this is true, say you, and who knows it not? but how easy a matter is it to answer these motives, and to make an *antiparodia* quite opposite unto it! To exercise myself I will essay” (III.253). Burton not only identifies himself as a skilled parodist but also suggests that, as a scholar, he delights in contradiction and the juxtaposition of opposing arguments. These tasks are undertaken for their own sake, in the spirit of fun, and with unfeigned enthusiasm. Furthermore, Burton’s playful use of the verb “essay” clearly invokes Montaigne and posits skepticism as a source of amusement.⁶⁰

The parody mainly rehashes well-worn stereotypes about women as spendthrifts, nags, and whores, but it acquires more comic resonance given Burton’s own bachelorhood and his previous exhortation that all should marry. The list reads as follows:

1. Hast thou means thou means? thou hast one to spend it.— 2. Hast none? thy beggary is increased.— Art in prosperity? thy happiness is ended.— 4. Art in adversity? like Job’s wife she’ll aggravate thy misery, vex thy soul, make thy burden intolerable.—

⁵⁸ Despite Burton’s own bachelorhood, he generally advises against sexual abstinence, calling the vows of chastity required by the Catholic church “unnatural and impious” and recommending marriage for melancholy maids with “this the ready cure, to give them content to their desire” (III.245, I.417).

⁵⁹ Here is Burton’s English translation: “1. Hast thou means? thou hast one to keep and increase it.— 2. Hast though none? though hast one to help to get it,— 3. Art in prosperity? thine happiness is doubled.— 4. Art in adversity? she’ll comfort, assist, bear a part of thy burden to make it more tolerable.— 5. Art at home? she’ll drive away melancholy. — 6. Art abroad? she looks after thee going from home, wishes for thee in thine absence, and joyfully welcomes thy return. — 7. There’s nothing delightful without society, no society so sweet as matrimony. — 8. The band of conjugal love is adamantine. — 9. The sweet company of kinsmen increaseth, the number of parents is doubled, of brothers, sisters, nephews. — 10. Thou art made a father by a fair and happy issue. — 11. Moses curseth the barrenness of matrimony, how much more a single life? — 12. If nature escape not punishment, surely thy will shall not avoid it” (III.252-253).

⁶⁰ See also II.127 on Burton’s use of “essay” as a direct allusion to the *Essays*.

5. Art at home? she'll scold thee out of doors.— 6. Art abroad? If thou be wise, keep thee so, she'll perhaps graft horns in thine absence, scowl on thee coming home. —7. Nothing gives more content than solitariness, no solitariness like this of a single life.—8. The band of marriage is adamant, no hope of loosing it, thou art undone.—9. Thy number increaseth, thou shalt be devoured by thy wife's friends.— 10. Thou are made a cornuto by an unchaste wife, and shalt bring up other folks' children instead of thine own.—11. Paul commends marriage, yet he prefers a single life—. 12. Is marriage honourable? What an immortal crown belongs to virginity! (III.253)

While misogyny underlies much of the humor of Burton's list, the Oxford don seems to have gained more pleasure from the method than the matter of his parody. Having said many disparaging things about women over the course of his discourse on love melancholy, Burton apologizes, noting that "that which I have said (to speak truth) no more concerns them [women] than men" and suggest that "if any man take exception at my words, let him alter the name, read him for her, and 'tis all one in effect" (III.216). Burton is unable to know for certain whether marriage will be more beneficial than harmful to the scholar, but this indeterminate state produces neither anxiety nor crisis but an occasion for recreation and play. As Burton entertains both himself and the reader with this admittedly lowbrow jest, he again invokes the pleasures of the Rabelaisian list as well as the underlying premise of Panurge's comic quest to determine whether or not he should take a wife. Moreover, he suggests that skepticism and laughter together comprise a practical remedy for melancholy when physic and conventional counsel fail.

III. Pills to Purge Melancholy: Learning and Recreation

While the question of marriage may be somewhat trivial, Burton's practice of framing skepticism as a pleasing exercise or a game similarly informs his treatment of much more serious matters like the composition of the heavens and whether they are ruled by a benevolent god. As one of several formal digressions in the *Anatomy*, the "Digression of Air" demonstrates how

skeptical laughter contributes to Burton's larger conception of recreation and diversion. The passage opens with an extended simile in which Burton compares himself to "a long-winged hawk" that "for his pleasure fetcheth many a circuit in the air" (II.34). This image is suiting both for the freedom that it invokes and its relevance to the theme of air, another of the six Galenic non-naturals.⁶¹ As with his *antiparodia* of marriage, Burton explains that, "having now come at last into these ample fields of air, wherein I may freely expatiate," he will "exercise myself for my recreation" (II.34-35). Rather than exerting himself physically, Burton allows his mind to wander and contemplates subjects as diverse as competing cosmological theories, both ancient and modern, paradoxes of the earth's motion, infinite worlds, and the problem of evil. Although the digression is comprised mainly of questions, the purpose of the work is to demonstrate just how and when to laugh at idle speculation.

Burton begins his playful discourse with questions of little consequence like whether certain birds sleep at night or which environmental factors determine sea level. Concerning the latter, Burton singles out for ridicule Josephus Blancanus's fear that, "in time the sea will waste away the land, and all the globe," demanding of readers, "*risum teneatis, amici?* [can you contain your laughter, friends?]" (II.39). Antiquated accounts of how the air affects weather in different hemispheres likewise provoke Burton's laughter when he, siding with Acosta, suggests that "*philosophiam Aristotelis meteorologicam vehementer irrisi, cum* [I had to laugh at Aristotle's meteorology]" (II.46). The stakes of such laughter, however, increase dramatically when Burton transitions from physical to metaphysical questions. He wonders, for example, "if God be infinitely and only good, why should He alter or destroy the world? if He confound that

⁶¹ Scholars have interpreted Burton's metaphor of flight or fictional cosmic voyage, along with his frequent allusions to Lucian, as an indication that this digression in particular supports a reading of the *Anatomy* as a Menippean satire. Burton's self-identification as a "new-fangled Icaromenippus" also supports this reading but I am less interested in laughter as an indication of literary genre than as part of Burton's therapeutic program (II.58).

which is good, how shall Himself continue good? If He pull it down because evil, how shall He be free from the evil that made it evil? etc.” (II.59). These questions are qualitatively different from the previous ones, but Burton’s laughter remains the same.

In an oft cited passage from the “Digression of Air,” Burton shifts from laughing at the error of certain individuals, be it Blancanus or Aristotle, to comically diminishing human pretensions to knowledge more generally. He even implicates his own page long inquiry into the nature of the divine by condemning “such absurd and brain-sick questions, intricacies, froth of human wit, and excrements of curiosity, etc.” (II.59-60). Burton then stops himself with the silly interjection: “But hoo! I am now gone quite out of sight, I am almost giddy with roving about: I could have ranged farther yet, but I am an infant, and not able to dive into these profundities or sound these depths” (Ibid.). By encouraging the reader first to laugh at the error and foolishness of others and then positing his own presumption as the object of ridicule, Burton not only amuses himself but prepares us to regard our own doubts in a new light. The metaphor of flight, which many critics have compared to the Menippean trope of cosmic voyage, allows Burton to distance himself from more immediate feelings of frustration or disorientation and to approach scholarly impasse from a different perspective. As Ruth Fox has argued “Burton’s benignant skepticism that underlies the tone of this digression lets him enjoy the spectacle of blanket-tossing while he savors the extent to which, because his flight is fanciful, the answer is bound to be elusive.”⁶²

The playful quality of skepticism in the *Anatomy* bears directly upon Burton’s conception of its therapeutic function and, in his discourse on the passions, Burton strategically conflates the philosophical end of tranquility with laughter. He begins a section titled “Perturbations of the Mind rectified” by arguing that if a “quiet mind” or “*animo tranquillo*” is, according to Epicurus,

⁶² Fox, *The Tangled Chain*, 96.

the only true source of pleasure [voluptas], then it follows that “fear and sorrow, therefore, are especially to be avoided, and the mind to be mitigated with mirth constancy and good hope” (II.102-103). Although mirth is not typically associated with skepticism or therapeutic philosophy, Burton positions it as a preeminent cure for melancholy. When the mind is beset with troubling thoughts, he advises the melancholy reader to “recreate thy mind by some contrary object, with some more pleasing meditation divert thy thoughts” (II.105). This is arguably what we witness Burton doing in the “Digression on Air” and what the *Anatomy* as a whole accomplishes for its reader. Since both laughter and skepticism share a common end, to ease the mind that suffers, they jointly advance the work’s practical objectives.

Drawing from contemporary medical discourses on laughter in the subsection “Mirth and merry company, fair objects, Remedies,” Burton, like Joubert, highlights the physiological as well as psychological effects of laughter on the humoral body. Citing Vives, he says that mirth “purgeth the blood, confirms health, causeth a fresh, pleasing, and fine colour, prolongs life, whets the wit, makes the body young, lively, and fit for any manner of employment. The merrier the heart the longer the life” (II.119). Having taken pains to show that laughter is integral to both the form and the function of the *Anatomy*, I want to suggest further that it transforms Burton’s understanding of what it means to administer to those suffering from melancholy. Together with Ficino, Burton emphasizes the seriousness of his laughter saying, “Again and again I request you to be merry, if anything trouble your hearts, or vex your souls, neglect and contemn it, let it pass, And this I enjoin you, not as a divine alone, but as a physician; for without this mirth, which is the life and quintessence of phisic, medicines, and whatever is used and applied to prolong the life of man, is dull, dead, and of no force” (II.123-124).

While Burton's identification with the figure of Democritus Jr. may seem peculiar given his subject matter, both the learned and popular traditions linking laughter to the purgation of melancholy humors, justify this choice. Many jest books of the period bear titles like "Democritus, or Doctor Merry-Man his Medicines, Against Melancholy Humours" (1607) and Burton himself bequeathed an impressive collection of such ridicularia or ephemera to the Bodleian Library upon his death.⁶³ His statement at the beginning of Partition III that "mine earnest intent is as much to profit as to please, *non tam ut populo placerem, quam ut populum juvarem*; and these my writings, I hope, shall take like gilded pills, which are so composed as well to tempt the appetite and deceive the palate, as to help and medicinally work upon the whole body; my lines shall not only recreate but rectify the mind" recalls the title of another such pamphlet called "A Pil to Purge Melancholie" (1599) (III.7). Although Burton's skepticism deliberately undermines the reader's faith in neo-Galenic medicine as well as most forms of dogmatic learning, he never abandons his sincere commitment to therapy.

Burton's compassion for the melancholy reader is perhaps most felt in his final section on religious melancholy. Here, Burton nuances the Horatian question from his preface, "*Fleat Heraclitus, an rideat Democritus?*" and posits superstition as opposed to "true religion" as the object of laughter.⁶⁴ His comment that "when I see a priest say mass, with all those apish gestures, murmurings, etc., read the customs of the Jew's synagogue, or Mahometan meskites, I must needs laugh at their folly: *Risum teneatis amici?* [Could you restrain your laughter, friends?]" leads one to anticipate the same kind of ethnographic survey as in the sections on bad diet (III.346). Burton does address a wide variety of religious customs as well as the gruesome

⁶³ See Gowland, *The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy*, 137.

⁶⁴ Cf. Horace, *Epistulae II*, "Si foret in terris, rideret Democritus [If Democritus were in the world, would he laugh]."

events of the recent French civil wars in order to destabilize his initial distinction between superstition and true religion, but it soon becomes evident that his primary concern is the current state of English Protestantism.⁶⁵ As with his treatment of love melancholy, Burton refrains from issuing severe cures since religious melancholy, he argues, stems mostly from austere behaviors like “immoderate fasting,” being “given to contemplation,” or “overmuch solitariness and meditation” (III.343). Instead, he employs once more a characteristic blend of skepticism and humor to counteract religious enthusiasm and that particular form of spiritual despair induced by Calvinist theology.

Once Burton turns his attention exclusively to Christianity, having addressed such broad questions as whether one can distinguish clearly between the three Abrahamic religions or whether there be gods at all, he begins to critique the epistemological practices of radical Puritan sects.⁶⁶ In particular, Burton condemns those who “terrify the souls of many” and suggests that,

Election, predestination, reprobation, preposterously conceived, offend divers, with a deal of foolish presumption, curiosity, needless speculation, contemplation, solicitude, wherein they trouble and puzzle themselves about those questions of grace, free will, perseverance, God’s secrets; they will know more than is revealed of God in His Word, human capacity or ignorance can apprehend, and too importunate inquiry after that which is revealed. (III.399).

⁶⁵ As in the section on diet rectified, Burton concludes by recommending that each person conform to the customs of his or her particular community. Skepticism thus results in religious freedom and toleration: “let every province enjoy their liberty in this behalf, worship one God, or all as they will, and are informed” and “if there be infinite planetary and firmamental worlds, as some will, there be infinite genii or commanding spirits belonging to each of them; and so, *per consequens* (for they will be all adored), infinite religions. And therefore let every territory keep their proper rites and ceremonies” (III.376-77).

⁶⁶ Although Burton does not cite *The Outlines*, he proves his familiarity with Pyrrhonian skepticism when he recounts how some “infer, that if there be so many religious sects, and denied by the rest, why may they not all be false? or why should this or that be preferred before the rest? The sceptics urge this, and amongst others it is the conclusion of Sextus Empiricus, *lib. 8 advers. Mathematicos*: after many philosophical arguments and reasons pro and con that there are gods, and again that there are no gods, he so concludes, *cum tot inter se pugnent, etc., una tantum potest esse vera* [there are so many diverse opinions, and yet one only can be true]” (III.383). See also III.387.

While doubt with respect to one's salvation may give rise to fear or desperation, Burton employs skepticism strategically to overturn the assumption that such matters can be determined in the first place. His doubt, evinced by the question "Why shouldst thou then distrust, misdoubt thyself, upon what ground, what suspicion?", ironically negates the former and serves as a form of consolation (III.420). With an eye "to ease their afflicted minds," Burton seems to affirm the Arminian doctrine of universal grace which effectively curbs "this furious curiosity, needless speculation fruitless meditation about election, reprobation, free will" but it remains unclear whether or not he does this only for the sake of therapeutic efficacy.⁶⁷ Regardless, Burton's skepticism in no way hastens the reader to despair but rather furnishes him or her with an invitation to unburden the mind. "Let him *laxare animum*," writes Burton in the closing pages of his *Anatomy*, "by all honest recreations refresh and recreate his distressed soul" (III.431-32).

⁶⁷ See Gowland on Laudianism, *Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 154-161.

Chapter 3

John Donne's Voluptuous Laughter: Skepticism and Holy Joy

Thomas Carew first hailed John Donne as the “The Monarch of Wit” in 1631 and this title has long shaped critical appraisals of his character and literary style.¹ Such appraisals, however, often take “wit” as evidence of Donne’s expansive intellect much more than his sense of humor. Indeed, the “witty conceits” that Samuel Johnson attributed famously to the school of metaphysical poets, Donne in particular, are often less funny than strange. Still, I would like to suggest that, throughout his diverse career, Donne posits a unique relationship between laughter and learning that sheds new light on his skepticism, his poetics, and his representation of devotional life. Although I will at times employ formal designations like satire, paradox, or comedy, my intention throughout is to frame laughter in terms of affect much more than genre. In part one, I argue that Donne uses philosophical skepticism to amuse and delight coterie readers in such early works as the *Paradoxes* and *The Courtier's Library*. Part two examines the status of the what Empson called the “joke” in “Elegy XIX” to suggest that skeptical laughter enables Donne to reevaluate sensual pleasure and female sexuality. Finally, parts three and four turn to “Satire III,” the *Essays in Divinity*, and select sermons in order to investigate how skepticism and laughter inform Donne’s representation of true religion. From the early prose and poetry to the later satire and devotional writings, I follow a trajectory of Donne’s laughter that

¹ Thomas Carew, “An Elegy upon the Death of the Dean of Paul’s, Dr. John Donne,” *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne*, ed. Charles M Coffin (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 290.

recasts skepticism as a viable means of attaining pleasure, even holy joy, if not absolute knowledge.

I. Laughter and Learning: Skepticism in Donne's *Juvenilia* and *Catalogus Librorum Aulicorum*

Even in early prose writings like the *Paradoxes and Problems*, Donne makes laughter integral to his representation and ironic display of learning.² John Carey's insightful comment that "essentially the paradox is a sceptical form (though it often pretends to be just humorous)" suggests a natural affinity between laughter and skepticism which, I would add, Donne makes all the more explicit with such works as "That a Wise man is knowne by much laughing" (1599-1600).³ This paradox not only evinces a familiarity with humanist debates about laughter but also sheds light on what Donne and his readers may have found laughable. We can perhaps imagine the snickering of coterie audiences as they encountered for the first time an audacious young man using humor to vaunt his own intellectual virtuosity. As Arthur Marotti's description of social convention at the Inns-of-Court suggests, "A nimble or 'witty' capacity for argumentation and controversy was highly prized- a fact reflected, for instance, in the fondness for such literary forms as the prose paradox and essay."⁴ Although some readers may be slow to engage with Donne's sophisticated and at times abstruse play, the *Paradoxes* frame reading itself as an interactive game of wits that is at once amusing, intellectually rigorous, and socially significant.

While self-referentiality is a defining characteristic of most paradoxical literature, *Paradox X* calls special attention to Donne's use of humor since laughter serves as the work's

² Although the precise date is unknown, scholars typically identify 1599-1600 as the likely date of composition. On *Paradox X*, see especially: R.E. Bennett, "John Manningham and Donne's Paradoxes." *Modern Language Notes*, Vol.46, No.5, (May, 1931). 309-313.

³ John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind, Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 236. Perhaps foremost in Donne's mind was Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* which he cites at length in the opening paragraphs.

⁴ Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 30.

central theme. Surely, we are meant to laugh at the exaggerated description of a courtier whose dress is “so glistening, and so painted in many colours, that he is hardly discerned, from one of the pictures in the Arras,” but we are also meant to wonder about the implications of such laughter and to determine for ourselves whether the titular proposition that wise men laugh is ultimately true or false.⁵ By showcasing the author’s ability to call commonplace assumptions into doubt, I argue that the paradox often confounds readers in such a way that mimics the skeptical exhortation to suspend one’s judgement. While Rosalie Colie notes in her work on Renaissance paradox that the genre’s “negative and positive meanings are so balanced that one meaning can never outweigh the other, though weighed to eternity,” she does not adequately account for why such disparate elements as play and uncertainty seem mutually to sustain one other.⁶ As the surprising case of Henri Estienne’s laughter has already demonstrated, the skeptic is uniquely suited to meet this moment of intellectual impasse with delight rather than despair because he adopts an ironic stance toward learning. By attending to Donne’s *Paradoxes*, we are able to see how such skeptical laughter comes to inspire new literary forms.

During the late 1590’s, the prose paradox was still an unfamiliar genre in English literature and, as such, benefited from the prestige of its Latin and vernacular precursors. Evelyn Simpson highlights, in particular, the influence of Ortensio Lando’s *Paradossi* (1534) which were first translated into French by Charles Estienne in 1553 and then partially into English by Anthony Munday in 1593.⁷ Although she rightly notes that Donne does not seem to adapt the paradoxes of Lando, this larger context is important because it shows how the paradox as a

⁵ “That a Wise Man is Known by Much Laughing,” in *The Complete Poetry*, 301-302. All subsequent citations of this poem are from this edition.

⁶ Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966), 6.

⁷ Evelyn Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 143.

learned form of recreation became affiliated with philosophical skepticism in England.⁸ In 1600, Sir William Cornwallis the younger composed a series of paradoxes in the style of Lando which were published posthumously under the titles *Essayes or Rather Encomiums* (1616) and *Essayes of Certaine Paradoxes* (1616). The earliest extant manuscript of the latter, which purports to praise such absurd topics as debt and syphilis, is dedicated to “a worthy frende Mr. John Donne.”⁹ While Cornwallis’s literary achievements are slight in comparison to Donne’s, he is responsible in large part for the conflation of the prose paradox with the English essay.

Indeed, Cornwallis is best known as the first English author to have written essays in the style of Montaigne.¹⁰ Unlike his more playful paradoxes, the *Essayes by Sir W. Cornewaleys* (1601-02) constitute an earnest effort to emulate the *Essais* and to engage with Montaigne’s ethical project of self-cultivation. Nevertheless, the interchangeable use of the word “essay” to designate both forms of writing not only suggests the still underdeveloped state of English prose during the period but also the playful and paradoxical nature of the *Essais* themselves. Montaigne famously used the word *essais*, from the French verb *essayer*, in order to classify his writing as provisional attempts at knowledge that could not be definitively attained. Thus, from its very inception, the essay was intended to enact or rhetorically perform the logical paradox at the heart of the skeptical tradition: “nothing can be known, not even this.”¹¹ That Montaigne’s skeptical manifesto *The Apology for Raymond Sebond* is also a paradox, should then come as no surprise. As Colie noted long ago, “it misleads its audience because it does the exact opposite of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Cornwallis, *The Encomium of Richard III*, ed. A.N. Kincaid (London: Turner & Devereux, 1977). Cornwallis also published a verse epistle to Donne.

¹⁰ For more on Cornwallis, see William Hamlin, *Montaigne’s English Journey* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013) 81-82. The revised and significantly expanded editions of Bacon’s 1597 *Essays* did not appear until 1612 and 1625 respectively.

¹¹ This aphorism is usually attributed to Carneades.

what it claims to do, launches a total attack upon the philosophical position it purports to defend.”¹² To the extent that Cornwallis’s prose invites us, at least momentarily, to attend to the paradoxical nature of the Montaignian essay, it also illuminates the skeptical dimensions of early modern paradox. Although Donne’s paradoxes were never labeled as such, I’d like to suggest that they can be read as “essays” in their own right.¹³

If we consider *Paradox X*, for instance, as an exercise in skepticism, then the playfulness of Donne’s citational practices, the conventional means by which he displays his erudition, becomes all the more meaningful. While Donne may appear at first to defer to ancient authors like Martial and Aristotle on the subject of laughter, he actually deconstructs their authority by turning the contents of their works into matter for jest. By opening with the following quotation from the Roman poet: “Ride, si sapis, o puella ride [Laugh oh girl, if you are wise, laugh!],” Donne simultaneously invokes the satirical spirit of the Latin original and challenges the reader to participate in a kind of interpretive game.¹⁴ The very fact that the quotation appears in Latin emphasizes the intertextual relationship that Donne wishes to construct between himself and Martial and demands of the reader a relatively high level of cultural and linguistic competency.¹⁵ *Epigram 2.4* also begins with the quotation that Donne cites, but Martial attributes this exhortation to Ovid, the “poeta Paelignus,” and we soon learn that his entire purpose is to refute it.¹⁶ Indeed, the epigram ends with a comic exhortation to weep. While we are to assume that

¹² Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, 4.

¹³ There is a similar slippage if we compare Donne’s *Essays on Divinity* with his *An Essay of Valour* or some of the shorter works listed among the *Dubia* on honesty, ambition, and fortitude. See Dennis Flynn, “Three Unnoticed Companion Essays to Donne’s ‘An Essay of Valour.’” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* LXXIII (Sept. 1969).

¹⁴ “Ride si sapis, o puella, ride,/ Paelignus, puto, dixerat poeta/ Sed non dixerat omnibus puellis./ Verum dixerit omnibus puellis.” (Martial 2.41.1).

¹⁵ Like Martial, Donne also composed a series of Latin epigrams but only the English translations have survived and some doubt their authenticity.

¹⁶ Craig Williams argues that direct quotations are uncommon in Latin poetry and characteristic of Martial’s style. This particular citation does not appear in any extant manuscripts of Ovid and may either be a paraphrase, a

Ovid advises all girls, “omnibus puellis,” to laugh because it makes them appear more sexually attractive, Martial intervenes to deter poor Maximina, a particular girl with horrendous teeth, from following this advice.

Although Donne’s English paraphrase “If thou beest wise, laugh” suppresses the overtly gendered aspects of Martial’s discourse on laughter by replacing the feminine vocative “o puella” with the more neutral pronoun ‘thou,’ it still aims to parody the Ovidian dictum. Whereas Martial’s cruel invective provokes laughter by positing Maximina’s physical deformity as the exception which disproves Ovid’s general rule, Donne’s paradox exploits the incongruity between coquettish, feminine laughter and the knowing laughter of the wise man. The implicit and admittedly sexist assumption operating here is also a Latin pun that goes something like this: even if a girl is wise [si sapis, o puella], she is still not wise because she is not a philosopher, literally a wise man [sapiens]. As such erudite word play demonstrates, Donne’s paradox is at once an exposition on learned laughter and a performance of it. Moving swiftly from one allusion to the next, Donne flaunts not only his knowledge of classical texts but also his facility with specious argument.

In order to make readers laugh at his own ingenuity, Donne carries Aristotle’s widespread notion that a capacity for laughter distinguishes humankind from animals to an absurd logical extreme.¹⁷ Even if it were true, as Aristotle maintains, that “the powers of discourse, reason, and laughter, bee equally proper unto Man onely,” it does not follow, as Donne suggests, that “hee be onely most wise, who hath most use of laughing.” Though Donne’s emendation is slight, it

quotation of a lost work, or a fabrication. *Martial, Epigrams Book II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 150-151.

¹⁷ Aristotle writes that “no animal laughs, save man.” *On the Parts of Animals*, trans. James G. Lennox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), III.10, 69.

comically exaggerates the relationship that Aristotle posits between laughter and wisdom and seems even to condone the very form of excess that the philosopher elsewhere condemns.¹⁸

Setting aside the larger context of the joke, one might conclude that Aristotle's actual meaning is either inaccessible or entirely unimportant to Donne. Time and again, he shows a skeptical disregard for the apparent "truth" of his sources, distorting them almost beyond recognition for the sake of a laugh.

Donne's playful exegesis of the medieval proverb "*Per risum multum possis cognoscere stultum* [Through much laughter you may recognize a fool]" not only subverts common estimations of wisdom and folly but also contradicts the anonymous author's clear condemnation of laughter. "By much *laughing* thou maist know there is a *fool*, Donne explains, "not, that the *laughers* are *fools*, but that among them there is some *fool*, at whom, *wise men* laugh." Although Donne's sophisticated arguments betray a deep skepticism toward conventional forms of knowledge, his paradoxes participate in a long tradition of ironic discourse that stretches from the learned ignorance of Socrates to Erasmus's praise of folly. What distinguishes Donne's skepticism, however, is the way in which he turns the indeterminate nature of the paradox into a collective source of amusement. While Donne deliberately misappropriates the wisdom of antiquity, his interpretive practices do not foreclose upon the possibility of meaning more generally but rather open it up in new and provocative ways. His misreadings are creative, generative and, most importantly, aimed to bring about pleasure.

¹⁸ In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle advises young men to pursue the mean with respect to laughter: "Those who carry humour to excess are thought to be vulgar buffoons, striving after humour at all costs, and aiming rather at raising a laugh than at saying what is becoming and at avoiding pain to the object of their fun; while those who can neither make a joke themselves nor put up with those who do are thought to be boorish and unpolished. But those who joke in a tasteful way are called ready-witted, which implies a sort of readiness to turn this way and that; for such sallies are thought to be movements of the character, and as bodies are discriminated by their movements, so too are characters." *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. Sir David Ross (Worlds Library Classics, 2009), IV.8.

During his residence at the Inns-of-Court, Donne characterized the relationship between laughter and learning amongst his particular milieu with the observation that “study and play made strange hermaphrodites.”¹⁹ Although he would return later to Lincoln’s Inn as Reader in Divinity in 1616, Donne’s ambitions upon entering in 1592 were oriented much more toward law or politics. As such, the ability to satisfy both halves of that androgynous creature would have been of utmost importance to his public career. While the playful nature of Donne’s paradoxes may seem at odds with the gravity of a barrister’s profession, such displays of wit were integral to a larger process of socialization that also encompassed women and wine. We have already seen that, in order to find the humor in *Paradox X*, readers must be well acquainted with Latin satire and Greek philosophy. Their laughter, like Donne’s, is thus contingent on such learning and signals membership in an elite social community. Arthur Marotti’s claim about the conditions of Donne’s coterie verse pertains equally well to his early prose: “Donne expected certain intellectual, aesthetic, and social knowledge or sophistication of his readers- the capacity to understand the nuances of his witty manipulation of literary conventions, genres, cultural codes, and specific social and rhetorical circumstances.”²⁰ To the extent that *Paradox X* succeeds in provoking laughter amongst an exclusive readership, it also draws critical attention toward laughter’s larger socio-cultural significance.

Despite the apparent frivolity of the *Paradoxes*, Donne’s ability to wear his considerable learning lightly distinguishes him from men of lesser wit. After all, it is only for the gentleman of leisure to engage with learning for the sake of recreation. While Donne jokes about learning to demonstrate that he is learned, he also jokes about learning to demonstrate that he is not merely so. Like the skeptic whose imperturbability is disclosed by a tranquil affect, Donne’s wise man

¹⁹ “Epithalamion Made at Lincoln’s Inn,” in *Complete Poetry*, 175.

²⁰ Marotti, 20.

laughs to show that nothing either great or small can detract from his sense of constant amusement. Donne characterizes other men as “*hot, choleric fire-brands*” or a “*thatcht house, quickly burning,*” but the wise man remains “as *cold as the Salamander.*” His laughter is self-possessed and suggests a certain detachment from such passions as envy or anger which naturally detract from more lighthearted pleasures.

Toward the end of the work, Donne offers a succinct summary of his paradoxical defense of laughter but also expresses contempt for those who laugh only in order to appear wise in the company of others. “Therefore let him *laugh,*” Donne writes, “so he shall bee knowne a *Man,* because hee can *laugh;* a *wise Man* that hee knowes at *what* to laugh, and a *valiant Man* that he *dares* laugh: for hee that *laughs* is iustly reputed more *wise,* than at whom it is *laughed.*” By building the association between laughter and knowledge or understanding, Donne’s paradox succeeds both in praising an unworthy object and in overturning common assumptions about that object. His final observation, however, that “in these later *formall* times... when our *superstitious Civility of manners* is become a mutuall *tickling flattery* of one another, almost euery man affecteth an *humour of iesting*” specifically targets court culture and condemns those who use laughter to feign wisdom. Donne implicates himself as well as the reader in this larger critique when he claims in the closing lines that “I thinke all *wisemen,* if any *wisemen* doe read this *Paradox,* will *laugh* both at it and me.” In true form, Donne’s paradox contradicts itself and leaves the reader with a conundrum. If we are wise or wish to appear wise, then we should laugh. However, if we laugh at the paradox, then the very proposition “That a Wise Man is knowne by much Laughing” is shown to be laughable and therefore unwise.

As Donne struggled for career advancement following his marriage to Anne More in 1601, he sharpened his critique of courtly culture and continued to mock ostentatious displays of learning. While *Paradox X* depicts the courtier as one whose laughter betrays a sophisticated understanding of social mores, *The Courtier's Library* (c.1603-11) positions the courtier more explicitly as the butt of the joke and aims to generate laughter at his expense. Originally printed and circulated under the title *Catalogus librorum aulicorum incomparabilium et non vendibilium* [The Catalogue of Courtier's Books: Rare and Not for Sale], this Latin prose satire is one of Donne's most understudied works.²¹ This is especially unfortunate because the *Catalogus* furnishes us with one of the best portraits of Donne's contemporary reading and reveals the extent to which he was engaged with continental scholarship in both Latin and vernacular languages. In her study of the English reception of Rabelais, Anne Lake Prescott considers the relationship between Donne's *Catalogus* and the famous catalogue of "nonbooks" at the Library of St. Victor in chapter seven of *Pantagruel*.²² Like Prescott, I wish to focus on the comic or satirical dimensions of Donne's work but am more interested in what the *Catalogus* reveals about Donne's own sense of humor and how skeptical attitudes toward learning influenced coterie circles. More recently, Piers Brown has expanded biographical readings of the *Catalogus* by adding to Simpson's explication of contemporary allusions an account of how the satire also comments on the conditions of scholarly and secretarial work during the period.²³ While Brown

²¹ After discovering a manuscript version of the *Catalogus* at Trinity College, Evelyn Simpson published an English translation with extensive commentary in 1930 but only two scholars have considered the work at length since then.

²² On nonbooks, imaginary libraries, and satirical catalogues see: Anne Lake Prescott. "Nonbooks." *Imagining Rabelais in Renaissance England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 167-179, J.W. Spargo. *Imaginary Books and Libraries: An Essay in Lighter Vein* (Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1952), Walter Blumenthal. *Imaginary Books and Phantom Libraries* (Philadelphia: G.S. MacManus Co, 1966).

²³ I am citing the English translation in Piers Brown. "'Hac ex consilio meo via progredieris': Courtly Reading and Secretarial Mediation in Donne's The Courtier's Library." *Renaissance Quarterly* 61.3 (2008): 833-866. All subsequent citations of this work are to this edition.

focuses mainly on the implicit contrast that Donne draws between learned secretaries and ignorant patrons, I suggest that the *Catalogus* can also be read as a product or manifestation of Donne's skepticism. It is not only courtly knowledge as mediated through epitomes or *sententiae* that he satirizes, but knowledge itself within the broader context of humanist education.²⁴

At its most basic form, the *Catalogus* is a short *jeu d'esprit* that comprises a list of 34 imaginary books and a short preface describing how a courtier can use this list to make himself appear learned at court. By "imaginary," I mean that the books with such humorous titles as "On Removing the Word Not from the Ten Commandments, and adding it to the Apostles' Creed" are entirely made up. While they may be attributed to real authors, like Bonaventura in the case of the previous example, they do not actually correspond to any existing works. In his preface, Donne advises the would be courtier who has little time for study, having slept until "after ten in the morning," to avail himself of the *Catalogus* since "it is enough for lazy wits to have the appearance of knowing." Although Donne's depiction of the courtier is clearly exaggerated for comic effect, the suggestion that choosing "the clothes appropriate to the day, place, and passions" is more important than "reading and the improvement of your mind," not only speaks to the superficiality of court culture but to the devaluation of learning more generally.

Since the courtier wishes both to conceal his ignorance and to impress his companions, Donne argues that he should avoid citing familiar works all together. "Having abandoned those authors that they call the Classics to academics and schoolmasters" he writes, "seek out books difficult for others to locate." While the study of classical antiquity was once the foundation of

²⁴ On the *Catalogus* see also: Anne Lake Prescott. "Menippean Donne." *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 165-168, Claire Preston, "The Jocund Cabinet and the Melancholy Museum in Seventeenth-Century English Literature," in *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (R.J.W. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 87-106. For topical references consult Evelyn Simpson's explanatory notes in the appendix of John Donne. "The Courtier's Library, or Catalogus Librorum Aulicorum." (London: Nonesuch Press, 1930).

humanistic education, Donne suggests that such learning no longer informs civic life and is largely unnecessary for professional advancement. Attending only to outward appearances, Donne's courtier considers learning an adornment to be displayed and admired rather than used. Even if the courtier's companions are less foolish than the courtier, they will still be duped by the novelty of the *Catalogus* since there is no book more obscure or rare than the one that never existed. Donne therefore concludes the preface with the following instructions: "I note down this list for your use that having prepared these books, you might suddenly spring forth on almost all topics, if not more learned than others, at least learned in a different way."

While much of the satire in the *Catalogus* is topical, referencing individual persons or contemporary events, it also satirizes learning in a much more general sense. Evelyn Simpson was right, therefore, to describe Donne's work as "an elaborate jest in the manner of Rabelais."²⁵ Donne's library parodies the state of humanist learning in seventeenth-century England, in much the same way that Rabelais's Library of St. Victor parodies the state of scholastic learning in sixteenth-century France.²⁶ Although Donne's list of books is shorter than Rabelais's, both draw attention to the difficulty of organizing and consuming knowledge, especially in an age when print technology had suddenly and dramatically increased the quantity of information available. Since the prospect of mastery seemed more illusory than ever, it was perhaps sensible for courtiers like Donne's to seek a means "to avoid the shame of ignorance and the bother of reading." Indeed, unlike Rabelais, Donne specifically targets the widespread use of epitomes, commonplace books, and *sententiae* to feign knowledge at court. But why should such bleak

²⁵ Simpson 149.

²⁶ On Rabelais's library see: Barbara Bowen, "Rabelais and the Library of Sainte-Victor," in *Lapidary Inscriptions* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1991), 159-70 and *Enter Rabelais, Laughing* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1998), 95-101, François Moreau, "La Bibliothèque de l'Abbaye de Sainte-Victor," *Littératures* 19 (1988): 37-42, Floyd Gray, *Rabelais et le comique du discontinu* (Paris: Champion, 1994), 83-105.

intellectual conditions ultimately give rise to laughter? The exuberance of Rabelais's mock-catalogue, like so many of his lists, results from a celebration of excess and a festive inversion of the serious and the ludic, but the quality of Donne's laughter is markedly different. While most scholars are discouraged when confronted with the limits of human knowledge, the skeptic is relieved to find cause for mental rest. In some ways like the courtier, who is freed from the "bother [fastidium]" of study, the skeptic takes pleasure in such lamentations as Donne's "no one knows everything" and there is "nothing more rare than to be fully learned." In the context of the *Catalogus*, these negative appraisals give rise to a kind of laughter whose therapeutic qualities resemble those of skeptical tranquility.

While scholars often look to Donne's poetry for skeptical themes or motifs, the *Catalogus* attests specifically to his familiarity with skeptical works by Sextus Empiricus, Cornelius Agrippa, and Erasmus, all of whom are named in the preface. The fourteenth book on Donne's list, "A Handful of Oak trees, or The Art of Getting Ahold of Transcendentals," is attributed to Raimond Sebond, but clearly invokes Montaigne whose "Apology for Raymond Sebond" is perhaps *the* hallmark text of Renaissance skepticism. The title playfully mocks the foundational premise of natural theology which is that knowledge of God's creation can lead to knowledge of God himself. For Donne, the attempt to get "ahold" of such knowledge with just a "handful of oak trees" is as comical as it is absurd- one would literally be left grasping at nothing. Skepticism not only informs the contents of Donne's imaginary library but also the very premise of his satire. While some may despair at our inability to assimilate the whole of human learning, Donne turns this condition into material for a jest and, like the skeptic, relinquishes desire for certain knowledge of uncertain things.

In many ways, we can read *The Courtier's Library* as a comic representation of what a skeptic's library might look like. Since the skeptic believes that nothing can be known, his shelves are filled with imaginary books; these books have titles which suit his fancy but no actual contents. Take for example, entry 22 which reads:

On Equilibrium, Two Volumes. Or the Art of Settling on a Position in Controversy. The First method is called simple, because given a controversy (such as, is there such a thing as transubstantiation?) yes and no are written on different but equal pieces of paper, and placed on a pair of scales, and the heavier must be stuck to. The other method is compound, because given a proposition from one side, another is given from the other: such as Peter sits in Rome, and John sits in Rome, and even if they are written in letters of equal size, and so on, the heavier must be chosen: by Erasmus of Rotterdam.

While the polemical doctrine of transubstantiation is a serious subject, Donne pokes fun at the methods by which such disputes are settled. The equipoised scale, in particular, became something of a skeptical motif after Montaigne had the image cast on a medal alongside his personal motto: "Que-sais-je [What do I know]?" While this scale typically represents a mental state that is free from perturbation, Donne's satire conflates this philosophical end with laughter. Furthermore, it trivializes some of the most divisive issues at stake in recent religious conflicts in order to suggest that the confessional divide is perhaps not so vast. Even overtly partisan entries like the one targeting Richard Topcliffe, notorious under Elizabeth's rule for his persecution of Catholics, speak only to Donne's hatred of violence and disloyalty. If skepticism is a way of exercising one's judgement, for Donne this becomes a type of play.

More blatantly scatological entries like "Cardano, On the nothingness of a fart" or "The Afternoon Belchings of Edward Hoby, or On Univocals, namely, On the Right of Kings, and On Chimeras, such as the King's Evil, the French Disease, and so on" are humorous because they comically deflate the pretensions of legitimate scholarship like Cardano's *De subtilitate rerum* [On the Subtlety of Things] which is an exemplary work of transcendental philosophy. Although

Donne's titles are clearly meant in jest, they effectively communicate the sentiment that such serious scholarship and lofty ideas are indeed nothing but hot air. As I turn now to the erotic poetry, I want to suggest that, as in the case of Cardano's fart, it is Donne's skeptical laughter that draws us repeatedly back to the exigencies of the body, back to the realm of immediate, sensual experience.

II. Donne's Mock-Metaphysics of Love: "Elegy XIX"

By first situating Donne's skeptical laughter within the context of wit-writing at the Inns-of-Court, I have stressed the importance of attending to the particular social conventions that would have determined the meaning of his work for coterie audiences. The historically and culturally specific nature of such laughter, however, makes this context exceedingly difficult for scholars to reconstruct. In the case of the *Songs and Sonnets* and the *Elegies*, one might even say that some of the most contentious debates in Donne criticism have arisen from disagreements over what Donne intended seriously and what he put forth only in jest. As J.B. Leishman has noted, "if Donne's contemporaries had an excessive, a too exclusive, admiration for his sheer wit, modern readers often fail to recognize it for what it is and to make allowance for it."²⁷

Perhaps more than any other literary critic of the twentieth century, William Empson understood and appreciated Donne's sense of humor and I want to suggest that he was right to observe that so often Donne's most radical thought and most compelling work is carried out under the pretense of a joke.²⁸ By revisiting "Elegy XIX," a poem that Empson famously defended, I argue that skepticism not only enables Donne to comically overturn conventional notions of chastity

²⁷ J.B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit* (New York: Hutchinson & Co., 1962), 147.

²⁸ The joke is quite central to Empson's critical idiom. In a letter to Frank Kermode, for example, Empson defends his reading of *The Songs and Sonnets* by conceding that, "I am ready to agree that all these dangerous references were jokes, or at least he would have claimed they were if accused of blasphemy; but why did the joke seem so piercing or alarming, or somehow true?" *Selected Letters of William Empson*, ed. John Haffenden (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 534.

and monogamy, but also provides philosophical justification for a more serious vindication of sexual love.

“Elegy XIX” or “To His Mistress Going to Bed,” which Empson grouped among “the jokey poems,” is easily one of Donne’s most controversial works.²⁹ It was omitted from the first printed edition of Donne’s poetry in 1633 and critical opinion has long been divided over whether the sexual encounter that the poem depicts is erotic or pornographic in nature and whether the male speaker is witty and vulnerable or sadistic and domineering.³⁰ While much of this controversy has resulted from difficulty in discerning the general tone of the poem, a small but meaningful variant in extant manuscripts is also to blame. At stake in this textual dispute is not only the integrity of a single poem but, as Empson put it, “the interests and the character of the poet himself.”³¹ By foregrounding the status of laughter and its relationship to skepticism in “Elegy XIX,” I follow Empson’s suggestion that the status of the “joke” bears directly on the poem’s larger meaning. Although skepticism has not generally been regarded as central to Donne’s erotic verse, I argue that it is especially necessary to understand his representation of women and sexual love.³²

The plot of “Elegy XIX” is straightforward enough, a man prompts his lover to undress and join him in bed, but the argument is far more complex. Donne’s bawdy wit becomes quickly apparent when, in the opening lines, the aroused speaker entreats his mistress to help him alleviate the agony of unfulfilled sexual desire.

Come, madam, come, all rest my powers defy,

²⁹ Ibid, 534.

³⁰ See especially John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind, Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014).

³¹ Empson, *William Empson: Essays in Renaissance Literature Vol. 1 Donne and the New Philosophy*, John Haffenden ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 60.

³² Scholars have instead thematized skepticism in poems like “The First Anniversary,” “Metempsychosis,” and “Satire III.” See for example, Kenneth Gross, “John Donne’s Lyric Skepticism: In Strange Way” *Modern Philology*. Vol. 101, No. 3 (February 2004): 371-99.

Until I labor, I in labor lie.
The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
Is tired with standing though he never fight.
(1-4)³³

While this initial complaint may recall the frustration of a Petrarchan lover, “Elegy XIX” is a celebration of requited and consummated love. Donne’s use of the word ‘powers’ denotes masculine potency and signals the onslaught of numerous sexual puns such as ‘labor’ which first refers to the physical exertion of intercourse but later to the discomfort of frustrated desire. Similar puns include the use of ‘standing’ to describe both a military stalemate and, as Carey suggests, the speaker’s “massive erection.”³⁴ Although critics have debated whether a similar scene in “The Extasie” where Donne characterizes chaste lovers “as 'twixt two equal armies fate/ suspends uncertain victory” should be read as comic, here the absurdity of love’s battle is unmistakable. There is nothing transcendental about this union and the soul remains tethered firmly to the body.

Donne’s use of ribald puns and vulgar imagery, however, does not immediately suggest that the relationship between the speaker and his mistress should be condemned. Even C.S. Lewis, who believed that Donne’s poetry was very much overrated, conceded that the poem “contains nothing intrinsically evil.”³⁵ If, as Herbert Grierson once supposed, Donne wrote the poem as an epithalamion celebrating his own marriage, then the chastity of the woman in question is beyond reproach. If, on the other hand, the “Madame” is either a rich married woman or a prostitute, as Gardner suggests, then there is little to redeem either her virtue or Donne’s depiction of adulterous love. It is interesting that although we know equally little about the male

³³ Donne, “Elegy XIX” or “To His Mistree Coming to Bed,” in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robbin Robbins (New York: Longman, 2010), 325-330. Subsequent citations of this poem will be given parenthetically by line number to this edition.

³⁴ Carey, *John Donne*, 105.

³⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 117.

speaker, critics eager to assess the decency of the lovers' relationship have focused on the marital status of the female beloved. While I agree with Gardner's dismissal of the epithalamion thesis, since it stems from the comment of a single seventeenth century reader, I do not think that the mistress's social or marital status is essential to Donne's statement about love. In order to pass moral judgement on the poem and its content, it is necessary to establish a criterion for assigning blame or pardon and this criterion, I argue, is exactly what Donne means to call in to question.

As the speaker bids the lady to remove her "girdle," her "spangled breastplate" and "happy busk," he effectively turns the literary convention of the chaste blazon into an erotic striptease (5-11). Emphasizing the luxurious quality of the woman's clothing, John Carey notes that "the sex exudes a strongly economic flavour."³⁶ While this interpretation complements Carey's larger view of Donne's ambition, enabling him to conflate social and financial aspirations with sexual ones, it misrepresents the speaker's argument that material goods actually pale in comparison to natural beauty. The girdle is "glistening," but the world inside is "far fairer" and only "th' eyes of busy fools" are distracted by the jewels adorning the breastplate (6-7). For the speaker, as for Donne, the woman's beautiful robe only obscures the greater beauty of her naked body. A simile detailing the moment when the lady's dress falls to the floor, "as when from flowry meads th' hill's shadow steals," invokes nature to critique the wealth that the rest of the world esteems. Carey's comment that the speaker "contrives to sound, provokingly, high-minded and dissolute at the same time" gets at the double valence of Donne's humor, but fails to register the way in which it reconciles the supposedly base desires of the body with the noble desires of the soul (14).³⁷

³⁶ Carey, 106.

³⁷ Ibid.

When the speaker compares his mistress to an angel wearing a white robe and invites her to “love’s hallowed temple, this soft bed,” he daringly appropriates the language and imagery of religion in order to suggest that their secular love is sacred (18). This rhetorical gesture is common in other poems like “The Canonization” where Donne develops his “religion” of love more thoroughly. In “Elegy XIX,” however, the speaker’s ridiculous conflation of physical and spiritual love is intended to make both the woman and the reader laugh. The speaker addresses his mistress directly saying:

thou, Angel, bring'st with thee
A heaven like Mahomet's Paradise; and though
Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know
By this these angels from an evil sprite:
Those set our hairs on end, but these our flesh upright.
(20-24)

The first lines flatter the woman, perhaps in a sacrilegious way, by comparing her sensual charms to those of the houris, beautiful virgin companions promised in the afterlife to the faithful according to Islam. The second lines, however, offer yet another phallic pun, ‘flesh upright,’ and suggest that good angels like the speaker’s mistress reveal themselves by causing erections.³⁸

The less than subtle nature of Donne’s humour evinces a knowing transgression of decorum but also subverts conventional opinions that dissociate the physical and the spiritual aspects of man. As Empson succinctly put it: “the joke is an argument that sexual pleasure is a part of heaven.”³⁹ This argument is as laughable as it is unorthodox but as the poem progresses, its philosophical basis as well as its plausibility become clearer.

³⁸ While Donne’s erotic angelology may seem outrageous to modern readers, Milton too entertained such thoughts in *Paradise Lost*. Recall that Adam receives an affirmative and sufficiently detailed answer when he demands of the angel Raphael: “Love not the heav'nly Spirits, and how their Love Express they, by looks, or do they mix immediate, touch?” (VIII.615-18).

³⁹ Empson, ““There Is No Penance Due to Innocence.”” *NYRB*. Dec. 3, 1981, pp. 4.

In the second half of the poem, a metaphysical conceit enthusiastically transforms the speaker's earthly angel into "my America!/ my new-found-land" (27). While recent critics, following Carey, have found in these lines evidence of a masculine desire to conquer and exploit the female body, they underestimate the way in which the context of the New World enables Donne to re-envision the power dynamics of sexual intercourse. The speaker's appeal to the woman to "License my roving hands" emphatically places her in a position of authority over him, much like Queen Elizabeth who had the power to grant or revoke charters granting access to "virgin" land.⁴⁰ If the mistress thus consents, then she becomes as "imperious" as her lover, which is to say that she is as eager to consummate their love. Considering Donne's membership in the Virginia Company, Thomas Hester reads "Elegy XIX" as a "rewriting of the English myth of America" and, more specifically, as a critique of Walter Raleigh's colonial ambitions.⁴¹ While the speaker plainly wants to "possess" the woman sexually, referring to her as "my kingdom," "My mine of precious stones," and "my empery," he knows that her autonomous will cannot and should not be subjected to his by force. With the concluding statement that "to enter these bonds is to be free," the speaker not only celebrates the sexual freedom (and release) that he enjoys in his lover's embrace, but also the mutuality of their love.⁴² While Donne's conceit certainly plays off of the misogynistic language of territorial conquest, the speaker's emphasis here on freedom

⁴⁰ Tom Cain, "John Donne and the Ideology of Colonization." *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol. 31, 2001: 440–476.

⁴¹ Thomas Hester. "Donne's (Re) Annunciation of the Virgin (ia Colony) in "Elegy XIX"." *South Central Review* (1987): 49-64.

⁴² Although Janel Mueller argues that women in Donne's poetry contribute to male selfhood, she suggests that, "Insofar as Donne's speakers associate the full mutuality of this human recognition with heterosexual intercourse freely undertaken and enjoyed, they rather strikingly represent the man and the woman as equals in love." "Women among the Metaphysicals: A Case, Mostly, of Being Donne for." *Modern Philology*, Vol.87, No.2, (Nov. 1989): 146.

suggests that his love is markedly *not* coercive, and that the mistress belongs to the lover only to the extent that they belong to each other.⁴³

Not all critics have found humour in “Elegy XIX,” but I want to suggest that the very same laughter that fuels Donne’s parodic play also lays the foundation for a skeptical critique of spiritual or transcendental love. The final two stanzas read like a mock-encomium in praise of nakedness as the speaker entices his mistress to cast off her last undergarment. “Full nakedness!”, the speaker cheers, “All joys are due to thee/ As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be/ To taste whole joys.” While the speaker playfully turns the literal meaning of ecstasy as the separation of the soul from the body to his own advantage, he also engages in a philosophical debate about the immortality of the soul. The metaphor of the body as clothing for the soul originates in Plato’s *Phaedo* where its larger purpose is to suggest that even if the soul is stronger than the body, the one must eventually succumb to the other in death. By celebrating the naked body instead of the disembodied soul, Donne rejects a central tenant of both Neoplatonic philosophy and Christian theology.⁴⁴ The speaker’s jest thus rests on a radically materialist conception of the soul that subverts the conventional hierarchy of spirit over flesh.

For the sake of our present argument about laughter, I am mainly interested in the gleeful manner in which the amorous speaker advances his skeptical claim since, in the Platonic dialogue, the argument that Cebes makes about the body as clothing for the soul evokes sorrow rather than joy, much less ‘whole joys’ as in “Elegy XIX.” In the *Phaedo*, the narrator recounts

⁴³ Robbin Robbins has suggested that Donne’s metaphor of the free captive likely parodies the KJV of 1 Corinthians 7:22 which explains that “for he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant.” Related to this paradoxical conception of Christian liberty, and I think foremost in Donne’s mind, is an earlier verse in the same chapter which recommends marriage as a means to avoid fornication. Paul writes, “The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.” 1 Corinthians 7:4.

⁴⁴ On Donne’s anti-Platonism see Leishman, *Monarch of Wit*, 172 and Ramie Targoff, *John Donne Body and Soul* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008), 58-59.

how “all of us, as we afterwards remarked to one another, had an unpleasant feeling at hearing what they said. When we had been so firmly convinced before, now to have our faith shaken seemed to introduce a confusion and uncertainty, not only into the previous argument, but into any future one; either we were incapable of forming a judgment, or there were no grounds of belief.”⁴⁵ While Plato’s speakers have reason to fear that the soul is not immortal, and more specifically that soon Socrates’s soul will die with his body, Donne’s speaker, much like Socrates himself, is undisturbed by what he cannot know of the afterlife. He rejoices, not in the metaphysical pleasures of the uncertain future, but in the physical pleasures of the present moment and bids his mistress to do the same.

Casting Donne’s speaker as both a wit and a skeptic, also sheds new light on the strange epistemological turn in the final stanza which favorably compares all women to “mystic books” with “gay coverings/ made for lay-men” (39-40). Again, placing women in a position of authority over men, the male speaker explains that access to such feminine mysteries is granted only to those “whom their imputed grace will dignify” (42). While the first conceit appeals to female sovereignty by comparing the mistress to a Monarch who licenses the acquisition of new territories, here the mistress is compared to God who alone imparts grace to sinners. Donne’s profane use of the technical word ‘imputed’ invokes a specifically Calvinist conception of righteousness which is not earned but given to man by Christ.⁴⁶ In a similar way, Donne’s speaker suggests that his mistress freely bestows her favor(s) on him, even though he is unworthy. However, once we learn that the mystical books which the speaker “must see revealed” contain only his Mistress’s most intimate parts, the skeptical nature of his humorous critique of divine revelation becomes readily apparent. “Then, since that I may know,” the

⁴⁵ Plato, *The Four Socratic Dialogues of Plato*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 225.

⁴⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III. xi. 2, 21-23.

speaker reasons, “As liberally as to a midwife, show” (43-44). Although the conceit of the mystical book leads one to expect that the speaker seeks some kind of profound knowledge about women, he only wishes to “know” them in the carnal sense of the word.

Throughout the poem, Donne’s skeptical laughter plays off of a seeming disparity between body and soul, immanence and transcendence, sacred and profane, in order to challenge disparaging conceptions of sexual love and bodily pleasure. Determining the status of such laughter in the oft cited concluding couplets is of utmost importance because it bears directly on both the speaker’s attitude toward his mistress and on Donne’s attitude toward women more generally. The speaker says,

Thyself: cast all, yea, this white linen hence
There is no penance much less [due to] innocence
To teach thee, I am naked first; why than,
what needst thou have more covering than a man?
(45-48)

Before addressing the textual variant which Empson fought so hard to reinstate, I want to emphasize the effect of the enjambment between lines 44 and 45, “show/ Thyself: cast all.” While the speaker clearly intends “Thyself,” to be the object of his revelation, its grammatical position in the next line also reinforces the idea that the woman is the subject or agent of the casting off. She undresses herself. Critics often compare “Elegy XIX” to Ovid’s *Amores* I.5 and Propertius’s *Elegies* II.15 which, as William Bastone notes, are “the only two poems in Augustan love elegy which describe a successful sexual encounter.”⁴⁷ One marked difference, however, between Donne and this Latin tradition must be observed. Whereas Donne’s speaker pleads and urges his mistress to “unlace yourself,” Ovid’s speaker reports bluntly: “I tore off the dress” and

⁴⁷ Diane J. Rayor and William W. Batstone (eds.) *Latin Lyric and Elegiac Poetry: An Anthology of New Translations*. New York: Garland, 1995.

Propertius's speaker even more so: "if you insist from pride in lying there dressed, you'll feel my hands ripping your clothes."⁴⁸ Donne's speaker is vulgar, but he is not lewd and by undressing himself first, before the still hesitant lady, he deliberately diffuses the threat of sexual violence. Carey and others suggest that the laughter in "Elegy XIX" is at the woman's expense, but each comparison only compounds her sense of agency in love.

In a scathing review of Helen Gardner's 1965 edition of Donne's love poetry, Empson argued that far from improving upon the text that Herbert Grierson had established in 1912, Gardner's editorial choices obscure the poet's true meaning.⁴⁹ The crux of this heated argument rests on the "much less"/"due to" textual variant found in line 46 of "Elegy XIX" which has since been raised to the level of ideological dispute in Donne studies.⁵⁰ Grierson, following the first printed edition of the poem, chose "due to" under the false conception that "Elegy XIX" was an epithalamion. Grierson believed that by printing "due to innocence," he was following a revision that Donne himself had made which resulted in a "softening" of the poem's larger meaning.⁵¹ Indeed, Gardner's "much less" has the moralizing effect of shaming the lovers for having sex and condemning their lack of remorse.

Although Empson maintains that Grierson printed the variant most consonant with the poem's celebration of sexual love, he also suggests that Grierson did so for the wrong reasons. Referring back to the conceit of territorial conquest, Empson explains that "the reason why she [the mistress] is innocent is that she is the Noble Savage, like Adam and Eve before the Fall...

⁴⁸ Ovid, *Amores* I.5 and Propertius, *Elegies* II.15.

⁴⁹ See Empson's "Donne in the New Edition" as well as Gardner's response in *Critical Quarterly* and later in *NYRB*.

⁵⁰ I say "ideological" because while the manuscript evidence points to the authority of Gardner's "much less," there is little support for her claim the "due to" is scribal in origin. Furthermore, as the recent *Variorum* edition notes, nearly two thirds of the existing 67 manuscripts, only 43 of which Gardner examined, contain some version of "due to."

she is America, where they are free as Nature made them.”⁵² The speaker thus says that ‘there is no penance’ because neither he nor his mistress are guilty of sin. Here, I would like to lend additional support to Empson’s reading by considering the possible sources for Donne’s libertine naturalism. While Empson suggests that “it may seem improbable that Donne would be thinking about the Noble Savage” we may cite Donne’s engagement with the *Essais* as proof that this was likely not the case. Montaigne’s favorable description of the New World in “Des Cannibales” is often cited as the source of the “Noble Savage” concept and we know that this essay had influenced English literary culture since Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* quotes directly from it. Much like Donne’s speaker who eulogizes nakedness and is himself naked by the end of “Elegy XIX,” Montaigne claims in his notice to the reader that “If I had lived among those nations, which (they say) yet dwell under the sweet liberty of nature's primitive laws, I assure thee I would most willingly have painted myself quite fully and quite naked.”⁵³ Although the catch for Montaigne is that he cannot in fact lay claim to such “sweet liberty,” I argue that, at least in the imaginative context of the poem, Donne’s speaker can.

Reflecting on the overall tone of “Elegy XIX,” Empson claims that “it is all a kind of joke, sure enough, but it tries out a position which might become very serious; so there is no change of tone when he arrives at the tremendous penultimate couplet.”⁵⁴ While modern critics have often cited Donne’s naturalism in readings of the love poetry, they have not recognized skepticism as an equally formative source of Donne’s poetic arguments. One important exception, however, is Louis Bredvold who long ago argued that Donne’s “Naturalism can not be understood apart from

⁵² Empson, *Essays on Renaissance Literature*, 101.

⁵³ Michel de Montaigne, “To the Reader.” *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*. Trans. Donald Frame, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1976), 2.

⁵⁴ Empson, *Essays in Renaissance Literature*, 161.

his Scepticism, which makes it possible. His appeal to Nature as a guide and norm is a substitute, as he himself makes very clear, for the authority of society and its accepted code of morality.”⁵⁵ By positing “Des Cannibales” as a likely source text for “Elegy XIX,” I argue that skepticism is not only essential for understanding Donne’s naturalism, but also its presentation as a joke.

The final question that the speaker poses to his mistress, “What needst thou have more covering than a man?”, has typically been read as a gross depiction of the sexual act which reinstates a sexist gender hierarchy. Achsah Guibbory, for example, argues that “once her [the mistress’s] confidence in female superiority has been reestablished, Donne gives a final twist to the argument that conclusively and wittily reasserts male supremacy by literally placing the man ‘on top.’”⁵⁶ Here the speaker’s wit is predicated on his misogyny. While I agree with Guibbory that a conservative reading of this line would provoke laughter at the woman, I want to suggest that an alternative reading is possible. As Guibbory herself acknowledges in a different essay on Donne’s erotic poetry, the speaker’s final line is “a witty revision of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:3-7.”⁵⁷ Tellingly, Guibbory neither quotes the actual verse nor provides further commentary since this would contradict her larger thesis that Donne’s *Elegies* stem from a masculine anxiety about female rule (Elizabeth) and aim only to reinstate male sovereignty. The passage from Corinthians reads as follows:

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a

⁵⁵Louis Bredvold, “The Naturalism of Donne in Relation to Some Renaissance Traditions,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 22 (1923): 474.

⁵⁶ Achsah Guibbory, “‘Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So’: The Politics of Love in Donne’s Elegies.” *ELH*. Vol.57, No. 4 (Winter 1990): 822.

⁵⁷ Guibbory, “Erotic Poetry.” *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 136

shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.

Readings that emphasize the speaker's misogyny depend on an obscure meaning of the word "cover" which is used to describe animal sex: a stallion "covers" a mare.⁵⁸ These are the only explanatory notes that the new *Variorum* gives for the line. However, given the thematic centrality of nakedness in the poem, I want to defend the legitimacy of the biblical allusion that directly speaks to the clothing that women must wear. The dictate that women must "cover" their heads is as sexist as the image of a stallion that "covers" a mare but the speaker's provocative suggestion that his mistress need *not* "have more covering than a man" completely subverts this hierarchy. Their sexual union, whether or not it takes place in the context of the New World or a prelapsarian world prior to the divine mandate that "he [Adam] will rule over you [Eve]," not only rejects discourses that denigrate or shame the body but also explores a heterosexual relationship that is based on mutual desire and equality between men and women. That modern critics, even feminist critics, have been hostile to a reading that so cunningly vindicates female sexuality is a mystery.

While Gardner dismissed Grierson for adopting the "softer" reading of Donne's elegy, it is actually her "much less" that censors Donne's radical, and necessarily skeptical, treatment of love. If Gardner agrees with Empson that "Elegy XIX" is indeed a joke, though this should not be taken as a given even though she acknowledges Donne's "brilliantly improper wit," her text reduces Donne's laughter to a kind of cynical reinstatement of the status quo that punishes the lovers for daring to aspire to such freedom and equality.⁵⁹ In any case, Gardner did concede that

⁵⁸ Examples from the *Variorum* include Sanders 1971; Hurley 1978; Docherty 1989.

⁵⁹ Gardner, "There is No Penance Due to Innocence": An Exchange," *The New York Review of Books*, March 4, 1982, 1.

Donne could very well have composed “due to” in addition to “much less,” but she leaves the matter up to interpretation since “neither Grierson, nor Professor Empson, nor I can claim to ‘prove’ scientifically anything at all.”⁶⁰

In arguing that Donne’s skeptical laughter challenges gender norms even while confirming them, I do not mean to dismiss his misogyny, which is far less ambiguous in poems like “The Comparison” or “Go and Catch a Falling Star.” Nevertheless, Guibbory’s claim that “It is unfair to Donne’s poetry, and inconsistent, to treat the misogynous cynical poems as rhetorical (hence, not ‘really’ meant) while reading the celebrations of mutual love as indicative of Donne’s ‘true’ feelings” leaves little room for the kind of wit that his contemporaries were right to celebrate and fails to account for the conventions of coterie poetry.⁶¹ In “Elegy XIX,” it is not Donne who addresses the mistress but Donne’s speaker, and scholars like Martin Dosworth have done well to remind us that the poem itself provides no evidence that the woman is even present before the speaker or that she ever “comes to bed.”⁶² Scholars like John Carey have wished to dismiss Empson as a “crack-brained” reader and Empson himself once identified as a “licensed buffoon,” but this is all the more reason why he understood Donne’s jokes best of all. While “Elegy XIX” evokes laughter with penis puns and jokes about sexual pleasure in heaven, it also offers a skeptical defense of nakedness that challenges disparaging attitudes toward the body and female desire.

III. Skeptical Laughter and Religious Dogmatism in “Satire III”

⁶⁰ See Empson, *William Empson: Essays in Renaissance Literature*, 60.

⁶¹ Guibbory, ““Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So,”” 813. On the difficulty of assessing Donne’s attitudes toward women see Theresa Dipasquale, “Donne and the Spectre of Misogyny” in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*. ed. Shami, Flynn, Hester. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 678-689.

⁶² Martin Dodsworth, “Donne, Drama and Despotism in ‘To his Mistress going to Bed.’” *Essays in Criticism* (2008) 58 (3): 210-236.

If there were a single work in Donne's oeuvre to rival Montaigne's *Apologie* as an exposition of philosophical skepticism it would be "Satire III," which scholars have frequently cited as evidence of the poet's own skeptical crisis, but here there are more differences than similarities worthy of note. For one, Donne's skepticism is not strictly epistemological since he does not, like Montaigne or Descartes, call the very basis of human knowledge into question. Donne limits his focus to the possibility of attaining divine knowledge and while philosophy furnishes him with a method of inquiry, theology furnishes the matter for doubt. It is not a general diversity of opinions that vexes Donne but a particular diversity of religious beliefs which threatens to undermine both his speaker's right to freedom of consciousness and the authority of the Church of England. Furthermore, while Montaigne invented the essay to complement the always provisional nature of his judgement, Donne situates his speaker's heroic quest for "true religion" within the context of verse satire, a genre that aims specifically to give rise to laughter. Scholars like Joshua Scodel and Richard Strier have, to differing degrees, championed "Satire III" as a skeptical defense of personal freedom, but they have not addressed how and why such a defense is articulated through the medium of satire.⁶³ By giving equal attention to the satirical and skeptical objectives of the poem, I argue that in "Satire III," skeptical laughter enables Donne to distance himself from the enthusiasm of religious dogmatists and to negotiate a practical stance toward secular authority.

The opening lines of "Satire III" foreground the speaker's conflicted emotions and immediately call the viability of satirical laughter into question. Donne begins "Satire III" with a

⁶³ On Donne's skepticism in Satire III see Joshua Scodel, "The Medium Is the Message: Donne's 'Satire 3,' To Sir Henry Wotton" (Sir, More Than Kisses), and the Ideologies of the Mean," *Modern Philology* (1993): 479-511 and Richard Strier, "Radical Donne: 'Satire III.'" *ELH*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Summer, 1993): 283-322.

meta-reflection on whether the genre of satire can be morally permissible and socially productive in a contemporary context. He writes,

Kind pity chokes my spleen; brave scorn forbids
Those tears to issue which swell my eyelids;
I must not laugh, nor weep sins and be wise;
Can railing, then, cure these worn maladies?
(1-4)⁶⁴

The vivid image of the speaker's writhing spleen not only pits laughter against tears, but also contrasts classical and Christian approaches to affect and emotion. Puzzling over the speaker's prohibition of weeping, Strier remarks that "why this speaker 'must not laugh' [at] sins is, in Christian terms at least, easily apprehended" but I would add that, in generic terms, the speaker's prohibition of laughter is even more surprising.⁶⁵ While Donne's description of the speaker's spleen suggests a general penchant for self-scrutiny, to look literally inside oneself, it also invokes the physiology associated specifically with satire.

Following the authority of antiquity, early modern physicians regarded the spleen as the seat of laughter in the humoral body and this understanding became a paradigmatic feature of comedy and satire. In his first satire, for example, Persius confesses that, "sum (petulanti splene) cachinno [I laugh with a petulant spleen]" and a character in Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* similarly exclaims, "my spleen is great with laughter."⁶⁶ By suppressing his impulse to laugh, Donne's speaker suggests that laughter may ultimately be incompatible with both the religious injunction to take pity and the philosophical injunction to be 'wise.' In Roman satire, laughter serves not only to delight [delectare] readers but also to instruct [docere] them, and the satirist himself fulfills this privileged role of truth-teller.⁶⁷ Donne's speaker, by contrast, doubts

⁶⁴ Donne, *The Complete Poems*, 387-396.

⁶⁵ Strier, "Radical Donne," 287.

⁶⁶ Persius, "Satire I," line 12. and Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, V.2.

⁶⁷ Horace, for example, writes "*ridentem dicere verum* [to speak the truth while laughing]." *Sermones*, 1.1.24.

satire's ability to deliver a serious moral message and demonstrates awareness that laughter, in a Christian cultural context, no longer enjoys the esteem it once had and, in political context, may no longer be prudent. Strier and Scodel both maintain that "Satire III" allows for a more autonomous subject than New Historicism has typically granted, but neither acknowledges that, to the extent that satirical laughter is tied intrinsically to the ethic of parrhesia [free speech], its suppression by "force" or "power" also bears directly on the exercise of individual freedom.⁶⁸

Thomas Hester compares Donne's opening lines to Juvenal's tenth satire which similarly emphasizes the satirist's emotions by contrasting Democritus's laughter with Heraclitus' tears. While Juvenal affirms the wisdom of both philosophers, he ultimately appropriates Democritean laughter to ridicule the prayers of those who seek wealth, power, or glory before true virtue. Donne's speaker also ridicules contemporary religious practices, but I want to suggest that his laughter essentially lacks the moralizing certitude of Juvenal's. By shedding doubt on the efficacy of 'railing,' Donne establishes the importance of skepticism to his satire and redefines laughter as a means to find truth rather than to dictate it. Indeed, the question that the speaker poses concerning laughter and tears is only the first of sixteen questions, some of which are rhetorical, others of which are open-ended. We have seen that the interrogative form can serve as the opposite of a declarative statement. However, when Donne's speaker compares religious devotion in the present age to philosophical inquiry in past ages, his use of negative questions makes matters even more confusing.

Is not our mistress, fair Religion,
As worthy of all our souls' devotion
As virtue was in the first blinded age?
Are not heaven's joys as valiant to assuage

⁶⁸ See Ralph Rosen, "Laughter," in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics* (London: Blackwell, 2015), Catherine Keane, *Figuring Genre in Roman Satire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Jennifer L. Ferris Hill, "Truth-Telling Laughter," in *Roman Satire and the Old Comic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 23-37, Maria Plaza, *The Function of Humour in Roman Verse Satire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Lusts, as earth's honour was to them?
(5-9)

Negative questions often presume an affirmative answer but this is not always the case in English and Donne exploits this grammatical ambiguity in order to complement the skeptical agenda of his satire. While religion ought to warrant the same devotion as virtue, philosophy may very well prevail in the end.

That 'heaven's joys' should be united with the 'joys which flesh can taste' is as provocative as the suggestion that 'blind philosophers' shall 'surpass us in the end.' Donne's effort to posit the soul as the entity 'which doth/ Give this flesh power to taste' recalls the 'whole joys' of "Elegy XIX" but here it is not 'imputed grace' which womankind bestows on man but 'imputed faith' which God bestows on philosophers. Strier is right therefore to note that "Donne is playing" and that "this may be serious play."⁶⁹ To expand on the nature of this play, however, we must recognize that religion here is already the object of laughter, not philosophy. Before Donne even turns to satirize the diverse institutions of the Christian church, he idolatrously pits the charms of Philosophia, a lady praised by both humanists and pagans alike, against those of "fair Religion."

Critical attention has focused mainly on the five character sketches that mock different attitudes toward religious devotion, but I want to suggest that the speaker's skepticism keeps the alternative path offered initially by philosophy in plain view. While Donne's first three exempla, the Catholic Mirreus, the Protestant Crantz, and the Anglican Graius, clearly attack the churches of Rome, Geneva, and England, they reflect the speaker's skeptical outlook since they ascribe religion to the domain of custom, literally habit or clothing. Each enamored of their own religion, the Catholic Mirreus worships the tattered "statecloth" of his mistress at Rome while the

⁶⁹ Strier, "Radical Donne," 289.

Calvinist Crantz prefers the “plain, simple, sullen” look of a country wench, and Graius admires the “new like fashions” of an English lass (47-57). Sextus Empiricus carefully distinguishes skepticism from both the positive dogmatism of those who “have claimed to have found the truth” and the negative dogmatism of those who “have asserted that it cannot be apprehended.”⁷⁰ Like Donne’s speaker, who makes “true religion” the object of an epic quest, Sextus characterizes the Skeptic as the one who “continues to search.” If Mirreus, Crantz, and Graius, each represent a different form of dogmatism, it remains to be seen what a skeptical approach to religion might look like.

With his description of Phrygius who “doth abhor/ all” and “knowing some women whores, dares marry none,” Donne represents yet another form devotional error (62-64). While Strier identifies Phrygius as a skeptic, he overlooks a subtle but essential distinction between Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism that bears directly on the schematic progression of the poem. Strier argues that “it is important to see that Phrygius is not what, in philosophical terms, would be called a negative dogmatist” because “his position, to reiterate, is not that all women/churches are bad.”⁷¹ I agree with Strier’s general representation of Phrygius but object to his definitions of “skepticism” and “negative dogmatist.” In the opening of *The Outlines of Skepticism*, Sextus groups the Academic together with the Dogmatist precisely because both stop searching for the truth. Phrygius, in a similar fashion, does not deny that a true woman exists but does despair of ever finding her. Strier’s insight that Phrygius’s epithet “careless” refers to skeptical ataraxia is etymologically plausible but unlikely since Academic skeptics did not posit

⁷⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 3.

⁷¹ Strier, “Radical Donne,” 296. Scodel argues by contrast that this position is the “practical equivalent of negative dogmatism.” “The Medium is the Message,” 496.

therapeutic tranquility as their primary end.⁷² Thomas Hester argues, I think more convincingly, that Phrygius represents one of the many heretical sects— most likely the Barrowists— that were multiplying in England during the mid-seventeenth century.⁷³ Like Phrygius, the Barrowists believe that “all” churches were potentially contaminated by the idolatry of Rome and advocate for complete separation from them. The epithet “careless” then refers to the rashness of these radical dissenters.⁷⁴ Given the scope of Donne’s first three caricatures, it makes sense that we should encounter some representation of the Puritan sects and Phrygius’ sexual abstinence may even be a joke at their expense.

The final portrait of Graccus who “loves all as one” resembles the viewpoint that Donne likely held during the 1590’s and is the most difficult to dismiss. In a religious sense, Gracchus can be compared to the Latitudinarians who trivialize the doctrinal and ecclesiastical differences between religious sects and believe that there are many paths to salvation. Donne himself once claimed that “I never fettered nor imprisoned the word Religion... immuring it in a Rome, or a Wittemberg, or a Geneva; they are all virtual beams of one Sun... co-natural pieces of one circle.”⁷⁵ In the same way that all women are of one kind, so too are all churches of one kind. The philosophical analogue of this religious position is perhaps less clear, but I want to suggest that Graccus too is a skeptic, and a better one than Phrygius. In refusing to marry, both Graccus and Phrygius suspend their judgement about where and whether true religion can be found, but only Graccus ascribes religious difference and religion itself to custom. He reasons, “that so/ As

⁷² Strier, “Radical Donne,” 297.

⁷³ Thomas Hester, *Kinde Pity and Brave Scorn: John Donne’s Satyres* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982).

⁷⁴ Scodel maintains in addition that “careless” may also invoke an Epicurean avoidance of love. Following Strier, he argues that Donne ultimately rejects ataraxia as a philosophical ideal.

⁷⁵ Edmund Gosse, ed. *The Life and Letters of John Donne: Dean of St. Paul’s, Volume 1* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co. 1899): 226.

women do in divers countries go/ In divers habits, yet are still one kind,/ So doth, so is Religion” (67-68). Like Montaigne, who claims that “We are Christians by the same title that we are Perigordians or Germans,” Graccus regards confessional identity as the arbitrary product of cultural difference.⁷⁶

Donne's comparison of religion to “divers habits” suggests furthermore that the distinguishing features of Catholicism and Protestantism are as superficial and perhaps as easily shed as the shirt on one’s back. Like the skeptic who opposes dogmatic opinion, Graccus evades the question of “true religion” by non-dogmatically assenting to the custom(s) of his various lovers. By emphasizing the diversity of women available to Graccus, Donne suggests that the moral authority of custom had, with the proliferation of divergent religious opinions, deteriorated by the end of the sixteenth century. Although Graccus refuses to privilege one church above another, we may assume that unlike Mirreus, Crantz, and Graius who disagree about the decadence or austerity of female adornment, Graccus admires that which is common to all: the woman’s naked body. This position at once invalidates the previous viewpoints and substantiates Donne’s satirical critique of religion. It would not be possible to laugh at the Catholic, Protestant, and Anglican churches unless one could, like Graccus, distance oneself from the truth claims of each. Although Donne attributes to Graccus the analogy that the church is to religion what clothing is to the body, this skeptical logic has been operative since the outset of the poem. In the absence of an objective criterion for discerning the “true religion,” Graccus attempts, ostensibly for practical purposes, to live in accordance with custom, but even this fails in the context of post-Reformation England to recommend a single course of action, a single woman/church to wed.

⁷⁶ Montaigne, (II.12, F.394).

Although Donne's speaker rejects Graccus in order to continue the search for true religion, it is ultimately force and not reason that renders his polyamory untenable. As if to deter us further from imitating the example of Phrygius or Graccus, both of which represent rational if not sensible responses to the problem of faith, the speaker admonishes his reader directly. "But unmoved, thou," he says, "Of force must one, and forc'd, but one allow,/ And the right; ask thy father which is she,/ Let him ask his" (70-72). Critics who read "Satire III" as representative of Donne's own spiritual crisis assume that 'thy father' refers to the poet's Catholic heritage, but I want to suggest that this appeal to paternal authority is complicated by the previous discourse on female chastity. If it is not possible to determine which women are false, then a mother's claims about 'thy father' are also non-evident and cannot be regarded as true. Donne articulates this doubt more clearly in "The Indifferent" when his speaker taunts his faithful lover(s) by asking, "Will it not serve your turn to do as did your mothers?"⁷⁷ It may do well to ask thy father which is the "true religion," but you will have to find him first. Horace often invokes his father to assure the reader that his moral prescriptions are virtuous, as when he claims that "the best of fathers formed me," but this traditional *mos maiorum* [custom of the ancestors (literally our betters)] conceit produces more doubt than assurance in Donne's satire.

Donne's speaker seems now to contradict himself, advocating both for Mirreus who values tradition and for Graius who "embraceth her whom his godfathers will," but this contradiction only redoubles the skepticism that initially gave rise to laughter at their expense (59-60). Though the speaker still hopes to find true love, we know that he will be forced to marry regardless. Like the initial exhortation to "seek true religion," the exhortation to "be busy to seek her" re-affirms the zetetic [inquiring] character of the speaker's skepticism but the new imposition of force

⁷⁷ Donne, "The Indifferent," *Complete Poems*, 202.

makes this search seem untenable if not absurd (74). How can one who must choose continue to seek? How will the speaker ever attain tranquility if he cannot suspend his judgement? By way of answer to these questions I wish to turn once more to Montaigne who, like Donne, associates skepticism with male anxieties about marriage but offers a completely different approach to the problem at hand. He attributes “a certain philosophical air” to a gentleman who, after enjoying his youth, married late in life. This man, “remembering how the subject of cuckoldry had given him material for talking and jesting about others” decided to marry a prostitute and agreed that every morning they would greet each other in the following way: “‘Good morning whore.’ ‘Good morning, cuckold.’”⁷⁸ Although this comic anecdote may seem like an extreme way to combat the consuming passion of sexual jealousy, it provides us with an example of how one might knowingly enter into a compact without concern for the truth. The gentleman is, of course, still a cuckold, but knowing this in advance puts an end to his torment. If Donne’s speaker must ‘of force’ choose a single church, he likely does so in a limited and contingent manner. That is, he acts in accordance with the customs of a particular religion while continuing his search for the true religion.

Some scholars have overestimated the certainty with which Donne posits Truth as an attainable goal. Helen Gardner, for example, asserts that “there is no trace in this poem of the philosophic scepticism sometimes attributed to Donne in his youth. He takes for granted that ‘the intellect, which is made for truth, can attain truth, and, having attained it, can keep it.’”⁷⁹ Even Scodel who argues convincingly for the influence of skepticism throughout “Satire III,” refers to

⁷⁸ Montaigne, (II.17, F.489).

⁷⁹ Gardner inexplicably cites the nineteenth century cardinal John Henry Newman on the subject of truth. I excerpt this quotation from Thomas V. Moore, "Donne's Use of Uncertainty as a Vital Force in "Satyre III"." *Modern Philology* 67.1 (1969): 43.

“the poet’s firm conviction that one can eventually find the true church.”⁸⁰ Moore, by contrast, argues that just as Donne refuses to offer a positive alternative to the various positions the satire critiques, so too does he refuse to offer a guarantor of truth. “Since there is no promise of grace” he writes, “there can be no certainty that man’s efforts will succeed.”⁸¹ While Moore’s further suggestion that the speaker’s uncertainty compels readers to critically examine their own religious views is convincing, he overlooks the philosophical underpinnings of this conclusion. This becomes important especially as Donne shifts the object of the speaker’s quest from “true religion” to “Truth” itself which he places atop a “cragged and steep” hill. We have already seen that the speaker’s repeated exhortations to seek repurpose the zetetic character of Pyrrhonism, but Donne’s emphasis on the difficulty of this search, the “hard deeds, the body’s pains; hard knowledge too” suggests its tendency to end in aporia.

The concept of aporia, which literally means “without passage,” has significant consequences for Donne’s metaphor of the heroic quest. In the view that I am proposing, the speaker continues to seek the true religion but is hindered by the limits of human reason. Donne invokes a fideistic approach to divine revelation when he says that “the mind’s endeavours reach, and mysteries/ Are like the sun, dazzling, yet plain to all eyes.” Unless god grants the speaker access to the truth, he will be left continually seeking and there is no assurance, as Hester maintains, that “the hill can be won and man with God through His Son.”⁸² The repetition of “about must and about must go,” which describes the speaker’s attempts to climb the hill of Truth, suggests a Sisyphean feat in which eternal and futile labor become meaningful in their

⁸⁰ Scodel, 497.

⁸¹ Moore, “Donne’s Use of Uncertainty,” 47.

⁸² Hester, 66. Robbins notes a parallel passage in the sermons which supports my reading: “As the Sun, ... is the most evident thing to be seen, and yet hardest to be looked upon, so is natural light to our reason and understanding... Nothing more *easy*, for a child discerns it; nothing more *hard*, for no man understands it. It is apprehensible by *sense*, and not comprehensible by *reason*.” (*Serm.* 3.356 (Christmas 1621)).

own right. For the speaker, the process of seeking truth has become even more important than the goal of attaining it. By emphasizing the rigor of this quest, however, Donne departs drastically from a skeptical conception of tranquility. Contrast, for example, R.J. Hankinson's metaphorical characterization of the skeptic way: "the Sceptic is, in this sense, perpetually travelling hopefully, never arriving— but, since whether or not he arrives no longer matters to him, the condition is perfectly calm."⁸³ Donne's speaker never seems to reach this state of equanimity since his search is harried, "to will implies delay, therefore do now" and motivated by a fear of death "for none can work in that night" (84-85).⁸⁴ While Moore suggests that the speaker's zeal serves to rouse his readers into action, it also counters charges that the skeptic is cowardly or unable to act.

Whereas Sextus Empiricus characterizes the skeptic's search in terms of ease, Donne emphasizes rigor in order to extol the heroism and courage of the one who undertakes it and this may be ultimately self-serving. The speaker's riddling and defensive exclamation, "believe me this,/ He's not of none, nor worst, that seeks the best," asserts both the intellectual and moral integrity of a skeptical stance toward religion even as it struggles to resist making such an affirmative statement, first with a double and then a triple negative (75). Here, I believe that Strier is right to conflate the speaker and the poet since, as he remarks, "in a world where everyone was a religious something—often a militant something— Donne was, for a remarkably long time, a religious nothing."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the poem still insists on the impossibility of this position and Donne himself, like his speaker, would eventually be forced to choose a single religion, likely before his conscience had settled on the true religion.

⁸³ Hankinson, 300.

⁸⁴ Strier points to Catullus for a secular reading of this line. I think that either is possible.

⁸⁵ Strier, "Radical Donne," 284.

While I agree with Scodel and Strier that “Satire III” promotes freedom of consciousness, I argue that Donne begins to formulate a conception of such freedom that divorces inward doubt from outward compliance. The speaker does exercise autonomy to the extent that he never privately assents to the truth that institutions of public power have thrust on him but this resistance does not necessarily extend beyond the self. The erotic analogy that best describes this limited form of agency might resemble Montaigne’s story of the happy cuckold who enters voluntarily into a marriage which he knows to be false or which he cannot know to be true as if to say, “you can have my body but you cannot have my soul/mind.” In a skeptical framework, the speaker’s ethical imperatives to “doubt wisely” and “to stand inquiring right” do not likewise preclude commitment to a particular religion (77-78).

Although Sextus maintains that the skeptic “does not assent to anything non-evident,” he does assent “to the conditions forced on him in accordance with an appearance.”⁸⁶ This is to say that the Skeptic acts in accordance with beliefs about how things appear to be but does not hold these beliefs dogmatically, as if they correspond to the way things actually are. Sextus thus allows for two forms of assent, forced and non-dogmatic, which he claims do not compromise the Skeptic’s skepticism. While Donne may not have known these more subtle distinctions of Pyrrhonian philosophy, “Satire III” negotiates a similar balance between radical doubt and dogmatism, individual freedom and state power. When the speaker urges the reader to “keep the truth which thou hast found” and reasons that “men do not stand/ In so ill case, that God hath with his hand/ Sign’d kings’ blank charters to kill whom they hate,” he suggests that the impressions of both the subject and the sovereign are equally fallible (89-91). The truth which ‘thou hast’ *appears* true to you, but this is quite different from the Truth which *is* true for

⁸⁶ Sextus, *Outlines*, I.13.

everyone. Donne therefore suggests that one may continue to seek the Truth even while assenting non-dogmatically to a lesser truth imposed by force.

This argument about skeptical assent only becomes more pronounced in *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), a polemical tract in which Donne argues that English recusants can and should take the Oath of Allegiance without fear that it compromises their conscience. He argues that,

Dubium speculatiuū, a man may safely, and ought to take the Oath: For so a man of much authority amongst themselves doth say, That in a doubt which consists in speculation, we doe not sinne, if we doe against it and himselfe chuses this example, If a Souldier doubt whether the warre which his Prince vndertakes be iust or no, yet in the practique parte, hee may resolute to fight at his Princes command, though he be not able to explicate the speculatiue doubt. And he adts this in confirmation; That where one part is certaine, and the other doubtful, we may not leaue the sure side, and adhere to the other.⁸⁷

In many ways, this passage contradicts Donne's anti-authoritarian stance at the end of "Satire III" which clearly limits the scope of "man's laws," but both use doubt to broach the topic of civil obedience and to determine the proper relationship of the individual to power. In "Satire III," the speaker subordinates earthly power to God's judgement when he demands, "At the last day? Oh, will it then boot thee/ To say a Philip, or a Gregory,/ A Harry, or a Martin, taught thee this?/ Is not this excuse for mere contraries/ Equally strong? Cannot both sides say so?" (95-99). If King James were to have demanded the allegiance of the speaker to the Church of England, as he later would of Donne, it seems likely that the speaker would take the oath but that he would not regard it as sufficient justification for faith or as reason to give up his search for Truth.

While the satirical laughter of the opening character sketches vanishes in Donne's intervening description of the speaker's heroic quest, here it finally reemerges alongside the skeptical trope of isostheneia [equipollence]. Donne perfectly balances his critique of both

⁸⁷ Here Donne is citing an Italian theologian, Luigi di Costacciaro Carbo whose work was prominent during the 1580s.

Catholics and Protestants as well as church and state authorities with disparaging references to King Philip III of Spain, Pope Gregory XVIII, Henry VIII of England, and Martin Luther. Although Donne dares not invoke James directly by name, his suggestion that monarchical and papal power are only “equally strong” undercuts what would later become the central tenet of the Oath of Allegiance which denounces the pope’s authority to depose the king. Rather than targeting abstract vices like vanity or folly, Donne offers a thinly veiled attack on specific religious and political figures, but “Satire III” differs from other examples of Reformation satire by its lack of clear partisan affiliation. While many have looked to this poem for evidence of Donne’s residual Catholicism or burgeoning Protestantism, the speaker maintains a skeptical outlook throughout which is evinced by this return to satire. By ridiculing the presumption manifest on both sides of the confessional divide, Donne suggests that neither possesses the absolute truth and urges others to take matters of religious controversy less seriously.

The speaker’s claim that “thou mayest rightly obey power, her bounds know” stops short of condoning civil disobedience, but it saves the individual’s conscience from the reach of tyranny (100). In *Against the Mathematicians*, Sextus responds to the charge that the Skeptic cannot consistently live his skepticism because “if he comes under the power of a tyrant and is compelled to do some unspeakable deed, either he will not endure what has been commanded, but will choose a voluntary death, or to avoid torture he will do what has been ordered.”⁸⁸ Although James may not have been a tyrant in the classical sense, his Oath of Allegiance forced dogmatists and skeptics alike into action and this is precisely the scenario prefigured by the speaker’s impending marriage in “Satire III.” In order to preserve the lives of English recusants and to quell civil unrest, Donne recommends against the former but even this pragmatic action

⁸⁸ Sextus, *Against the Mathematicians*. 11.162-6.

need not undermine his skepticism, his private reservations about the “true religion.” It is easy to see why Carey and others represent Donne as a careerist who sought advancement by any means necessary, but “Satire III” attests to the rigor and authenticity of his intellectual quest.

With the final image of a stream that represents Power, Donne aims to recover the detached perspective on which Democritean laughter is predicated. From such a heavenly vantage point, the turbulent waters of civil discord seem inconsequential as does the heroic individual who now dots the water’s edge. “As streams are, power is,” Donne maintains, “those blest flowers that dwell/At the rough stream's calm head, thrive and do well,/ But having left their roots, and themselves given/ To the stream's tyrannous rage...in the sea are lost” (103-108). This complex image contrasts those who ‘dwell’ and ‘thrive’ alongside power that respects its bounds with those who are swept away by power that exceeds them. Opposing Scodel and Hester, Strier argues that the stream’s “calm head” represents divine authority and that in the poem “there is no conception of men’s just power.”⁸⁹ If this were indeed the case, Donne it seems would be making a radical case for civil disobedience, the question he poses, however, is not whether but how to obey.

That thou mayest rightly obey power, her bounds know;
Those past, her nature and name is chang’d; to be
Then humble to her is idolatry.
100-103

In order to “rightly obey,” Donne suggests that one must recognize the limits of secular power, namely: that the sovereign cannot justly lay claim to authority over the soul. Those “flowers” that leave behind their roots and succumb to the “tyrannous” stream, give too much dominion to secular power and fail to reserve within themselves a place for doubt. “So perish souls,” Donne writes, “which more choose men's unjust/ Power from God claim'd, than God himself to trust.” I

⁸⁹ Strier, “Radical Donne,” 312.

have argued that in “Satire III” Donne employs skeptical laughter as a means to counter the rashness of religious dogmatism (109-110). In this final image of secular power, we see that doubt enables the individual to continue seeking true religion even among conflicting authorities that claim it has already been found.

IV. Skepticism and Laughter in the *Essays on Divinity* and Select Sermons

Most scholars agree that Donne would have read Montaigne’s *Essays*, quite possibly in French, by 1603 or 1604.⁹⁰ However, if we consider Donne’s close affiliation with the Countess of Bedford who was responsible in part for John Florio’s 1603 translation of Montaigne, we can posit a much earlier date. This influence is important to establish because it helps to determine the unique ways in which Donne brings philosophical skepticism to bear on the political and religious conflicts of his time. Whereas many have argued for a fideistic interpretation of Montaigne’s skepticism, suggesting that his “Apology for Raymond Sebond” complements an essentially orthodox Catholic outlook, Donne’s skepticism coincides with the renunciation of his Catholic faith.⁹¹ Indeed, Donne’s skepticism is often conflated with his apostasy and invoked to characterize the mood of the intense but relatively brief period before Jack Donne became Dr.

⁹⁰ Donne indicates that he has read the *Essays* when, in a letter to George More, he writes “that Michel Montaig[n]e saies, he hath seen, (as I remember) 400 volumes of Italian Letters.” *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651) reproduced with an introduction by M. Thomas Hester (Delmar, NY, 1977), 92.

⁹¹ On Donne’s skepticism see especially Kenneth Gross. “John Donne’s Lyric Skepticism: In Strange Way.” *Modern Philology*. 101.3 (2004): 371-399; John Klause. “The Montaigneity of Donne’s Metempsychosis,” in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*. ed. Barbara Lewalski. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986) and “Hope’s Gambit: The Jesuitical, Protestant, Skeptical Origins of Donne’s Heroic Ideal,” *Studies in Philology* (1994): 181-215, John Carey. *John Donne, Anita Gilman Sherman, Skepticism and Memory in Shakespeare and Donne* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and “The Skeptical Ethics of John Donne: The Case of Ignatius His Conclave,” in *Reading Renaissance Ethics*, ed. Marshall Grossman (New York: Routledge, 2007), 226-45, James Baumlín, *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse* (Columbia: U of Missouri P., 1991), Douglas Trevor, “Mapping the Celestial in Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and the Writings of John Donne.” *Shakespeare and Donne: Generic Hybrids and the Cultural Imaginary*, (ed. Judith Anderson and Jennifer C. Vaught. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 111-129.

Donne of St. Paul's. However, following John Carey who suggests about Donne's skepticism that "there is ample evidence that it remained a potent element in his thought throughout his life," I wish to consider in this final section what it means to regard Donne as a skeptic even after he takes holy orders in 1621.⁹² In doing so, I do not mean to suggest that one of the most renowned preachers in the history of the Anglican Church was either an atheist or a crypto-Catholic. Rather, I mean to show how skepticism enabled Donne to playfully engage with the paradoxes of religion in a way that was still amenable to his faith. I will turn first to Donne's *Essays in Divinity* and then to select sermons on laughter.

Like Montaigne, Donne was born into a Catholic family, but he was also born into a Protestant state and his enduring engagement with the *Essays* reveals how early modern skepticism can be productive in different cultural contexts. The very fact that skepticism has been strategically mobilized by both sides of the confessional divide suggests that it has no inherent allegiance to a particular denomination of faith.⁹³ It responds, rather, to whichever doctrine happens to be prescribed by convention or enforced by authority at a given time and in a given place.⁹⁴ From the standpoint of the skeptic, religion is a matter of indifference because spiritual dogma lies beyond the purview of human knowledge and cannot be determined by rational debate. In a chapter concerning the gods, Sextus Empiricus explains that although skeptics "affirm undogmatically that Gods exist and reverence Gods and ascribe to them foreknowledge," they still routinely offer arguments to the contrary in order to confound "the rashness of the Dogmatists."⁹⁵ Thus, we may conclude that the skeptic is likely to act in accordance with religious customs, whatever they may be, and disinclined to give weight to

⁹² Carey, 234.

⁹³ This point is also illustrated by Henri Estienne and Gentian Hervé.

⁹⁴ See Dennis Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996).

⁹⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, III.3.

sectarian disputes. If Donne and Montaigne were to have miraculously switched places at birth, one can easily imagine, given the fluid nature of confessional identities during the period and the propensity of both men for skeptical philosophy, the former remaining a Catholic and the later becoming a Protestant.

All of this, however, is not to say that skepticism and faith are necessarily incompatible. On the contrary, Donne's skeptical critique of Sebond's *Theologia naturalis* (1434-1436), which Montaigne had translated into French at the request of his father and which formed the basis of his "Apologie de Raymond Sebond," reinstates an essential division between the domains of philosophy and theology that effectively safeguards faith from the onslaught of reason. While Donne's *Catalogus* made Sebond the object of laughter, his attitude toward natural theology is much clearer in the *Essays on Divinity* (1614-1615), a work whose title suggests an obvious debt to Montaigne's *Essais*. In the opening pages, Donne compares three ways that man can attain knowledge of God. Having concluded that divine revelation and scripture are either impossible or exceedingly difficult to access, he turns finally to creation, recounting how

Sebund, when he had digested this book into a written book, durst pronounce, that it was an Art, which teaches al things, presupposes no other, is soon learned, cannot be forgotten, requires no books, needs no witnesses, and in this, is safer then the Bible it self, that it cannot be falsified by Hereticks. And ventures further after, to say, That because this book is made according to the Order of Creatures, which express fully the will of God, whosoever doth according to his booke, fulfills the will of God. Howsoever, he may be too abundant in affirming, that *in libro creaturarum* there is enough to teach us all particularities of Christian Religion.⁹⁶

Donne's critique of Sebond's overabundant affirmation exemplifies a skeptical stance toward dogmatism, especially with Montaigne's "Apology" as a precedent. Although natural theology aims to verify divine truths by means of human reason, Donne suggests that it only succeeds in undermining their potency.

⁹⁶ John Donne. *Essays in Divinity*. ed. Evelyn Simpson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952. p.7-8

Take the proposition that God created the world. No one was present to witness this feat and the narrative account which we find of it in Genesis is, by Donne's own admission, more allegorical than historical. Nevertheless, Donne does not then conclude that the proposition is false or that we cannot determine whether it is true or false, but rather uses this example to distinguish between that which can be apprehended by faith alone and that which is subject to reason. He explains, "That then this Beginning *was*, is matter of faith, and so, infallible, *When it was*, is matter of *reason*, and therefore various and perplex'd."⁹⁷ Although the Caldeans, Egyptians, and Chinese all give conflicting estimates of the world's age and certain authors then attempt to reconcile these estimates by calculating lunar and planetary years, the basic proposition that god created the world remains fully intact. On other matters concerning creation which neither scripture nor history can clarify, Donne suspends his judgement. Thus the section concludes: "And therefore Saint Augustin says religiously and exemplarily, *If one ask me what God did before this beginning, I will not answer, as another did merrily, He made Hell for such busie inquireres: But I will sooner say, I know not, when I know not, then answer that, by which he shall be deluded which asked too high a Mystery, and he be praysed, which answered a lie.*"

Evelyn Simpson's claim that *The Essays of Divinity* "is the kindest, the happiest, the least controversial of Donne's prose works" might lead some to conclude that by the time Donne was contemplating a career in the church, his skepticism had for the most part abated.⁹⁸ No longer do we encounter such melancholy refrains as the oft cited: "And new Philosophy cal's all in doubt,/ The Element of fire is quite put out;/ The Sunne is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit/ Can well direct him where to looke for it."⁹⁹ While a change in tone between the *Anniversaries* and the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁹⁸ Ibid., xii.

⁹⁹ Donne, *Complete Poetry*, 198.

Essays is certainly discernible, I want to suggest that Donne's skepticism actually helps rather than hinders his newly forged peace of mind. In the 1611 poem, doubt disorients the speaker utterly but by 1615, it enables Donne to effectively regain his bearings. Returning to the theological arguments set forth by Sebond and refuted by Montaigne, he writes the following:

Men which seek God by reason, and naturall strength (though we do not deny common notions and general impressions of a sovereign power) are like Mariners which voyaged before the invention of the Compass... Such are they which would arrive at God by this world, and contemplate him onely in his Creatures, and seeming Demonstration. Certainly every Creature shewes God, as a glass, but glimmeringly and transitorily, by the frailty both of the receiver, and beholder.¹⁰⁰

Far from inducing anxiety or despair, recognizing our inability to attain certain knowledge of the divine leads Donne to accept the natural limitations of human learning and to cease from vain speculation. Since the book of nature reveals only "what he *doth*, not what he *is*," Donne finds solace, ironically, in what *cannot* be known of god, concluding that "I beleeve he is somewhat which no man can say or know. For, *si scirem quid Deus esset, Deus essem* [if I could know what God is, I would be God]."¹⁰¹ For Donne, many questions concerning the essence of god cannot be answered and it would be inadvisable, perhaps even impious, to insist otherwise. Once Donne took holy orders, skepticism continued to influence his thinking about religious matters and specifically informed his consideration of Christian laughter.

On February 16th of the year 1620, Donne delivered a sermon at Whitehall before King James addressing the seeming paradox of how Christ, "that melancholick man, who was never

¹⁰⁰ Simpson, 20.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

seen to laugh in all his life,” should be the source of “all joy, and everlasting joy.”¹⁰² Although scripture attests to the fact that “Jesus wept,” there is little evidence that he ever laughed and by emphasizing this startling absence “in all his life,” Donne marks Christ as a figure of dispositional rather than occasional sorrow.¹⁰³ Although the purpose of Donne’s Lent sermon is to encourage the congregation in “the hard work of believing,” his almost pathological representation of Christ reflects not only the somber mood of a particular season devoted to “mortification and humiliation” but a more universal exhortation to weep.¹⁰⁴ By examining both its physical and spiritual dimensions, Donne returns repeatedly to laughter in order to define a space for the licit enjoyment of temporal pleasures that effectively overturns the asceticism latent in much of post-Reformation culture. I begin by showing how laughter became central to humanist debates concerning the humanity and divinity of Christ and then move to examine the joyful laughter of two sermons that Donne delivered in 1622 on the subject of Christ’s tears and the Christian imperative to rejoice.

During Lent, those present at the King’s court would eagerly anticipate a special six week sermon series that not only ushered in the celebrations of Good Friday and Easter Sunday but also featured the most prominent preachers in the Church of England.¹⁰⁵ Donne regularly preached at Whitehall on the first Friday of Lent and, as illustrated by the sermon excerpt from 1620, he often found cause to reflect on the affective dimensions of the season itself and of the faith more generally. While the story of the Passion is meant to give way to the joy of the Resurrection, Donne amplifies the pain and suffering of Christ to such an extent that this

¹⁰² John Donne, “Number 9: A Lent-Sermon Preached before the King, At White-Hall, February 16, 1620. in vol. 3 of *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Smith, 10 vols. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1953-62, 1957), 221. Unless available in the more recent Oxford edition, all sermon citations are to this edition.

¹⁰³ John 11:35. All quotations of scripture are from the King James Version of the Bible.

¹⁰⁴ (207, 220)

¹⁰⁵ Peter McCullough, “Introduction,” *The Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Peter McCullough, vol. 1. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), xx-xxii.

transmutation of emotion appears unfathomable. His dour portrait of ‘that melancholik man’ paints a picture of unrelenting sorrow that seems to confirm medieval conceptions of the world as a “vale of tears [vallis lacrimarum],” but it also pathologizes such conceptions by ascribing them to physiological imbalance. We have seen that laughter was often associated with the purgation of melancholy humors during the early modern period and, though Christ was never seen to laugh, I want to suggest that, for Donne, laughter becomes an important means to counterbalance spiritual despair.

In the context of early modern England, scholarship on the history of the emotions has tended to focus on negative emotions like shame, anger, or sadness.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the very word “passion,” which we often use interchangeably with emotion, derives from the Latin verb *patior* meaning “to suffer.” While Christ did suffer in his Passion, Donne’s description refers to Christ’s innate humoral disposition. As M.A. Screech’s and Daniel Ménager’s work on Renaissance laughter has shown, humanists and theologians alike struggled to reconcile Christ’s identity as “a man of sorrows” with Aristotle’s claim that laughter is proper unto mankind. If, as Donne maintains, Christ never laughed, then he could not be both fully human and fully divine. If not fully human, then his death would not be sufficient to atone for our sin and his life could not exemplify the Christian life. Although Donne contrasts laughter with melancholy, he also invokes this larger debate concerning Christ’s humanity.

In 1622, Donne returned to Whitehall to deliver another Lent sermon on the subject of Christ’s tears which also comments on his laughter. Despite the heaviness of the topic, indeed Donne implores his auditory in the exordium to let him “melt your soules in a bath of his

¹⁰⁶ On Donne, for example, see John Stachniewski, "John Donne: The Despair of the "Holy Sonnets"." *ELH* (1981): 677-705. and Douglas Trevor, "John Donne and Scholarly Melancholy." *SEL*, no. 1 (2000): 81-102.

[Christ's] tears," Peter McCullough has argued that the sermon displays a propensity for wit and invites auditors to engage in a fun interpretive game.¹⁰⁷ McCullough's imagining of the scene emphasizes the performative nature of the early modern sermon and raises the question of whether Donne himself might have laughed while preaching.¹⁰⁸ "On this February morning," McCullough writes, "Donne must have inspired knowing smiles by proclaiming only two words as his text: 'John 11.35: Jesus wept'" and "thus holds his audience captive through their desire to know how he will, with Renaissance *sprezzatura*, spin an hour's sermon out of only two words."¹⁰⁹ Donne proceeds to elaborate on the circumstances that led Christ to weep and to delineate three different types of tears: "Humane," "Prophetical," and "Pontifical" which demonstrates his ability to investigate discrete emotions in depth. When he turns to laughter, it is likewise important to differentiate between kinds.

Citing scripture, Donne attests to the fact that Jesus "wept thrice," but he also considers alternative sources to supplement our knowledge. He writes, "In that Letter which *Lentulus* is said to have written to the Senate of Rome, in which he gives some Characters of Christ, he saies, That Christ was never seene to laugh, but to weepe often. Now in what number he limits his often, or upon what testimony he grounds his number, we know not." The "Letter of *Lentulus*" is an apocryphal source believed to have been written during the time of Tiberius which gives a detailed description of Christ's physical appearance and outward demeanor.¹¹⁰ During the fifteenth century, this Latin epistle was widely circulated and its contents regarded as authentic. While *Lentulus* remarks, like Donne, that Christ "numquam uisus ridere [was never

¹⁰⁷ *Sermons*, vol 4., no.13., 324. Peter McCullough, "Donne as Preacher," *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. Aschah Guibbory, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006),177.

¹⁰⁸ We know, for example, from Izaak Walton that Donne wept openly while preaching. *Ibid* 174.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 177.

¹¹⁰ Cora E. Lutz. "The Letter of *Lentulus* Describing Christ." *The Yale University Library Gazette* (1975): 91-97.

seen to laugh],” he also qualifies this description with the assertion that Christ was “serenissiman [most tranquil]” and “hilaris quidem servata gravitate [cheerful but maintaining dignity].”¹¹¹ Donne’s concern about the reliability and specificity of this letter as well as his observation that while John, Luke, and Paul each describe an instance of Christ’s weeping, their testimonies do not substantiate one another, call attention to the incomplete nature of the Biblical record. We know, according to Donne, that Jesus “wept here, when he mourned with them that mourned for *Lazarus*; He wept againe, when he drew neare to Jerusalem, and looked upon that City; And he wept a third time in his Passion” but Donne leaves open the possibility that Christ may have wept on other occasions, just as he may have laughed, though this is nowhere documented.

In a letter to Henry Goodyer, Donne reveals why he found the prospect of an agelastic messiah so threatening. Although Donne identifies with the melancholy Christ in *Biathanatos*, his controversial tract on suicide, here he argues that “As we may not kill our selves, so we may not bury our selves: which is done or endangered in a dull Monastique sadnesse, which is so much worse then jolity.”¹¹² As a self-diagnosed melancholic, laughter was a matter of both practical and personal import to Donne who sought ways to regulate the excesses of his own humoral disposition.¹¹³ Again alluding to the “Letter of Lentulus,” Donne remarks that “though our blessed Saviour be never noted to have laughed, yet his continuance [countenance] is said ever to be smiling. And that even moderate mirth of heart, and face, and [is] all I wish to my self; and perswade you to keep.” Mirth, in this case, is not only the opposite of melancholy but also the means by which it is cured. Donne’s counsel that “in your self you must allow some inordinatenesse of affections and passions” flies in the face of conventional estimations of

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons*, 37-41.

¹¹³ See Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy*, 87-115.

temperance and even seems to license worldly indulgence. Here, as in many of his secular love lyrics, Donne aims to reconcile the lower and higher inclinations of man. “Our nature is Meteorique,” he claims, “we respect (because we partake so) both earth and heaven, for as our bodies glorified shall be capable of spirituall joy, so our souls demerged into those bodies, are allowed to partake earthly pleasure.”¹¹⁴ To the extent that laughter attests to the humanity of Christ, without diminishing his divinity, it lays the foundation for a more holistic conception of mankind that does not sacrifice the fullness of this life to the next.

“Jesus wept” is commonly known as the Bible’s shortest verse and its brevity emphasizes both its clarity and importance but, in his exegesis of John 11:35, Donne points also to I Thessalonians 5:16 remarking that “there is another as short; *Semper gaudete, Rejoyce evermore*, and of that holy Joy, I may have leave to speak here hereafter, more seasonably, in a more Festivall time.” Later in 1622 Donne offers a full exposition of 1 Thessalonians 5:16 in a sermon delivered at the parish church of St. Dunstan’s and I propose to read these two sermons in tandem as an extended reflection on devotional affect.¹¹⁵ Here Donne mounts a powerful defense of laughter that counterbalances the weight of Christian sorrow with an equally strong imperative to rejoice. What is most striking about this second sermon is not the urgency with which Donne contrasts tears with laughter, though this too is important, but the way that he transforms laughter into an expression of holy joy. Harkening back to when “we handled those two words *Jesus wept*,” Donne makes a case for rejoicing now in this life and not only in the next. Joy is not a promise for the future, Donne argues, for “it is not *Gaudebitis semper*, you shall Rejoyce, by way of Comfort, but it is, *Gaudete*, Rejoyce, see that you doe Rejoyce, by way of Commandment.”

¹¹⁴ Donne, *Letters*, 40.

¹¹⁵ “Number 10: A Sermon Prached at Saint Dunstans. 1 Thessalonians 5.16. REJOYCE EVERMORE” in *Sermons*, 10:213-228.

Surprisingly, Donne does not frame the pleasure of such joy in terms of license, as he does in other devotional contexts, but in terms of obedience.

In true Aristotelian fashion, Donne aims specifically to affirm laughter as a rational faculty that compliments man's highest nature, but he anticipates many objectors. As Daniel Derrin has argued, "it is easy to forget just how much Donne's listeners were habituated to the expectation that heaven holds life's real joys."¹¹⁶ Donne demands of his auditory:

But how far may we carry this joy? To what outward declarations? To laughing? St. Basil makes a round answer to a short question. *An in universum ridere non licet?* May a man laugh in no case? *Admodum perspicuum est*, It is very evident, that a man may not, because Christ says, *Voe vobis*, Woe be unto you that laugh; and yet St. Basil in another place says (which we are rather to take in explanation, than in contradiction of himself) that that woe of Christ is cast, *in obstreperum sonum, non in sinceram hilaritatem*: a dissolute and indecent, and immoderate laughing, not upon true inward joy, howsoever outwardly expressed.

Positing laughter as an expression of joy or *sinceram hilaritatem* [sincere cheerfulness] transforms a worldly passion into a spiritual virtue and constitutes a moral imperative. Although Donne is careful to distinguish joyful laughter from the kind of 'dissolute,' 'indecent,' and 'immoderate' laughter that we see elsewhere, he still maintains that the threat of spiritual despair is a far greater danger. Adam Potkay, who praises this sermon as "breathhtaking" for its "diagnosis of cultural joylessness," argues convincingly that "spiritual joy, so intensely desirable in Protestant theology, announces its elusiveness through the very insistence with which it is invoked. Exhortations (or commands) to rejoice in the right way are also admissions that such rejoicing is scarce."¹¹⁷ Donne's investment in laughter may have been born from a personal anxiety over God's saving grace, but it comes to speak to a much broader public concern once he

¹¹⁶ Daniel Derrin, "Engaging the passions in John Donne's Sermons." *English Studies* 93, No. 4 (2012): 463.

¹¹⁷ Adam Potkay, "Spenser, Donne, and The Theology of Joy." *SEL*. 46, no. 1 (2006): 58 and 48.

takes orders. It is not only Christ who is melancholy but the entire Church of England and as a Doctor of Divinity, Donne prescribes joyful laughter serves as the surest cure.

Having established the legitimacy of laughter with the authority of St. Basil, Donne turns to examine the figure of Isaac whose name in Hebrew means laughter. Donne describes how “At the promise of a Son, *Abraham fell on his face and laughed*; a religious Man, and a grave Man, 100 years old, expressed this joy of his heart, by this outward declaration.” Rejecting common interpretations that disparage Abraham’s laughter, Donne offers a total reappraisal of this crucial passage from Genesis that effectively replaces doubt or disbelief with holy joy. He explains that

Hierome's translation reads it, Risit in corde, interesting that it is in the hearthe laughed within himself, because St. Hierome thought that was a weakness, a declination towards unbelief, to laugh at God's promise, as he thinks Abraham did. But Saint Paul is a better Witness in his behalf; Against hope he believed in hope; he was not weak in faith; he staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief. Quod risit, non incredulitatis, sed exultationis indicium fuit, his laughing was no ebb of faith, but a flood of joy. It is not as St. Hierome takes it, Risit in Corde putans celare deum, aperte, ridere non ausus; he kept-in his laughing, and durst not laugh out; But as St. Ambrose says well, Risus non irrisio diffidentis, sed exultatio gratulantis; he laughed not in a doubtfull scorne of Gods promise, but in an overflowing of his own joy.

While this generous estimation of Abraham’s laughter reflects well on the patriarch’s character, the real significance of Donne’s exegesis concerns the character of God himself. As an expression of joy rather than doubt, Abraham’s laughter serves as an example of what it means to fulfill the biblical commandment to rejoice always.

Donne even goes further to read the sacrifice of Isaac as proof that a just God would never take away our cause for joy, literally our laughter. Donne argues that “the trial of *Abraham* was to sacrifice Isaac: *Immola Isaac tuum*, sacrifice all thy joy in this world, to God, *Et non mactatus sed sanctificatus Isaac tuus*, thy joy shall not be destroyed, but sanctified, so farre from being made none, that it shall bee made better, better here, but not better than that hereafter.” Without denying the joys that are to come or the heavenly pleasures that will surpass earthly

ones, Donne reassigns value to the present moment, “better here,” and demarcates a space for temporal enjoyment. The holy laughter that Isaac comes to represent is then proof of a merciful god and the vindication of a hope that surpasses rational expectation. Thus, whoever is unable or unwilling to feel such inward joy and to express it outwardly through laughter breaks a holy commandment. He “departs,” Donne argues, “and abandons himself into an inordinate sadness” which constitutes both “an argument against religious tenderness” and “an argument against thankfulness of the heart.”

Although sin surely occasions sorrow and begets suffering in this lifetime, Donne insists that “there is a joy required for Temporall things” and that to deny this would be “the perversest assertion.” His defense of laughter, to the extent that it permits and even advocates for the enjoyment of terrestrial and temporal pleasures, constitutes a radical critique of religious asceticism. Potkay regards this sermon as the “clearest formulation” of what he calls Donne’s “theology of joy” but he fails to register just how strange Donne’s exegesis truly is.¹¹⁸ Even as he invokes the authority of the early Church fathers to substantiate his claims, Donne advances a conception of pleasure and spiritual joy that is without precedent. Citing Chrysostom, in particular, Donne reasons that “a man may have *Flores*, flowers of joy, and have no fruit, a man may have some fruit, and not enough, but if he have joy in God, he hath *radicem voluptatis* [the root of pleasure], if we may dare to translate it so, (and in a spirituall sense we may) it is a voluptuous thing to rejoyce in God.” The word *voluptas* [pleasure] carries with it a negative connotation since the only ancient philosopher to reconcile it to *virtus* [virtue] was Epicurus whose teachings were associated during the Renaissance with sensual indulgence and atheism. Donne’s effort here to redeem pleasure recalls that of Erasmus who argues in the “Epicurean”

¹¹⁸ Potkay, 57.

that “they are mightily mistaken that foolishly represent Christ, as by Nature, to be a rigid melancholick Person, and that he invited us to an unpleasant Life; when he alone show’d the Way to the most comfortable Life in the World, and fullest of Pleasure.”¹¹⁹ As if repudiating his own former depiction of ‘that melancholik man,’ Donne overturns a number of the period’s most deeply ingrained assumptions about the role of pleasure in devotional life and strives to surmount the dichotomies that wrench apart flesh and spirit, body and soul.

Dr. Donne’s unusually personal remark near the end of the sermon that “as long as the glass hath a gaspe, as long as I have one, I would breathe in this ayre, in this perfume, in this breath of heaven, the contemplation of this Joy” recalls the sensuality of the younger Jack Donne and suggests an often overlooked continuity between Donne’s most sincere religious works and his often disingenuous poetry. Early love lyrics like the “Canonization” and the “Ecstasy” similarly refuse to distinguish between sacred and secular pleasures. As Donne closes the sermon, his unorthodox exposition of the holy Eucharist invites the congregation to likewise partake in the joy of this life. He writes,

Comedite amici, says Christ, bibite et inebriamini. Eat and drink, and be filled. Joy in this life, Ubi in sudore vescimur St Bernard, where grief is mingled with joy, is called meat, says Saint Bernard and Christ calls his friends to eat in the first word. Potus in futuro, says he, Joy in the next life, where it passes down without any difficulty, without any opposition, is called drink; and Christ calls his friends to drink: but the overflowing, the Ebrietas animae, that is reserved to the last time.

Although Donne acknowledges that the sensual pleasures of this world only whet the appetite for the spiritual pleasures of heaven, he hardly counsels against earthly delights. In fact, his brazen conflation of the Lord’s supper with a passage from the Song of Solomon disregards an essential

¹¹⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Colloquies of Erasmus*. Translated by Nathan Bailey. Edited with Notes, by the Rev. E. Johnson, M.A. (London: Reeves and Turner, 1878). Vol. 2, pp.342.

distinction between *gaudium* [joy] and *delectatio* [delight].¹²⁰ In the Latin which Donne quotes, Song of Solomon reads: “comedite, amici, et bibite, et inebriamini, carissimi [eat, oh friends, drink and get drunk, oh dear ones] but it is emphatically *not* Christ who enjoins lovers to partake of food, wine, and sex.¹²¹ By interjecting this erotic celebration of physical pleasure into the Eucharistic prayer and substituting these words for the words that Jesus actually said to his disciples on the night of his betrayal, Donne gives the impression that the Christian faith is more oriented toward pleasure than scripture suggests.¹²² Indeed, spiritual intoxication, not the euphemistic ‘overflowing’ of Donne’s English translation, but the ‘*Ebrietas animae* [drunkenness of spirit]’ is the only indulgence denied us in the present.

That Donne went so far as to supplement or manipulate scripture in order to find adequate grounds for his vindication of laughter and holy joy attests to the exigency that he ascribed to the question of devotional affect. Whether the spiritual health of the Church of England was endangered by reformed theology or some other culprit is unclear, but Donne’s commitment to remedy it remained constant. In 1625, Donne delivered a sermon very much in line with his previous sermon on 1 Thessalonians 5:16 in which he shows himself to be a true Doctor of the Church. “God hath accompanied, and complicated almost all our bodily diseases of those times,” Donne says, “with an extraordinary sadness, a predominant melancholy, a faintness of heart, a cheerlessness, a joylessness of spirit, and therefore I return often to this

¹²⁰ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Question 31, Article 3: “For we take delight both in those things which we desire naturally, when we get them, and in those things which we desire as a result of reason. But we do not speak of joy except when delight follows reason; and so we do not ascribe joy to irrational animals, but only delight.”

¹²¹ Song of Solomon 5:1.

¹²² Holy Communion in the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* states that “he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, sayyng: Take, eate, this is my bodye which is geven for you, do this in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he toke the cuppe, and when he had geven thanks, he gave it to them, sayyng: drynk ye all of this, for this is my bloude of the newe Testament, whyche is shed for you and for many, for remission of synnes: do this as oft as you shall drinke it, in remembrance of me.”

endeavor of raising your hearts, dilating your hearts with a holy Joy.”¹²³ Even if Christ himself never laughed, he concludes that Christian laughter should not be condemned since it celebrates the joy that is ours in the present life and the joy that shall be ours in the next.

¹²³ “Number 1: The second of my Prebend Sermons upon my five Psalms. Preached at S. Paul’s, January, 29.1625” in vol.7 of *Sermons*, 68-69.

Chapter 4

Translating Tranquility: Lucy Hutchinson and the Laughter of Lucretius

Until fairly recently, Lucy Hutchinson (1620-1681) has most commonly been regarded, if she has been regarded at all, as the biographer of her husband John Hutchinson, a Puritan martyr and Parliamentary regicide. Indeed, her *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* seems to encourage such critical oversight by diminishing Hutchinson's own authorial identity and literary accomplishments. With respect to the Colonel, for example, Hutchinson describes herself as "a very faithful mirror reflecting truly, though but dimly, his own glories upon him."¹ She further develops the trope of what David Norbrook has called "excessive wifely deference" when she claims that "the greatest excellency she had was the power of apprehending and the virtue of loving his; so as his shadow she waited on him everywhere, till he was taken into that region of light which admits of none, and then she vanished into nothing."² As a testament to her grief, Hutchinson represents herself as subservient to her husband. Even the dim reflection that she once was fades after his death. Of course, such sentiments are ironically undercut by the very act of biographical writing since as, Neil Keeble has argued, it is ultimately she who gives him life

¹ Lucy Hutchinson, *The Life of Colonel Hutchinson* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973), 32.

² All subsequent quotations from Hutchinson's Lucretius translation are from the most recent Oxford edition and will be cited parenthetically with the abbreviation *DRN*: Hutchinson, *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson Vol.1: The Translation of Lucretius*, ed. David Norbrook and Reid Barbour (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), xvi; Hutchinson, *The Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, 33.

and not the opposite.³ Nevertheless, the apparent discrepancy between Hutchinson's modest self-presentation and bold ambitions as a writer has often plagued modern scholars.

Nowhere is this discrepancy more apparent than in the dedicatory preface to her translation of Lucretius's epic poem *De rerum natura* which Hutchinson composed in 1675, more than two decades after completing her actual translation. Many scholars interested in the reception of Lucretius and his materialist philosophy have been surprised, even baffled, at the fact that a Puritan woman was the first to translate what is perhaps the most controversial work of Latin literature into English. Reid Barbour has argued convincingly that Hutchinson's translation actually typifies many of the intellectual concerns of the mid-seventeenth century since a growing interest in Epicureanism predates it, but even he concedes that, "in so far as these Epicurean principles are seriously at odds with her deep commitment to providence as the driving force in public and private history, the choice of Lucretius for translation has struck Hutchinson's modern readers as something of a conundrum."⁴ Hutchinson's vociferous repudiation of her own translation, as when she claims that "I abhorre all the Atheismes & impieties in it," only compounds the difficulty of determining why she produced it in the first place (*DRN*, 7). Still, I would like to suggest that it is both possible and necessary to read through Hutchinson's protestations against Lucretius in order to consider how she and others in her milieu may have profited from the poet's therapeutic objectives.

Though more incidentally, previous chapters have already highlighted the importance of translation to the formation of an early modern conception of therapeutic laughter. We have seen,

³ Keeble writes that "for all her disavowals and self-effacement, she is his author, he her creation; though she marginalizes her own participation, she remains much the most forceful and decisive character in the action. She, not he, animates a text devoted to him." "The Colonel's Shadow: Lucy Hutchinson, Women's Writing and the Civil War" in *Literature and the English Civil War*, ed. Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawday (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 224.

⁴ Reid Barbour, "Lucy Hutchinson, Atomism and The Atheist Dog" in *Women, Science, and Medicine 1500-1700*, ed. Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton, 122.

for example, how Robert Burton brings Democritean laughter to bear on a contemporary English context by integrating into his own satirical preface an original translation of the *Letter to Damagetus* and we first encounter what I have been calling “skeptical laughter” in the dedicatory epistle to Henri Estienne’s translation of Sextus Empiricus’s *Outlines of Skepticism*. Throughout this project, Montaigne’s skepticism has likewise been informed and mediated by translation: Montaigne’s own French translation of Raymond Sabunde’s *Theologia Naturalis* and John Florio’s English translation of the *Essais*. Although the reception of Lucretius and Epicurean philosophy differs in significant ways from the often concurrent reception of Pyrrhonian skepticism, especially in England, Montaigne again serves as an important point of transmission.⁵ As Norbrook and Barbour explain, “awareness of Lucretius beyond academic circles would have been greatly heightened by the appearance in 1603 of John Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s *Essays* (Hutchinson, *DRN*, xx).”⁶ Montaigne’s heavily annotated copy of *De rerum natura* bears witness to his extensive engagement with Lucretius as do the numerous passages reproduced in the *Essais*. He cites Lucretius just under 150 times and quotes more than a sixth of the poem in Latin.⁷ These citations may or may not have been evident to Montaigne’s first readers, but once Marie de Gournay added the sources of Montaigne’s quotations to her 1595 edition of the *Essais*, the extent of Lucretius’s influence became all the more evident. Norbrook and Barbour are right, therefore, to suggest that Gournay serves as an important forerunner to Hutchinson in terms of understanding the special appeal of Lucretius to

⁵ William Hamlin, for example, highlights John Florio’s collaboration with Matthew Gwinne who translated from Latin into English many of Montaigne’s Lucretian citations. *Montaigne’s English Journey* (Oxford, Oxford UP 2013), 54-44.

⁶ See also Philip Ford, “Lucretius in Early Modern France,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*. ed. Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2007), 227-41.

⁷ On Montaigne’s engagement with *De rerum natura* see especially M.A. Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius: A Transcription and Study of the Manuscript, Notes and Pen-marks* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998).

women writers of the period.⁸ Although both women were authors in their own right, their respective roles as editor and translator have often made them ancillary figures in literary history. By taking Hutchinson's translation of Lucretius as a central focus of this chapter, I want to argue that translation itself provides an essential ground for understanding both the reception of classical ideas in an early modern context and the relationship between continental and English literary culture.

Since Hutchinson's translation was never printed in her lifetime, we can ascertain the broader significance of an English Lucretius by looking to one of the dedicatory poems printed in Thomas Creech's translation of 1682. The poem, which celebrates the very fact that "Thou hast Lucretius English—", begins with a jealous lament.

How happy had our English Tongue been made
Were but our Wit industrious as our Trade?
Wou'd we from hence to distant Countries go?
What Greece or Rome e're yields in England sow
And teach th' Unlearned what the Learned know.
In this the French Excel, but we take Care
Not what they write, but only what they wear;
Vain tho they be, in them less Care we find
To dress the Body than adorn the Mind.
There, to know all, you only French shall need;
And the World's Learning in one Language read.⁹

When Hutchinson first put pen to paper in the 1650s, Lucretius was the only major Latin author to remain untranslated in England (Hutchinson, *DRN*, xxii). As the author of this poem suggests, whoever successfully translates Lucretius renders a service to both the English language and to England itself which, remains subservient to France in philosophy and philology, if not poetry.

⁸ Hutchinson, *DRN*, xx. Norbrook and Barbour also include Jane Own in this list who gave a manuscript of Lucretius, the only one in England at the time, to the Bodleian Library in 1610. The editors also note that the dedicatees of Florio's Montaigne were learned Jacobean women.

⁹ Lucretius, Titus Carus. *The Epicurean Philosopher, His Six Books De Rerum Natura Done into English Verse with Notes*, trans. Thomas Creech (Oxford: L.Lichfield, Printer to the University, 1683).

The very propensity for using the word “English” as a verb suggests the active and even imperious nature of English translation. Although Hutchinson makes no mention of such nationalistic sentiments, we can imagine her identifying with Lucretius who claims that “I, now first, home to our country bring/ And forreigne learning in our owne tongue sing” (V.348-349). In order to understand how Hutchinson’s translation challenges early modern conceptions of laughter, this chapter will begin with a detailed treatment of her dedicatory preface which will also serve as a basis for theorizing the task of early modern translation. Turning from the paratext to the text itself, I then consider the practical choices that Hutchinson makes when translating terms such as *ridere* [to laugh] and *deridere* [to deride] which are central to Lucretius’s depiction of philosophical tranquility. The final section seeks to establish the lasting impact of Lucretius on English epic poetry by comparing the Lucretian subtext of Hutchinson’s *Order and Disorder* with Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

I. A Lady’s Lucretius: “Out of My Monstrous Selfe”

While the task of a translator differs essentially from that of an author, Hutchinson’s contradictory self-presentation is similar in both contexts. In her dedication to Arthur Earle of Anglesey which precedes her “vnworthy translation” of Lucretius, Hutchinson repeatedly emphasizes her “obedience” to her lordship (5). While such expressions of modesty were conventional during the period, and especially common for women writers, Hutchinson’s sense of compliance is exceptional given the controversial nature of her subject matter. In the preface, she must not only acknowledge the social superiority of her potential patron, whom she calls the “Maecenas of our days,” but also excuse the inferiority of her sex (5). Since her translation undermines the common assumption that writing is not an acceptable pastime for women, the

admission that “I did attempt things out of my owne Sphaere,” makes Hutchinson appear more in line with social norms even as she subverts them (5). It is clear that the author of the preface who now reflects on the translation she undertook “out of youthfull curiositie” adopts a strikingly different perspective on the merits of her work and its value in the years following the Restoration. Regardless, something of that former self also remains and what Keeble has argued about Hutchinson’s biography, may also be said of her translation: “there are then two Lucy Hutchinsons in the *Memoirs*: the obedient wife, her husband’s shadow, who has no voice, and the creatively independent, defiant and opinionated narrator who speaks for the former.”¹⁰ The Hutchinson who marginalizes her own work and who disparages her author differs considerably from the Hutchinson who first deemed it worthwhile to translate him.

If, for example, Hutchinson’s dedication suggests that women have no business dallying with pagan philosophy, it also suggests the opposite. The very act of translating Lucretius contradicts the notion that writing is incompatible with female modesty and Hutchinson’s dedication, even as it disparages the desire for honor, boasts about her accomplishment. In the very first lines, Hutchinson bolsters the significance of her own work by contrasting it with the failure of her acquaintance, John Evelyn, who published an incomplete translation of Lucretius in 1656. Hutchinson claims that “for (‘though a masculine Witt hath thought it worth printing his head in a lawrell crowne for the version of one of these bookes) I am so farre from glorijng in my six” (5). Despite her many apologies, Hutchinson takes pride in her identity as a woman translator and offers her particular work as evidence of female accomplishment more generally. Her use of parentheses here reveals the conflicting voices present in the text and the bifurcation of authorial purpose. One Hutchinson, to draw again on Keeble’s model, disavows her previous

¹⁰ N.H. Keeble, “The Colonel’s Shadow,” 227-247.

work and seeks to distance herself from its contents while the other Hutchinson wishes plainly to steal the laurel from atop Evelyn's head. This formal distinction is also at play in several of Hutchinson's more scathing marginalia.

One of the key pieces of evidence that we have dating Hutchinson's translation to the period between 1645 and 1658 is a disapproving poem by Sir Aston Cockayne whose address to Alexander Brome would have given Hutchinson rightful cause for offense. In order to encourage Brome to undertake his own translation of Lucretius, Cockayne writes that "I know a Lady that hath been about/ The same designe, but she must needs give out:/ Your Poet strikes too boldly home sometimes,/ In geniall things, t'appear in women's rhimes,/ The task is masculine, and he that can/ Translate *Lucretius*, is an able man."¹¹ When Hutchinson presented her manuscript to Lord Anglesey, likely with the hope of it being printed, she recognized that both its content and its authorship were culturally significant. Indeed, her autobiography reveals that even as a child, Hutchinson excelled as a student and would often compete with her male counterparts. "My father would have me learn Latin," she recounts, "and I was so apt that I outstripped my brothers who were at school, although my father's chaplain, that was my tutor, was a pitiful dull fellow."¹² By alluding to Evelyn's 'masculine Witt' in her dedication, Hutchinson continues the pattern of using Latin to distinguish herself as a woman amongst men. This desire for scholarly distinction surely contributed to Hutchinson's admitted 'curiosity' about a canonical Latin text that had never before been printed in England or translated into English.¹³

¹¹ *Small Poems of Divers Sorts* (London: Wil Godbid, 1658).

¹² Lucy Hutchinson, "The Life of Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson, Written by Herself. A Fragment" in *The Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, ed. James Sutherland (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1973), 288.

¹³ There is also an anonymous prose translation of Lucretius from the seventeenth century in the Bodleian Library (MS Rawl. D.314).

Although translation was sometimes regarded during the early modern period as more derivative than original composition and therefore more amenable to female modesty, it was still a leisure activity reserved for a small minority of women, including Mary Sidney and Queen Elizabeth, with special access to education. Hutchinson boasts of having had eight tutors all at once at the age of seven and her autobiography explains that since a dream had led her parents to believe that they would have a daughter “of some extraordinary eminency,” they “applied all their cares and spar’d no cost to emprove me in my education.”¹⁴ While literary criticism has long privileged the agency of the author, the rise of translation studies over the past several decades has shed new light on the historical and cultural significance of translation. Lawrence Venuti’s claim that scholars must examine the cultural practices that render the translator “invisible” enables us to see that Hutchinson has in many ways been doubly obscured both by her identity as a translator and by her identity as a woman writer.¹⁵ Although the first five cantos of Hutchinson’s *Order and Disorder* were printed anonymously in 1679, they had long been attributed to Hutchinson’s brother Sir Allen Apsley. This critical presumption of male authorship was not corrected until 2001 when David Norbrook, noting similarities between the poem and Hutchinson’s Lucretius, published the additional fifteen cantos which had remained in manuscript. In the broader contest of this project, attending to Hutchinson’s Lucretius not only advances our larger investigation of how laughter transforms early modern conceptions of therapeutic tranquility but also illuminates the gendered aspects of philosophical discourse and classical reception during the period. Increasingly, feminist scholars are turning to translation in order to better ascertain women’s participation in English literary culture and, as Hutchinson

¹⁴ Hutchinson, “Autobiographical Fragment,” 288.

¹⁵ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility* (Routledge: 1995). See also Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies* (Routledge:1991).

herself claims, Lucretius earned her “the little glory I had among some few of my intimate friends” (13).¹⁶ This comment suggests that, although her manuscript was never printed, those who read it recognized Hutchinson as more than a nameless transmitter of antiquity. Indeed, her Lucretius translation would later serve as inspiration for the development of Hutchinson’s own poetic voice.

While the study of early modern translation gives special insight into how classical texts shaped European intellectual culture and the prestige of many vernacular languages, it is especially relevant to the English literary context since the Renaissance arrives comparatively late in England and therefore relies more heavily on translation of both classical and continental texts. It has become commonplace, for example, to cite *De rerum natura* in the standard Latin edition published in 1564 by the French classicist Denis Lambin. Hutchinson relied mainly on a 1631 edition by the German scholar Daniel Pareus since there was no Latin edition printed in England until 1675, the same year that Hutchinson presented her translation to Anglesey. That Hutchinson’s translation responded to an urgent demand speaks all the more to her ambitions as a writer. In a recent volume of collected essays, Tania Demetriou and Rowan Tomlinson have noted that “critical attention has turned increasingly to translation in and of itself, as a process inseparable from the emergence and dissemination of humanist culture in England.”¹⁷ This is certainly true of Hutchinson’s translation which stages an encounter between two seemingly

¹⁶ On women and early modern translation see especially: Marie-Alice Belle, “Locating Early Modern Women’s Translations: Critical and Historiographical Issues” in *Women’s Translations in Early Modern England and France*, a special issue of *Renaissance and Reformation* 35:4 (2012), 1-23, Deborah Uman. *Women as Translators in Early Modern England* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2012); Margaret Hannay, ed., *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent: Kent State UP, 1985), Tina Krontis, *Oppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators in the English Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 1992)

¹⁷ Tania Demetriou and Rowan Tomlinson, ed., “Introduction.” in *The Culture of Translation in Early Modern England and France, 1500-1660* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 6.

disparate cultures and makes an unlikely match out of an English Puritan and a Roman Epicurean.

A closer examination of Hutchinson's paratextual material as well as the translation 'in and of itself' raises a number of important questions. How did Hutchinson conceive of her task as a translator and what attitude did she adopt toward her subject matter? What was her motivation for translating Lucretius and to what extent did his teachings impact her? And finally, was Hutchinson's translation ultimately successful and why should scholars attend to it today? We have already seen that, in many ways, Hutchinson's dedication is very conventional, drawing on a standard *topos humilitatis* and denouncing the impieties of her pagan author. In other more interesting ways, however, Hutchinson departs from cultural norms and sheds new light on how early English readers responded to Lucretius' ethics of pleasure and prescriptions for a life of tranquility. Hutchinson's youthful desire "to vnderstand things I heard so much discourse of at second hand" not only attests to the growing influence of atomism and Epicurean philosophy in English intellectual circles during the 1640s and 1650s but also to Hutchinson's own feelings of exclusion from this community (7). Her marginalization is echoed even in Norbrook's description of Hutchinson as "an aspiring citizen of the republic of letters" (xv). Although we know that Hutchinson takes pride in her knowledge of Latin and uses it both to enable and to legitimate her participation in the learned discourses of the day, the dedication also suggests that the teachings of Lucretius affected her in a profoundly personal way. That is, she not only read Lucretius, as did some humanists, for his exemplary Latin but also to learn from his moral philosophy.

Framed as a conversion narrative, the dedication recounts how Hutchinson learned to repent of her desire for Pagan knowledge and recasts translation itself as a means to repudiate

rather than assimilate ancient wisdom. Concerning Lucretius and “the other fardle of Philosophers,” she argues that “they represent to vs the deplorable wretchednesse of all mankind, *who are not translated from darknesse to light* by supernaturall illumination, and teach vs that their wisdom is folly, their most vertuous & pure morallity fowle defilement, their knowledge ignorance” (my emphasis 9). Although it would be impious to claim that she dispenses such divine revelation, Hutchinson certainly hopes that her poetic translation will be instrumental to the spiritual “translation” or transformation of the reader. Translation, much more than a rudimentary or derivative exercise, is revealed to be a central part of Hutchinson’s own intellectual and moral formation and her purpose then shifts toward the moral edification of a presumed reader. As a translator, Hutchinson has agency and assumes responsibility for the potentially dangerous elements of her work. Interestingly, Lucretius also aims to “translate” the central ideas of Epicurus’s Greek philosophy into Latin poetry and does so for the benefit of a particular reader [Memmius].¹⁸ When Hutchinson turns later to the composition of *Order and Disorder*, she is still acting as a translator in both senses of the term. Her biblical epic about creation not only serves as a “translation” of the book of Genesis but seeks once more to “translate” the reader from darkness to light.

Still, Hutchinson’s utter rejection of Lucretius’s central argument that chance rather than divine providence governs the universe, suggests the untranslatability of the text as a whole or at least the impossibility of moving certain ideas between incommensurate cultural contexts. While the most influential readings of Hutchinson’s translation have considered how Lucretius’s republicanism may have challenged the political climate of the Restoration or how his atomism influenced the rise of the natural sciences in England, few studies have addressed the central

¹⁸ On the relationship between Lucretius and Epicurus see David Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.)

question of whether religion, specifically Protestantism and its Puritan counterparts, are compatible with the tranquility that Lucretius posits as the end of Epicurean philosophy. Like his teacher, Lucretius recommends retirement from public life and looks only to cosmology and physics as a means of freeing man from what he believed was an irrational fear of death and divine punishment. Since Hutchinson condemns those who “make it a specious pretext within themselves, to thinke religion is nothing at all but an invention to reduce the ignorant vulgar into order & Government,” she seems to foreclose upon the possibility that a Christian could aspire to tranquility (13). But what of the laughter that Lucretius attributes to this most pleasurable state of mind?

In her dedication, Hutchinson calls attention to Lucretius’s laughter when she censures those who sin by “*deriding* Heaven and Hell, Eternall Rewards & Punishments, as fictions in the whole, because the instances of them in particular were so *ridiculous*, as seemd rather stories invented to fright children than to perswade reasonable men” (my emphasis 11). Here, laughter results from Lucretius’s supposedly enlightened view of religion and corresponds directly to *ataraxia* or the end goal of Epicurean philosophy. In order to refute this atheistic position, Hutchinson aims to silence Lucretius's laughter by strategically positioning Epicurean philosophy and Lucretius himself as objects of ridicule. She argues that Lucretius’s theories about Nature “are so *silly, foolish* and false, that nothing but his Lunacy can extenuate the crime of his arrogant ignorance” and also targets “his & his masters *ridiculous*, impious, execrable doctrine reviving the foppish casuall dance of attoms” (my emphasis 12). By laughing at Lucretius, Hutchinson dismisses his ideas without making recourse to rational argument but, in so doing, she also adopts the very stance that Lucretius himself takes toward superstition and erroneous expositors of natural phenomenon. In either case, it follows that if atomism is merely

“silly,” then readers can approach the poem without fear of corruption and without undermining the hierarchy of divine revelation over human reason. Such derisive laughter, then, actually facilitates the transmission of Lucretius’s work and the dissemination of Epicurean philosophy in England. In France, Denys Lambin adopts a similar strategy when he writes to Pierre de Ronsard, in the most authoritative Latin edition of *De rerum natura*, that “rideamus licet Epicuri deliria [it is fitting that we laugh at the madness of Epicurus].”¹⁹ When Hutchinson refers to her author as “this Lunatick” or “this Dog” she echoes a longstanding Christian tradition of repudiating Lucretius wholesale, but her approach to the text actually enables readers to derive some benefit from his teachings.

Throughout the dedication, Hutchinson’s own subtle reworking of Lucretius’s text suggests the ways in which translation serves as a basis for her creative appropriation of his ideas. When, for example, Hutchinson claims of *De rerum natura* that “I turnd it into English in a roome where my children practizd the severall qualities they were taught, with their Tutors, & I numbered the sillables of my translation by the threds of the canvas I wrought it” she characterizes the material conditions of her work in such a way that actually pits her skill directly against her author’s (7). Although the passage seems to diminish the quality of Hutchinson’s translation by comparing it to women’s work undertaken in a distracted and haphazard manner, Lucretius himself compares didactic poetry to the art of weaving and often employs technical vocabulary such as *exordium* [beginning or warp threads] and *texere* [to weave or compose].²⁰ When he writes that “Men, before weomen, were employd in wooll,/ To whom kind nature was more bountifull/ then to the female sex, and did impart/ More ingenuitie for euery art,” he insults

¹⁹ Titus Lucretius Carus, *De rerum natura libri sex*, ed. Dionysio Lambino (Paris: Philippe Gaultier, 1563), 99.

²⁰ On Lucretius’s weaving metaphors see especially Jane McIntosh Snyder, “The Warp and Woof of the Universe in Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*.” *Illinois Classical Studies*. VIII.1

women but only to deflect accusations that his own art is emasculating (5.1406-1409). By depicting translation as a pastime suitable for women, Hutchinson seems to conform to the expectations of her sex but, in so doing, cleverly asserts her agency as an author and models herself directly after Lucretius.

Later in the preface, Hutchinson plays more subversively with both Lucretius and conventional ideas about femininity, using his text to articulate the contradictions of her own authorial identity. Having previously argued that reason makes men “monstrous by their learning” and having recounted how she learned “to run out of my monstrous selfe,” Hutchinson warns the reader against gazing “too long, or too fixedly on that Monster, into which man by the sorcerie of the devil is converted, least he draw infection in att his eies, and be himselfe either metamorphosed into the most vgly shape, or stupefied and hardened against all better impressions” (15). Again drawing on the idea of conversion or metamorphosis, Hutchinson suggests that translation brought her into such close proximity with Lucretius that she was actually made to resemble him. Casting herself as a Medusa figure who turns men who look upon her to stone, Hutchinson frames her own disfigurement as evidence of her knowledge and expertise as a translator. Even her elaboration of monstrosity recalls Lucretius and his account of the origin of animal life when “all forming earth then many monsters made/ Who most vnaturall looks and members had,/ Androginous, in whom two sexes meete,/ Yett neither owns” (5.876-879). If we take Hutchinson’s preface as a theoretical exposition of her approach to translation, we see that despite her efforts to distance herself from Lucretius, the translator always runs the risk of merging with her source. The hybrid nature of the monster that Hutchinson becomes through the process of translation suggests that Hutchinson not only shares with Lucretius an androgynous penchant for weaving but also for didactic poetry.

II. Translating Lucretian Laughter and Hutchinson's Smile

As we have seen in earlier chapters, laughter became implicated in the early modern reception of both ancient atomism and philosophical tranquility. Democritus, the father of atomistic physics, was widely regarded during the Renaissance as “the laughing philosopher” and the therapeutic objectives of Pyrrhonian skepticism were more practically implemented in medical texts prescribing laughter as a cure for melancholy. Ada Palmer, who writes without qualms of a “Lucretian Skepticism,” suggests that the already complex relationship between skepticism and Epicureanism in antiquity becomes all the more complex in the seventeenth century once Pierre Gassendi and Marin Mersenne transform skepticism into a vehicle for modern scientific empiricism.²¹ Although Lucretius ultimately advances a dogmatic system of thought, he relies on skeptical strategies to such an extent that Palmer is right to argue that in addition to Sextus Empiricus, Epictetus, and Cicero, “now Lucretius must be added to the list as another vein of transmission, and one that carried a distinct form of skeptical argumentation not highlighted by any other surviving ancient skeptic.”²² Like the Pyrrhonian skeptic, Lucretius necessarily casts doubt on the viability of sense perception as a means of attaining knowledge since the atom is not discernible to the naked eye. Similarly, he adopts a skeptical attitude toward religion by systematically offering natural explanations for divine phenomena in order to reveal superstition as the true cause of human suffering. The most salient point of comparison, for our present purposes, however, is that like the skeptics, Lucretius posits epistemology as the basis for

²¹ Ada Palmer, “Religion Trampled Underfoot: Epicurus, Atomism, Atheism, and Skepticism in the Renaissance” in *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2014), 221. See also James Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archeology of Ataraxia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

²² Palmer, *Reading Lucretius*, 33.

attaining *ataraxia*, a state of mind that he represents with metaphorical descriptions of untroubled waters and a sea that laughs.

In most respects, Hutchinson's translation of *De rerum natura* adequately renders the language and contents of Lucretius's verse. Although Hugh J. Munro, the prominent nineteenth-century classicist who first brought scholarly attention to Hutchinson's original translation manuscript, ultimately deemed it unworthy of publication on account of her "more extensive than accurate" command of the Latin language, two modern editions of the translation attest to its lasting value. Hugh de Quehen, who published the first edition in 1996, has argued specifically that Munro's observation that "gross errors and misconceptions occur in almost every page" must be mediated by the fact that many such errors result not from Hutchinson's poor command of the language but from her use of a corrupt Latin text with annotations and emendations that have since been rejected.²³

More recently, David Norbrook and Reid Barbour, joint editors of the two volume Oxford edition (2012), have made de Quehen's contention all the more clear by printing alongside Hutchinson's translation the Latin edition(s) on which she relied. While de Quehen's argument that Munro was ill-suited to appreciate Hutchinson's pre-Augustan style makes a claim for the translation's intrinsic literary merit, Norbrook and Barbour emphasize its broader cultural and historical value.²⁴ As evinced by her preface, Hutchinson's conception of the translator's task is not at all in line with that of an academic philologist whose purpose is to produce an authoritative scholarly edition. She even seems to boast that "I thought this booke not worthy

²³ H.A.J. Munro, "Mrs Lucie Hutchinson's Translation of Lucretius," *The Journal of Classical and Sacred Philology* 4 (1858; reprint, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1970), 122.

²⁴ Hugh de Quehen, "Ease and Flow in Lucy Hutchinson's Lucretius," *Studies in Philology*, 93 (1996), 288-30. In a review of this edition, David Hopkins takes issue with de Quehen's oversimplified understanding of Augustan poetry and emphasizes the modesty of Hutchinson's achievement by reiterating the literary superiority of John Dryden's later Lucretius translation. Hopkins, "Pre-Augustan' Lucretius?: Lucy Hutchinson's 'De Rerum Natura.'" *Arion* 5.3 (1998): 124-133.

either of review or correction, the whole worke being one fault” (7). Even so, her modern editors are right to observe that, in terms of linguistic accuracy and fidelity, Hutchinson easily outstrips contemporary efforts by John Evelyn (1656) and Thomas Creech (1682). Turning now to examine her translation of the proem to Book One in which the poet invokes the goddess Venus as inspiration for his narration of creation, I want to consider how Hutchinson translates Lucretian laughter and its larger significance to philosophical therapy.

Although Lucretius does not thematize laughter to the same degree as Montaigne or Burton, laughter distinguishes his creative rendering of a cosmos where man lives unburdened by superstition and free from fear. Closely allied to Epicurean conceptions of pleasure, laughter enables Lucretius to characterize both human and nonhuman agents such as nature, the Epicurean sage, or the gods in such a way that unifies his natural and moral philosophy, his physics and his ethics. Although Hutchinson often renders variants of “ridere,” the Latin verb meaning to laugh, as the more diminutive “smile,” her translation attests to a broader understanding that laughter not only informs Lucretius’s poetic idiom but also rises to the level of a philosophical concept.²⁵ A 1725 Latin edition of *De rerum natura* contains a gloss on the first occurrence of the word “ridet” that reads simply, “Amat hoc verbum Lucretius [Lucretius loves this word].”²⁶ Indeed, for Lucretius, laughter presupposes a tranquil state of mind that results only from a rational understanding of the natural world and man’s relation to it. When Hutchinson translates the invocation to Venus, her attention to the language of affect and emotion is especially striking.

²⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all citations of the Latin text of *De rerum natura* are to the edition reproduced in the Norbrook and Barbour edition.

²⁶ Titus Lucretius Carus, *De rerum natura libri six, cum notis integris*, ed. Dionysii Lambini, Oberti Gifanii, Tanaquilli Fari, Thomae Creech (Lugduni Batavorum, apud Janssonios van der Aa, 1725), 7.

In the proem, Lucretius praises Venus as the patron goddess of Rome, the generative source of all living things, and the only deity able bring about civil peace by subduing the Martian forces of war. While these political and scientific implications are important, the philosophical implications of Lucretius' Venus are even more important for understanding the role that laughter plays throughout *De rerum natura*. Venus, whom Hutchinson describes as the "Delight of god's and men" is the personification of pleasure itself which Epicurus posits as the highest good. Hutchinson's choice of "delight" is perhaps less overtly sensual than the Latin "voluptas," but it conveys an Epicurean sense of pleasure more clearly than, for example, John Evelyn's choice of "joy."²⁷ Hutchinson continues,

When thou (O Goddess) comest stormes flie away
And heaven is no more obscur'd with showres
For thee the fragrant earth spreads various flowers
The calmed ocean smiles, and att thy sight
The serene skie shines with augmented light.
(1.6-10)

Although Hutchinson here renders "ridet" as "smiles," the reader still grasps its strong association with the calmness [aequora] and serenity [placatum] of nature which Lucretius offers as metaphors for Epicurean tranquility. Even amidst the raging storms of civil strife, the follower of Epicurus enjoys a mind free from perturbation and a body free from pain. Evelyn aims to recuperate some of the semantic meaning lost in his rendering of "voluptas" by later anticipating Lucretius's use of "ridet" with an interpolation of "mirth."²⁸ Whereas Hutchinson writes that Venus "doest grace/ The starrie firmament, the sea, the earth," Evelyn suggests that she, "In

²⁷ Titus Lucretius Carus, *An Essay on the First Book of T. Lucretius Carus De Rerum Natura*, trans. John Evelyn (London: Prined for Gabriel Bedle and Thomas Collins, and are to be sold at their shpt at the Middle-Temple-Gate in Fleetstreet, 1656), 13.

²⁸ Evelyn, *An Essay*, 13.

heaven, dost all comfort bring and mirth/ To the ship-bearing Seas, Corn-bearing Earth.”²⁹

Nevertheless, like Hutchison, Evelyn also maintains that in Lucretius’s world, “Smooth seas and heavens smile.”³⁰

Long before either Hutchinson or Evelyn could have encountered Lucretius, Edmund Spenser had incorporated a loose four stanza translation of the proem to the first book of *De rerum natura* into the fourth book his *The Faerie Queene* (1596). Assigning Venus the epithets “Mother of laughter” and “welspring of blisse,” Spenser amplifies the goddess’s association with positive emotions like mirth and joy.³¹ In contrast to Hutchinson, Spenser uses both “smyling” to characterize Venus and “laugh” to characterize the response of the heavens to her apparition. He renders the opening lines of Lucretius as follows:

“Great Venus! Queene of beautie and of grace,
The joy of Gods and men, that under skie
Doest fayrest shine, and most adorne thy place;
That with thy *smyling looke* doest peaifie
The raging seas, and makst the stormes to flie;
Thee, goddesse, thee the winds, the clouds doe feare,
And, when thou spredst thy mantle forth on hie,
The waters play, and pleasant lands appeare,
And heavens *laugh*, and al the world shews *joyous cheare*”³²

In the commentary to the most recent edition of Hutchinson's translation, Norbrook and Barbour suggest that, given the breadth of her reading and special interest in Lucretius, Hutchinson would

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ All citations of Spenser are from *Spenser: The Faerie Queen*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2007), 4.10.47. See Laurel L. Hendrix, “‘Mother of laughter, and wellspring of blisse’: Spenser’s Venus and the Poetics of Mirth,” *English Literary Renaissance* 23.1 (1993): 113-133.

³² Spenser, 4.10.44, (my emphasis). While scholars working on the reception of Lucretius have noted this passage, Spenser scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge Lucretius’s influence. For more on this debate see Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011), 158-172, Anthony Esolen, "Spenserian Chaos: Lucretius in The Faerie Queene." *Spenser Studies* 11 (1994): 31-52, Jonathan Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things* (New York: Fordham UP, 2009), 63-121, Edwin Greenlaw, "Spenser and Lucretius," *Studies in Philology* 17.4 (1920): 439-464, Ronald Levinson, "Spenser and Bruno." *PMLA* (1928): 675-681.

surely have known these lines. It is all the more significant, therefore, that she departs from them by diminishing the very relationship between laughter and Epicurean pleasure that Spenser aims to accentuate. Norbrook and Barbour suggest that Hutchinson seems to follow Daniel Pareus' gloss on the word "rident" which suggests that the oceans "sua æquabilitate & tranquillitate hilaritatem quondam præ se ferunt [by their smoothness and tranquility reveal a certain cheerfulness]." ³³ Hutchinson's smiling ocean effectively blunts the force of such cheerfulness for early modern readers, but it still casts tranquility in a positive light and conveys the essential relationship that Lucretius posits between the emotions and nature.

In order to describe a continuity that early modern subjects assume between the internal climate of the body and that of the external world, Gail Paster has employed the term "ecology of the passions," explaining that "emotions were a body's weather, its winds, and its waves." ³⁴ When Hutchinson translates Lucretius, she not only renders the language of his poetry but also the concepts of his philosophy. In the case of the 'calmed ocean' that 'smiles' and the 'serene skie' that 'shines,' Hutchinson conveys the way in which a radically materialist conception of the universe obscures the boundary between animate and inanimate things. While Hutchinson's smiling ocean participates in a poetic tradition dating back to Homer, who also portrays the ocean as *γελᾶν* [laughing or shining], it acquires a more philosophical meaning in the context of *De rerum natura*. ³⁵ For Lucretius, laughter contradicts the affective state characterized by

³³ See note commentary Hutchinson, *DRN*, 469. Latin translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Pareus actually takes this gloss directly from the Lambin edition.

³⁴ Gail Paster, "Becoming the Landscape: The Ecology of the Passions in the Legend of Temperance," in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 139 and *Humoring the Body* (Chicago: U of Chicago P 2010), 9.

³⁵ On *γελᾶν* see Stephen Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008). See also Halliwell's appendix on the difference between laughter and smiles *Greek Laughter*, 520-529.

common metaphors such as Hamlet's "a sea of troubles."³⁶ It specifically invokes the various forms of emotional distress or perturbation that Epicurean *ataraxia* seeks to dispel.

Unlike more conventional uses of prosopopoeia that attribute human characteristics to abstract ideas or inanimate objects, Lucretius's sea laughs because human emotions and natural phenomenon like the weather are more closely linked in an atomistic universe. Since all matter is composed of atoms, the soul—which is as mortal as it is material—shares a common nature with the body and the body, in turn, shares a common nature with its surrounding environment. Hutchinson's translation thus suggests that Paster's sense of an "ecology of the passions," extends beyond the early modern period and back at least as far as Lucretius. While Spenser's interpolation of "thy smyling looke" effectively transfers laughter back to the personified goddess, Hutchinson reserves "smiles" for the ocean, as does Lucretius, and in so doing more accurately communicates the liminality of a passion shared by both human and nonhuman entities.

Although Hutchinson does not share Lucretius's open admiration for Epicurus, we can imagine that she identified with the difficulty he ascribes to the task of translation. If we substitute her Latin for his Greek and her English for his Latin, the parallel in the following lines becomes all the more resonant:

How hard a task I've taken to rehearse
The Greeke obscurities in Latine verse,
The scantnesse of the tongue, and noveltie
Of things whereof I treat, makes me well see,
Yet doth your vertue, and the hope t'obtaine
Your pleasing friendship, lessen all the payne,
Inducing me to spend my wakefull nights
In searching words, which may convey cleare light
Into your mind, that soe you may discern
All hidden things, and natures misteries learne;
For not the sunne, nor the bright beames of day,

³⁶ Shakespeare, Hamlet III.i.60.

Can the minds mists and terrors drive away,
But natures contemplation, wherein
Our disquisition we from hence begin
(l.139-52)

This passage, which Hutchinson renders with a single periodic sentence, frames translation as a task undertaken primarily for the benefit of others. Though we cannot attest to the number of readers that Hutchinson had or longed to have, her dedication to Lord Anglesey evinces a similar care for the mental and emotional wellbeing of the reader whom she fears will be led by the poem to neglect “that healing spring of Truth, which only hath the vertue to restore & refresh sick humane life” (15). Lucretius’s apparent care for the wellbeing of his patron Memmius not only motivates him to make the teachings of Epicurus accessible to Roman readers but also reveals the extent to which both his poetry and his exposition of physics ultimately serves the ends of therapeutic philosophy.

In order to “warne incautious travellers, and leaue a testimony” Hutchinson, referring to her dedication says, “I could not but in charity sett vp this seamarke,” lest readers “loose their liues, and fill themseues with poyson, drowning their spiritts in those pudled waters” (15). Even as she repudiates Lucretius, Hutchinson reveals her indebtedness to him by repurposing the language and imagery of his nautical metaphors. Read in conjunction with the dedication, the emblem of the smiling ocean that we first encounter in the proem reveals itself to be nothing more than a delusion, superseded by the “Light, Life, knowledge, tranquillity, rest” that Hutchinson locates in the “only true & pure divine fountain” (13). And yet, the vehemence of her denunciation in the 1675 dedication only attests to the power that Lucretius held over Hutchinson in the late 1650s during which time she undertook the translation. Indeed, describing herself as one who “had miraculously scapd a horrible precipice,” Hutchinson suggests that she had all but cast herself into the smiling sea of Lucretius’s atheism and impieties (14). Although she would

later repent of a “wanton dalliance with impious bookes,” Hutchinson’s translation still serves as a record of the profit and pleasure, however brief, derived from her encounter with Lucretius (13). We know that, in retrospect, he only caused her shame, but did Lucretius ever make Hutchinson smile?

Sometime during the period either just prior to or during which Hutchinson undertook her translation of Lucretius, she sat for a portrait by Robert Walker, the chief painter of the Parliamentary party. The portrait depicts Hutchinson with a laurel wreath in her lap accompanied by one of her sons. Norbrook, who features this image from a private collection on the cover of his edition of *Order and Disorder*, and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann both cite the



Figure 1 Portrait of Lucy Hutchinson by Robert Walker. Private Collection.

laurels as clear evidence of Hutchinson's poetic ambition.³⁷ Although her accomplishments would be far greater than his, Hutchinson appears in this portrait more modest than Evelyn whom she reproaches in her dedication for wearing a crown of laurels on the frontispiece of his incomplete translation of Lucretius. Nevertheless, like her poet, Hutchinson longs "To crop the newborne flowers, and get/ A fresher wreath, my temples to adorn" or "to crowne/ My head with a fresh wreath of flowers new blowne,/ Such as noe muse hath ever worne before" (1.934-35; 4.3-5). The laurels, however, are not the only element of Hutchinson's portrait that suggests resonances with Lucretius.

By painting Hutchinson alongside her son, Walker underscores her identity as a mother and invites a comparison between the translator of Lucretius and the maternal figure of Venus. Although Hutchinson bore many children, Walker's decision to feature a single boy in this painting, who gazes lovingly up at his mother, further strengthens the visual resemblance between Hutchinson and the goddess who is often depicted alongside either cupid or Aeneas in a similar pose. Seated in front of a tall column, the background suggests Hutchinson's connection to the classical past while billowing clouds posit nature as both a formal source of light and a figurative source of inspiration. Unlike Evelyn's frontispiece, which features a highly eroticized image of a lactating Venus spraying milk from no fewer than five breasts directly onto Evelyn's head, Hutchinson's portrait is considerably less sensual.³⁸ Her facial features, however, give way to a gentle and serene smile that not only invokes the opening lines of her Lucretius but also suggests the pleasure Hutchinson takes in translating him. Although it may seem implausible that

³⁷ Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry and Culture 1640-1680* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 203-204.

³⁸ A digital scan of Evelyn's frontispiece may be viewed here: <http://www.library.rochester.edu/rbscp/4301>. Evelyn's frontispieces bears a striking resemblance to the frontispiece of the Janssonius Latin edition of Lucretius (1620) as well as to the frontispiece of Michel de Marolles's French translation. See Line Cottagnies, "Michel de Marolles's 1650 French Translation of Lucretius and its Reception in England." *Lucretius and the Early Modern* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016), 161-189.

Walker would cast his subject as a Venus figure and that either Lucy or John Hutchinson would welcome this, we must recall just how popular paintings of Venus had become by the mid-seventeenth century. As Norbrook and Barbour note, John Hutchinson had himself acquired three pictures from the royal collection featuring the goddess, two of which were by the prominent Italian painter Titian (xxxiv). Although neither the *Venus del Pardo* nor the *Venus and the Organ Player*, which the Hutchinsons proudly displayed at Owthorpe, feature a Venus who smiles, the *Venus of Urbino*, from the same series of reclining Venuses, does wear a tantalizing smile.

The sharp contrast between Titian's erotic nudes and Hutchinson's portrait reflects the full range of meanings ascribed to the goddess while her smile reflects a common philosophical distinction between Heavenly Aphrodite and Common Aphrodite.³⁹ Hutchinson's portrait therefore suggests, like her Lucretius translation, that Epicurean pleasure need not be reduced to the hedonism of the Royalist court but may represent something entirely different. While Norbrook suggests that Hutchinson values the austerity of Epicurean ethics and finds in Lucretius an analogue for contemporary Republican virtue, Barbour has shown how Epicurean prescriptions for a tranquil life appealed as much to Parliamentarians like Hutchinson as to Royalists like Walter Charlton and Margaret Cavendish in the years following the English Civil War.⁴⁰ If we take Walker's portrait as emblematic of this multivalence, however, we are better able to see how Hutchinson's translation renders the concept of Epicurean tranquility into the

³⁹ See for example, Pausanias's speech in Plato's *Symposium*.

⁴⁰ Barbour, "Between Atoms and the Spirit: Lucy Hutchinson's Translation of Lucretius," *Renaissance Papers*, 1994, 1-16.

new and unexpected context of Puritan intellectual culture. While Creech's printed translation was much more widely circulated than Hutchinson's, his libertinism often distorts Lucretius's poem to make it more enticing to courtly audiences. The Venus of his poem, for example, appears inexplicably as a monarch, "profusely drest/ With all the Spices of the wanton East."⁴¹ Hutchinson's modesty, as evinced by her relatively plain dress and serene smile, thus serves as a more reliable vehicle for Epicurean ethics. The very scrupulousness that may have led Hutchinson to denounce Lucretius as an atheist seems ironically to have made her less likely to depart from his original text.

Although Hutchinson may have wished, for both personal and political reasons, to subdue the full force of *De rerum natura*, her substitution of a smile for Lucretian laughter also reflects broader cultural and historical changes that scholars since Norbert Elias have sought to explain in terms of civility or the "civilizing process."⁴² Drawing on Elias's unfinished work on laughter, for example, Quentin Skinner has argued that during the mid to late seventeenth century, the medical and philosophical discourses affirming laughter as a therapeutic and socially productive passion began to fall into disrepute.⁴³ Citing a variety of conduct manuals alongside the agelastic pronouncements of Hobbes, Skinner suggests that laughter became a specific object of prohibition during Hutchinson's lifetime, "something that needs to be eliminated or at least controlled."⁴⁴ While previous chapters have examined how laughter informs early modern receptions of classical tranquility, the philosophical end shared by both Skeptics and Epicureans, Hutchinson's translation effectively marks the end of this transformation. Born in the wake of

⁴¹ Lucretius, *The Epicurean Philosopher*, trans. Thomas Creech, 3. See also Hutchinson, *DRN*, lix.

⁴² Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners Vol. I*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

⁴³ Skinner, "Hobbes and the Classical Theory of Laughter" in *Leviathan after 350 Years*, ed. Tom Sorell & Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

the French Wars of Religion, therapeutic laughter finally collapses with the lost hope of an English Republic. As the demands of social decorum and public decency grew ever more rigid, laughter itself comes to be understood as an excessive emotion rather than a means to regulate excessive emotions and, as we shall see, injunctions to exert proper control over one's body pertain especially to the female body.

Looking forward to the final decades of the seventeenth century, Skinner highlights the clear prohibition of laughter in Lord Halifax's *Advice to a Daughter* (1688), but he overlooks the gendered aspects of this prohibition in order to argue for the more absolute nature of an increasingly rigid demand for decorum and self-regulation. In an effort to understand the more particular conditions of Hutchinson's translation, I want to suggest that the Halifax work sheds light on the broader connotations of her smile, both in the Lucretius manuscript and in the Walker portrait. Although Halifax cautions his daughter against laughing too much and under the wrong circumstances, it soon becomes apparent that the problem with laughter is not its association with a particular passion such as mirth, but its association with loud noises and even speech itself. "A good-humour'd Woman," writes Halifax, "one who thinketh she must always be in a Laugh, or a broad Smile... thinketh it less ill manners to talk impertinently, than to be silent in Company... the Chattering of Monkeys is a better noise than such a Concert of senceless Merriment"⁴⁵ If rational discourse and laughter are proper unto "Man," as Aristotle maintains, then Halifax makes the gendered assumptions of this "universal" pronouncement clear by excluding both women and animals.

⁴⁵ Halifax, George Savile. *Advice to a Daughter as to Religion, Husband, House, Family and Children, Behaviour and Conversation, Friendship, Censure, Vanity and Affectation, Pride, Diversions* (London: Printed for M. Gillyflower and B. Tooke, 1699), 106-107.

Hutchinson herself attests to such gendered assumptions when she explains to Anglesey that if her Lucretius translation “had merited glory, or could my sex, (whose more becoming vertue is silence,) deriue honor from writing, my aspiring Muse would not haue sought any other Patrone then your Lordship” (5). The prohibition of laughter therefore serves as a natural extension of the prohibition of women’s speech and writing. While the closed-mouth smile of Hutchinson’s portrait does communicate a certain cheerfulness, it does so without actually allowing laughter to burst forth from her teeth, lips, and open mouth. In many ways, Hutchinson’s smile represents the suppression of Lucretian laughter and effectively “translates” the Epicurean sense of natural pleasure into the more “civilized” world of the seventeenth century. In more interesting ways, however, Hutchinson’s smile is characteristic of her ironic engagement with tropes of female modesty. Although she acknowledges the cultural and social codes proscribing women’s speech, Hutchinson nevertheless finds reason to transgress them. Her smile therefore suggests a subtle renegotiation of the precept that women ought not laugh. As we have seen in the dedication, Hutchinson does indeed laugh at Lucretius when she ridicules his atheism, but she also laughs with him when she denounces the effects of superstition and worldly ambition. We might say that just as Walker’s portrait of Hutchinson renders the invisible translator visible, so too does her translation render audible, the inaudible laughter of her smile. The act of translation itself, for Hutchinson, then constitutes a form of laughter.

III. Hutchinson as “Beata Illa”: Retiring to Owthorpe with Much Mirth

A poem that Hutchinson composed around the same time as her Lucretius translation reveals the extent to which she was influenced by an Epicurean conception of tranquility and suggests that translation and original composition were complementary practices. While

Hutchinson's authorial voice is confined to the margins and other paratextual material of the translation, here we see her more freely adapting many of his central arguments concerning public life, ambition, and ethical pleasure. Ostensibly written after her husband's retirement from political life (1653-1659), the poem also amplifies the political significance of such retirement during the rise of the Protectorate by targeting the "unbounded sovereignty" of princes and the "pomp and majesty" of court (4, 60).⁴⁶ Comprised of 31 rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter, the poem begins as follows:

All sorts of men through various labours press
To the same end, contented quietness;
Great princes vex their labouring thoughts to be
Possessed of an unbounded sovereignty;
The hardy soldier doth all toils sustain
That he may conquer first, and after reign:
Th' industrious merchant ploughs the angry seas
That he may bring home wealth, and live at ease.
These none of them attain: for sweet repose
But seldom to the splendid palace goes
(1-10)

Modern scholars who have treated this poem are quick to note the likely influence of pastoral verses such as Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst," Vergil's *Eclogues*, and especially Horace's *Epode II*, all of which praise the delights of a country retreat.⁴⁷ Judging Lucretius to be a less immediate precursor, Susan Wiseman argues that Hutchinson's poem structurally resembles Horace's poem and seems specifically to adapt his idea of the "beatus ille [happy man]."⁴⁸ Like Horace, who juxtaposes the work of farming with the work of business, politics, and war, Hutchinson offers critical appraisals of princes, soldiers, and merchants. While she draws clearly on conventional

⁴⁶ Hutchinson, "All Sorts of Men Through Various Labours Press," in *The Broadview Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Verse*, ed. Alan Rudrum, Joseph Black, Holly Faith (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2001), 317-318. All subsequent citations to the poem will be by line to this edition.

⁴⁷ See Susan Wiseman, *Conspiracy and Virtue: Women, Writing, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 2006), 185-88 and Elizabeth Scott-Bauman, *Forms of Engagement*, 161-163.

⁴⁸ Horace, *Epode II*, ln 1.

dichotomies between country and court, *otium* [leisure] and *negotium* [business], Hutchinson also introduces an entirely new dichotomy between men and women by transforming Horace's praise of a single man into censure of the many men who fail to attain the Epicurean ideal that she calls 'contented quietness' and 'sweet repose.' Since Hutchinson's "All Sorts of Men" foregrounds tranquility much more explicitly than Horace's *Epode II*, we should regard Lucretius as an equally important source of influence. Indeed, when Hutchinson claims that "private lives are only free from care" and "country slumbers undisturbed are," she echoes the Epicurean idea that withdrawal from public life is most conducive to pleasure.

While Hutchinson does not presume that the tranquility her poem exalts is easily attainable, she does imply that it may be more attainable for women than men. Previous chapters on Montaigne and Burton have highlighted retirement from public life as a precondition for writing during which time engagement in scholarship takes the place of engagement in politics. This literary convention, even when it appears disingenuous, is usually gendered male since women cannot withdraw from a "Sphaere," to use Hutchinson's terminology, in which they were never active. Much more than other schools of ancient philosophy, however, Epicureanism lends itself to the kind of subversion that Hutchinson here intimates since men and women alike gained regular admittance into the Garden.⁴⁹ Although "All Sorts of Men" does not explicitly address women or women's special access to philosophical tranquility, Hutchinson's decision to entirely omit the section of Horace's poem that praises the "chaste wife" who "should be playing her part there,/ In caring for home and children,/... /Piling the sacred hearth high with old firewood/ For her weary man's arrival" suggests a general distaste for the gender norms associated with the

⁴⁹ See Natania Meeker on the relationship between Epicureanism and Women in eighteenth-century France. "Engendering Modernity: Epicurean Women from Lucretius to Rousseau." *Dynamic Reading: Studies in the Reception of Epicureanism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 133-161.

poetic trope of male retirement to a country house.⁵⁰ Critics have not, to my knowledge, commented on Hutchinson's omission of this Horatian passage, but it is all the more significant since Ben Jonson follows Horace quite closely when he writes in "To Penshurst" of

what praise was heaped
On thy good lady then, who therein reaped
The just reward of her high housewifery;
To have her linen, plate, and all things nigh,
When she was far; and not a room but dressed
As if it had expected such a guest!
These, Penshurst, are thy praise, and yet not all.
Thy lady's noble, fruitful, chaste withal
(83-90)

By declining to replicate the association between women and domestic duties, which characterizes both Horace's and Ben Jonson's depiction of country life, Hutchinson's poem simultaneously participates in a classical and contemporary tradition of pastoral poetry and departs from it in significant ways. In the earlier works, the masculine ideal of tranquility necessarily excludes women because it depends in large part on a wife's duty to her husband. While Hutchinson preserves Horace's delight in a simple "home-grown meal," her use of the passive voice in the line "His table is with home-got dainties crowned" deliberately obscures the identity of the person preparing the food. At the Hutchinson estate in Nottinghamshire, these duties were likely relegated to servants since the lady of the house preferred composing verse at her leisure or translating classical and theological works from Latin.

Many years after writing "All Sorts of Men," Hutchinson would describe her courtship with her husband by recounting what another suitor had said to John Hutchinson when he first expressed a desire to be better acquainted with the young Lucy Apsley: "Sir, you must not expect that, for she is of a humour she will not be acquainted with any of mankind... she shuns

⁵⁰ Horace, *Epode II*, trans. A.S. Kline (2005).

the converse of men as the plague; *she only lives in the enjoyment of herself*, and has not the humanity to communicate that happiness to any of our sex.”⁵¹ Fashioning herself as a model of self-possession, Hutchinson seems already to embody the characteristics of the Epicurean sage who is unmoved by the passionate excess of romantic love and who partakes in the happiness of the gods. Unlike her male suitors, she has learned from Lucretius, in her own words, “that humane natures are/ With little pleasd, and *best themselves enjoy*,/ When payne doth not torment, nor pleasure cloy” (II.20-22).⁵² Although both Lucy and John Hutchinson retired to their country house at Owthorpe during the interregnum to watch as Cromwell dismantled the Commonwealth they had fought to establish, it was she and not he who studied Lucretius at this time and who sought to understand the philosophical grounds for such retreat. It was she and not he who aspired to be a “*beata illa* [happy woman].”

Hutchinson’s reflection on ethical pleasure in “All Sorts of Men” attests to the broader influence of Epicurean philosophy on her thinking and, in particular, of Lucretius on her verse. As in her translation, Hutchinson carefully differentiates between heavenly and common Aphrodite in order to distance herself from the hedonism of courtly life and the libertinism that would later come to characterize the reign of Charles II.

Nor can voluptuous men more fullness find,
For enjoyed pleasures leave their sting behind.
He’s only rich who knows no want; he reigns
Whose will no severe tyranny constrains;
And he alone possesseth true delight
Whose spotless soul no guilty fears affright
(25-30)

Hutchinson’s conception of ‘true delight’ continues the Epicurean tradition of overturning conventional estimations of wealth, power, and ambition but politicizes even further Lucretius’s

⁵¹ Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, 29.

⁵² See also Hutchinson, *DRN*, II.1122-1123 and III.330.

idealization of a simple life lived in accordance with nature. While Lucretius's statement that "In truth mans feare, and still attendant care/ Nor clashing arms, nor keene darts can repell/ But boldly they with kings and greatmen dwell" clearly vindicates a private life over a public life since even the most powerful kings are powerless in the face of desire, Hutchinson turns this general admonition of politics into a specific admonition of monarchy (2.46-48). Her use of the word 'tyranny' to characterize the unchecked rule of the passions, suggests that monarchy leads inevitably to the abuse of power.

This critique of monarchy is strengthened by Hutchinson's argument that freedom can only be found in the countryside since "Here man's a prince; his subjects ne'er repine/ When on his back their wealthy fleeces shine:/ If for his appetite the fattest die,/ Those who survive will raise no mutiny" (33-36). Once he withdraws from public life, man's desire for dominion extends only to the animals and while the language of pryncedom is here tied inextricably to slaughter and greed, it is at very least circumscribed by the limits of the estate. In Lucretius, kings fear death like all men unschooled in philosophy, but in Hutchinson, they fear a violent death at the hands of "spies" or "a poisoned morsel" (39, 42). While the Epicurean conception of retirement held powerful appeal for exiled Royalists during the interregnum, the clear anti-court sentiments of Hutchinson's poem likely register her growing disillusionment with Cromwell's Protectorate.⁵³ Whether the Hutchinsons retired to Owthorpe by choice or out of necessity after the declaration of the Commonwealth of England, the idyllic poem nevertheless casts a dark light

⁵³ While Norbrook and Barbour suggest of Hutchinson's Lucretius translation that "here and elsewhere her political language combines Epicurean elements with a strongly Parliamentary perspective" and attests more broadly to the "wide spectrum of different political perspectives which the *DRN* offered in the 1650s," Charles Key Smith has argued that Hutchinson's preface only replicates conventional Puritan rejections of a Royalist/epicurean ideology and that there is little evidence to support the notion that, during the seventeenth century, Lucretius was used to support a Republican agenda. Unlike Norbrook and Barbour, however, Smith does not take into account Hutchinson's more overtly politicized "All Sorts of Men." Hutchinson, *DRN*, lxxxvi and Smith, "French Philosophy and English Politics in Interregnum Poetry" in *The Stuart Court and Europe: Essays in Politics and Political Culture*, ed. Malcolm Smuts (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 200.

on their republican aspirations. In the wake of the Civil War, therefore, even given the triumph of the Parliamentarian party, “All Sorts of Men” represents both an ideal and the failure of an ideal. By privileging the “freedom” and “liberty” of private life, Hutchinson diminishes the political import of these values in such a way that may be ethically suspect (61, 31).

Expanding on the idea of ‘true delight,’ Hutchinson notes that once removed from the intrigues of court life, one enjoys “mirth” that is not “confined to rules of state” (40). Indeed, the enjoyment of natural pleasures that Hutchinson praises draws directly from the second and fifth books of *De rerum natura* in which Lucretius describes the idyllic period, in a longer account of civilization, just prior to the twin birth of luxury and war. Although the country lacks the lavish adornments of the court, Hutchinson argues along with Lucretius that the wealth of nature far exceeds that of a “splendid palace” and is more conducive to human happiness (10). Her emphasis on the language of affect not only invokes Lucretius’s metaphorical descriptions of *ataraxia* but also suggests that translating the *De rerum natura* shaped Hutchinson’s own understanding and practice of philosophical therapy. She writes,

Bright constellations hang above his head,
Beneath his feet are flow’ry carpets spread
The *merry* birds delight him with their songs,
And *healthful* air his *happy* life prolongs;
At harvest *merrily* his flocks he shears
(43-47 my emphasis)

Although Hutchinson objects to the sensual pleasures of court, her objections are not only political but also philosophical in nature since the “wantonness” that Creech so eagerly amplifies in his translation of Lucretius actually distorts the true teachings of Epicurus.⁵⁴ In “All Sorts of Men,” we see that Hutchinson uses repetition to indicate that she does indeed care for pleasure

⁵⁴ Norbrook and Barbour note that the word “wantonness” occurs 34 times in Creech’s translation but only five times in Hutchinson’s translation. Hutchinson, *DRN*, ix.

since it is important to her that the farmer be as ‘merry’ as the birds that ‘delight him.’ Likewise, her perhaps heavy handed use of alliteration makes happiness integral to health.

When comparing the grass to ornate rugs, Hutchinson’s ‘flow’ry carpets spread’ recalls a particular phrase that she employs twice in her translation of Lucretius. In the proem to book two when Lucretius offers a radical reappraisal of the sumptuous feasts and decadent furnishings of the rich, Hutchinson translates:

Yet men, stretcht ^out vpon the mossie ground,
When smiling seasons the calme yeare restores,
And checquers the greene grasse with various floures,
In shadie groves, neere to some purling spring,
As sweete refreshments tast, as wealth can bring
(2.28-32)

In comparing the Latin, we notice that Hutchinson again suppresses Lucretius’s laughter when she renders his “tempestas arridet [laughing season]” as ‘smiling seasons,’ but the phrase “conspergunt viridantis floribus herbas” seems to have made a lasting impression on her. When Lucretius changes the verb “conspergunt [besprinkle]” to “pingebant [paint]” in book five, Hutchinson retains her distinctive use of ‘checquers’ and only slightly modifies her coloring of the grass and flowers. In “All Sorts of Men,” she effectively transposes Lucretius’s ‘viridantis floribus herbas’ into the countryside of Nottinghamshire and her own bucolic image of ‘flow’ry carpets spread’ showcases her characteristic concision as a translator. While such verbal and thematic resonances suggest Lucretius’s influence on Hutchinson as a poet, they also help us to understand the larger significance that Hutchinson attributes to retirement. Much more than a borrowed poetic embellishment, her ‘flow’ry carpets spread’ invokes the entire ethos of Lucretius’s pre-civilized world. Hutchinson’s translation of the corresponding passage in book five reads as follows:

When oft, on greene banks by a river side,

Shaded with spreading trees, they satisfied
Their bodies pleasantly with cheape delight
When smiling seasons did their ioyes invite
And various coulourd flowres checquerd the grasse,
In sports, discourse & laughter did they passe
Those times of gladnesse, then the rurall muse
Was in her glorie
(5.1441-49)

Although obscured partially by Hutchinson's translation, Lucretius here uses laughter to establish a continuity between nature or the "tempestatas ridebat [laughing weather]" and man who passes his time in "ioca [jests]" and "dulces esse cachinni [sweet laughter]." For Lucretius, laughter distinguishes the period of human history that coincides with our fullest enjoyment of life's sweetest pleasures.

In her rendition of how men danced upon the bare earth, Hutchinson writes that "This made much mirth [risus] and laughter [dulcesque cachinni] at that time" (5.1454). While later ages would seek to improve upon such pleasure, the advent of war and luxury would only detract from them. Laughter would not be recovered until the Epicurean sage could teach men what they had forgotten concerning the pursuits of kings and powerful men, namely, that "these but a sport and idle mockerie are [Quòd si ridicula hæc, ludibriaque esse videmus]" (2.45). Since Lucretius clearly locates the idyllic age of mirth in a historically distant past, his purpose is never to advocate for a return to it. Rather, the laughter of the Epicurean sage stems from his or her knowledge that no amount of glory or wealth can contribute to the pleasures that are readily available to all. Lucretian laughter therefore has the dual purpose of expressing delight in true pleasures and contempt for false ones.

In Hutchinson's "All Sorts of Men," the countryside represents both an actual retreat and the idea of philosophical detachment from real world affairs. While Hutchinson employs words such as "mirth," "delight," and "merry" in place of laughter and its various Latin derivatives to

praise simple pleasures, the overt anti-courtliness of her poem amplifies the satirical force of Lucretian laughter.⁵⁵ This is to say that although Hutchinson refrains from calling the ambitions of her princes, soldiers, and merchants “ridicula [a joke],” as does Lucretius, she ridicules them nonetheless (2.46). “One village feast,” she claims, “shall gain a greater name/ Than his who wears the imperial diadem” (54-55). Hutchinson’s bitter refrain might well invoke either Charles I or Cromwell, perhaps even Charles II, depending on the date of the poem’s composition. In the final lines, Hutchinson similarly refrains from calling the court “ludibria [a laughingstock],” as does Lucretius, but she relentlessly mocks the bankruptcy of its values (2.45). Her final couplet demands, “What court then can such liberty afford?/ Or where is man so uncontr’ld a lord?” (61-62). Drawing on classical definitions of the tyrant, Hutchinson scoffs at the lord who, in believing himself to be free, remains an abject slave to his own unruly passions.⁵⁶ Although the Epicurean trope of retreat significantly informs the pastoral language and imagery of “All Sorts of Men,” Hutchinson’s laughter, more satirical than therapeutic in nature, betrays a sustained engagement with contemporary political affairs and a frustrated desire to influence them.

By examining Hutchinson’s translation of Lucretius and its effect on her pastoral poetry, we can see how the concept of *ataraxia* continues to change across different historical contexts, especially as the smile begins to take the place of laughter in Hutchinson’s depiction of nature. As translation comes increasingly to inform early modern studies, historians such as Peter Burke have argued that, in addition to shedding light on the transmission of texts and ideas, translation opens new ways of understanding encounters between cultures. This observation applies especially to Hutchinson’s case since she is as concerned with the larger political and theological

⁵⁵ Hutchinson’s parody of Waller’s *Panegyrick to my Lord Protector* also showcases her penchant for political satire.

⁵⁶ See for example Plato, *Republic* IX.

implications of her translation as with its technical and poetic features. Urging scholars to attend to the significance of untranslatability, of meaning that fails to cross linguistic and cultural borders, Burke notes perceptively that “the sense or senses of humour of different cultures, ‘cultures of laughter’, as they have been called, are very different.”⁵⁷ If Lucretius’s laughter proves especially difficult for Hutchinson to carry into her own English idiom because she deems it incompatible with her particular religious and political convictions, we must examine how this affects our understanding of her broader historical circumstances, especially after 1660.

While there are many reasons why Hutchinson might have rejected Lucretius’s materialist explanation of the cosmos and consequent argument that death and divine punishment are nothing to fear, we must now consider whether this rejection necessarily renders both his laughter and the Epicurean tranquility it represents untenable from a Puritan/Parliamentarian perspective? Quite unlike Pierre Gassendi or Walter Charleton, who sought to “baptize Epicurus,” Hutchinson resists the temptation to assume that the classical and contemporary contexts she mediates between are commensurate or to seek to make them so, and it was perhaps her experience as a translator that made this discrepancy all the more apparent. By turning now to *Order and Disorder*, I want to suggest that Hutchinson’s continued efforts to “translate” Lucretian laughter into an early modern context advances our understanding of republican poetry after the Restoration and, more specifically, of the English biblical epic. While most critics have sought to make sense of Hutchinson’s Lucretius as an exceptional phenomenon, one as idiosyncratic as the woman who produced it, her *Order and Disorder* reveals the extent to which Lucretius influences literary production in the latter half of the seventeenth century and provides new insight into Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

⁵⁷ Peter Burke, “Cultures of Translation in Early Modern Europe,” in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Peter Burke and R. Po-chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 7.

IV. The Garden of Epicurus and the Pleasures of Eden in *Order and Disorder* and *Paradise Lost*

Four years after Hutchinson wrote the dedicatory preface to her Lucretius translation, the first five cantos of her biblical epic *Order and Disorder* were anonymously printed. *Order and Disorder* is the only work that was printed during Hutchinson's lifetime and, until David Norbrook published the remaining fifteen cantos in 2009, it had been falsely attributed to Hutchinson's brother, the royalist Sir Allen Apsley. While the poem as a whole is fascinating as an ambitious retelling of the book of Genesis, the first five cantos which describe the creation and fall of mankind invite special comparison with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Some critics have assumed that Hutchinson wrote in imitation of Milton, but the 1679 print date in no way confirms this chronological account.⁵⁸ A manuscript dedicated to the Countess of Rochester bears the date 1664, one year after Milton is likely to have completed *Paradise Lost*, but Norbrook confirms that Hutchinson could have been at work on the poem as early as 1660.⁵⁹ Given their mutual patron Lord Anglesey and their shared political ideas, it is not impossible that Hutchinson could have known *Paradise Lost*, but there is no internal or external evidence to establish this. Rather, what matters for our present purposes, is that both Hutchinson and Milton are writing their biblical epics in the wake of the Restoration and both position their work as a response to Lucretius.

In the preface to *Order and Disorder*, Hutchinson does not address Lucretius by name, but her clear evocation of the language and imagery of the dedication to her translation reappears

⁵⁸ See for example, C.A. Moore, "Miltoniana (1679-1741)," *Modern Philology*, 24 (1926-7), 321-24 and Shannon Miller, "Maternity, Marriage, and Contract: Lucy Hutchinson's Response to Patriarchal Theory in *Order and Disorder*," in *Engendering the Fall* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2008), 107-135.

⁵⁹ On current dating, see Norbrook's introduction in Hutchinson, *Order and Disorder*, ed. David Norbrook (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), xvi-xvii. All subsequent citations of this poem will be by canto and line number to this edition.

here to reveal both the identity of the author and the relationship of the present work to the previous one. Describing how *De rerum natura* ultimately led her to meditate on scripture, Hutchinson writes that

The vain curiosity of youth had drawn me to consider and translate the account some old poet and philosophers give of the original of things... yet it had filled my brain with such foolish fancies, that I found it necessary to have recourse to the fountain of Truth, to wash out all ugly wild impressions and fortify my mind with a strong antidote against all the poison of human wit and wisdom that I had been dabbling withal. (3)

On the surface, this statement seems to reiterate the feelings of shame and guilt that Hutchinson had previously ascribed to her “wanton dalliance with impious books” and to draw a series of unequivocal distinctions between the falsehood of philosophy and the truth of scripture, the ignorance of youth and the wisdom of old age. Hutchinson’s use of the word “poison,” however, to characterize the teachings of Lucretius, is much more ambivalent than it seems.

The metaphor of poison that Hutchinson here employs recalls both the dedicatory preface of her Lucretius translation and an important passage from book four of *De rerum natura* on the subjectivity of taste and other sense perceptions. Rather than conceding, as would the Skeptics, that the taste of a given food cannot be known because individuals have conflicting opinions of it, Lucretius explains that each nature contains a mixture of seeds or atoms that produce different effects on different individuals. In Hutchinson’s words, he says,

Proceed wee now the reason to declare
Why meates which pleasant to some persons are,
Others distast, for theres such a difference
That some are poysond with that meate, from whence
Others suck nourishment, soe serpents by
Licking mans spittle, eat their flesh and die.
Soe Hellibore fatts quails, & plover, though
It poysons man (IV.661-67)

If there is nothing essential about the poison in poisonous foods, then it follows, by extension, that there is nothing inherently dangerous in the teachings of Lucretius. As a metaphor for

reading, Hutchinson's comment about "poison" obfuscates or even deconstructs clear distinctions between truth and falsehood. In the closing to her Lucretius dedication, Hutchinson notes with respect to the strong admonitions she issues against the reading of her translation that "I say not this to your Lordship, though I leaue it in your booke, as an antidote against the poison of it, for any novice who by chance might prie into it. Your Lordship hath skill to render that which in it selfe is poisonous, many ways vsefull & medicinall, and are not liable to danger by an ill booke" (15). Although, as Norbrook and Barbour note in their textual commentary, the word poison was commonly used to characterize *De rerum natura*, Hutchinson actually turns this accusation into grounds for legitimating her translation and provisionally recommending its circulation.⁶⁰

Despite the strong rhetoric of condemnation in both *Order and Disorder* and her translation, it is important that Hutchinson nowhere adopts a model of authoritarian prohibition. As a translator, she assumes responsibility for mitigating whatever risk that Lucretius poses to her reader by laying bare the polyvalent nature of her source text. In a Derridean sense, we might say that Lucretius is Hutchinson's *pharmakon* and the contradiction so characteristic of her authorial statements evinces not a lack of self-understanding but a propensity for play.⁶¹ While Hutchinson offers both her Lucretius preface and *Order and Disorder* as "antidotes" for the poison she has personally helped to disseminate, her earlier preface ultimately ascribes the "skill" for rendering Lucretius into something 'vsefull & medicinall' to Lord Anglesey. In *Order*

⁶⁰ Evelyn claims similarly in a manuscript comment to "offer som Antidote against the Poyson of the Errors, which our Author here striues to convey vnder all the gildings of Poetry, and Arte." Cited in Hopkins, "English Voices of Lucretius," 256. In the preface to his printed translation, Evelyn advises the reader to look not only, like a spider, for poison in Lucretius but also, like a bee, for honey. *An Essay*, A9.

⁶¹ Jacques Derrida. "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 61-172. Derrida especially highlights the role of the translator who is forced out of necessity to destroy the *pharmakon*, rendering only partially the meaning of the original term.

and Disorder, Hutchinson herself lays claim to the virtue and discernment that will enable her to transform such poison into a cure.

Hutchinson's practical interpretation of the Lucretian aphorism "*Ut quod ali cibus est aliis fuit acre venenum* [what is food to some may be bitter poison to others] suggests further that, with respect to translation, the problem may very well lie with the receiver rather than the source of a given text (4.638). Since each of her respective prefaces refer to different periods of Hutchinson's life as a reader, writer, and translator, they also give us a sense of how her ability to assimilate the teachings of Lucretius in a productive manner changed over time. In the preface to *Order and Disorder*, she boldly states that "I disclaim all doctrines of God and his works, but what I learnt out of his own word, and have experienced it to be a very unsafe and unprofitable thing for those that are young, before their faith be fixed, to exercise themselves in the study of vain, foolish, atheistical poesy" (4). Fashioning herself as a prodigal daughter of sorts, Hutchinson confesses that she had been poisoned by the "ridiculous lies" of "heathenish authors" and only recovered herself by "a miracle of grace and mercy" (4). Indeed, Hutchinson's self-condemnatory language echoes her description of Eve who also sounds, ironically, as if she had been reading too much of Lucretius. Hutchinson writes that Eve,

Believed that death was only a vain threat.
Her unbelief, quenching religious dread,
Infectious of counsel in her bosom bred,
Dissatisfaction with her present state
And fond ambition of a God-like height;
Who now applies herself to its pursuit,
With longing eyes looks on the lovely fruit,
First nicely plucks, then eats with full delight,
And gratifies her murderous appetite.
Poisoned with the sweet relish of her sin
Before her inward torturing pangs begin
(4.204-14)

The analogy then follows that Hutchinson sought after classical learning at the peril of her own soul with the very same eagerness that Eve sought after the knowledge of good and evil expressly forbidden by God. However, if Lucretius is Hutchinson's downfall, he is also her redemption insofar as her translation of *De rerum natura* both enables and compels her to write *Order and Disorder*. Out of the very poison with which she had been infected, Hutchinson fashions an antidote for herself and for any reader who may be in need of it.⁶²

While Hutchinson's conception of "poison" draws on a conventional metaphor equating reading with the consumption of food that must be digested thoroughly in order to produce new writing, her understanding of how the "infection" of controversial ideas is transmitted has radical and more far reaching implications. If we are uncertain as to whether Hutchinson had access to Milton's *Paradise Lost* during the early 1660's, it is likely that she would have read his *Areopagitica*, a polemical prose tract opposing the Licensing Order of 1643 that made all printed works subject to state censorship. In this tract, which has rightly been regarded as one of the first defenses of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, Milton twice praises the governments of antiquity for not censoring Epicurean writing. He observes that "of other sects and opinions, though tending to voluptuousnesse, and the denying of divine providence, they tooke no heed. Therefore we do not read that either Epicurus, or that libertine school of Cyrene, or what the Cynick impudence utter'd, was ever question'd by the Laws" and next, that "Lucretius without impeachment versifies his Epicurism to Memmius, and had the honour to be set forth the second time by Cicero so great a father of the Commonwealth."⁶³ Grouping the works of Epicurus and

⁶² Concerning the reader, Hutchinson writes that "if anyone of no higher a pitch than myself be as much affected and stirred up in the reading as I have been in the writing, to admire the glories and excellencies of our great Creator, to fall low before him, in the sense of our own vileness, and to adore his power, his wisdom, and his grace, in all his dealings with the children of men it will be a success above my hopes; though my charity makes me wish everyone that hath need of it the same mercy I have found" (*OD* 4-5).

⁶³ John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 931.

Lucretius among heretical books that ought not be censored, Milton makes a compelling case both for the capacity of individuals to exercise moral discernment and rational judgement while reading and for the impossibility of containing the “poison” of dangerous ideas by any other means.

Even if the books of Lucretius and Epicurus were censored by the state, Milton argues that their atheism could still surface in permissible books and, most notably, in the Bible itself. Though he exaggerates, Milton explains that even scripture “oftimes relates blasphemy not nicely, it describes the carnall sense of wicked men not unelegantly, it brings in holiest men passionately murmuring against providence through all the arguments of Epicurus.”⁶⁴ Milton does not here recommend the reading of *De rerum natura*, as he does in *Of Education*, but as we turn to consider the influence of Lucretius and Epicurean philosophy in *Paradise Lost*, it is easy to see why Milton would protect the freedom of engaging with such ideas.⁶⁵

Unlike Hutchinson, who inveighs against “all the rubbish our grave tutors laid in when they taught us to study and admire their inspired poet and divine philosopher,” Milton advocates for directly confronting “the heathen Writers of greatest infection” so that the best of men can overcome “the worst of men, who are both most able, and most diligent to instill the poison they suck.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, both Hutchinson and Milton share a conviction that readers of good faith should be equipped to resist poisonous ideas and their respective biblical epics work similarly toward this end. Regardless of the chronology of their composition, Hutchinson’s continued engagement with Lucretius in *Order and Disorder* throws into sharper relief the Lucretian

⁶⁴ Ibid., 939.

⁶⁵ “Then also those Poets which are now counted most hard, will be both facil and pleasant, *Orpheus, Hesiod, Theocritus, Aratus, Nicander, Oppian, Dionysius*, and in Latin *Lucretius, Manilius*, and the rural part of *Virgil*.” Milton, “Of Education,” *The Complete Poetry*, 976.

⁶⁶ Hutchinson, *Order and Disorder*, 4 and Milton, *Areopagitica*, 940.

subtext of Milton's *Paradise Lost* which scholars over the past two decades have only begun to explore.⁶⁷ Since the first five cantos of Hutchinson's *Order and Disorder* cover roughly the same events from *Genesis* as *Paradise Lost*, with both ending at the point where Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, they will serve as the basis for our present consideration.

Although *Order and Disorder* should be regarded as a work of great poetic innovation, Hutchinson describes it as a devotional or meditative exercise designed specifically to counteract the harmful effects of translating Lucretius. The act of translation, she suggests, places the translator in such close and constant proximity to the site of infection that the risk of contagion is very high. Having been so thoroughly immersed in the language of Lucretius, Hutchinson turns to scripture in order to cleanse her mind and replace his words with God's words. With this notion in mind, Hutchinson still approaches her new poetic task from the mindset of a translator, noting that "I have not studied to utter anything that I have not really taken in" (5). While Robert Wilcher has argued that Hutchinson's *Order and Disorder* participates in the early modern tradition of paraphrase and transposes the book of *Genesis* into the new genres of epic and romance, I would argue that both of these activities fall under the broader domain of translation. Hutchinson herself, addressing those who "think Scripture profaned by being descanted on in numbers," makes a case for her fidelity to the spirit if not the letter of the text, suggesting that "such will pardon me when they remember a great part of the Scripture was originally written in

⁶⁷ On Milton and Lucretius see, Philip Hardie, "The Presence of Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*," *MQ* 29 (March 1995), 13-24 and a revised version in *Lucretian Receptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 264-2; John Leonard, "Milton, Lucretius, and 'the Void of Unessential Night'" in *Living Texts: Interpreting Milton*, ed. Kristin Pruitt and Charles Durham (Selingsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 2000), 198-217; David Quint, "Fear of Falling: Icarus, Phaethon, and Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57.3 (2004): 847-881; David Norbrook, "Milton, Lucy Hutchinson, and the Lucretian Sublime" *Tate Papers* 13 (Spring 2010); David Hopkins, "The English Voices of Lucretius from Lucy Hutchinson to John Mason Good," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, ed. Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 245-73; Jonathan Goldberg, "Milton's Angels." *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in Renaissance Representations* (New York: Fordham UP, 2009).

verse” (5). Hutchinson’s willingness to “translate” scripture, much like Milton’s willingness to let Epicurus and Lucretius go uncensored in print, evinces a distinctly Protestant attitude toward free and unmediated access to both sacred and secular texts.

Translation, as I have suggested, serves as one way for Hutchinson to recuperate the laughter of Lucretius, but here she also represents translation as a special fulfillment of the biblical commandment “to exercise our spiritual mirth in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs” (5). Although Hutchinson is careful to distinguish her ‘spiritual mirth’ from the “drunkenness, and lasciviousness, and libeling satire” of more “celebrated songs,” her preface to *Order and Disorder* reveals an unexpected desire to make pleasure and even laughter central to the Christian life (5). Even as she repudiates the atheism of Lucretius, she appropriates many of his therapeutic strategies. Whereas Lucretius argues that a lack of divine intervention in the creation of the cosmos and in human affairs more generally, mitigates the fear and dread induced by the prospect of eternal punishment, Hutchinson aims through opposite means to bring about a similar end. Not only does she emphasize the grace and mercy of her God, but also his providence which directs all things toward the good.

Lucretius’s Venus may seem like an odd model for the Christian God who creates an earthly paradise only to expel man from it, but Hutchinson refers repeatedly to her divinity as Love. “With haste,” she writes, “let’s to the living spring retire,/ There quench and quiet the disturbèd soul,/ There on Love’s sweet refreshing green banks roll/ Where, ecstasied with joy, we shall not feel/ The serpent’s little nibblings at our heel” (5.550-554). While Hutchinson transforms an overtly sensual image of lovers rolling in the grass into a spiritual understanding of Love’s ecstasy or divine ravishment, her emphasis on the pleasure still available to Man after the Fall is striking. The use of the word “disturbèd” clearly evokes the affective dimensions of

Lucretian tranquility which Hutchinson here associates with her god Love. That she aims to naturalize such language within the context of scripture not only suggests the degree to which Hutchinson found this therapeutic concept compelling, but also draws attention to its apparent absence in the biblical narrative.

Although Hutchinson claims in her preface to *Order and Disorder* that “I resolved never to search after any knowledge of him and his productions, but what he himself hath given forth,” she continually diverges from the narrative of *Genesis* in order to supplement true knowledge with human learning. When Hutchinson describes the Trinity, for example, she draws directly from Lucretius’s description of the gods. She writes,

One uncompounded, pure Divinity,
Wherein subsist so the mysterious three
That they in power and glory be;
Each doth himself and all the rest possess
In undisturbed joy and blessedness.
There’s no inferior, nor no later there,
All coeternal, all coequal are
(*OD* 1.90-94)

Compare Hutchinson’s own translation of Lucretius,

The devine nature doth it selfe possesse
In immortallitie and euerlasting peace,
Remoovd farre of from mortall mens affairs,
Neither our sorrows, nor out dangers shares,
Rich in it selfe, of vs no want it hath,
Not moovd with merits, nor disturbd with wrath
(*DRN* 1.55-60)

Hutchinson turns to Lucretius as an authority on the very nature of the Christian God and while she will go on to depict the various persons of the Trinity as actively engaged in human affairs, the language of self-possession and freedom from perturbation are identical. In his examination of the relationship of Dryden and Milton to Lucretius, Paul Hammond also examines this passage from *Order and Disorder*. However, since he declines to locate its precise parallel in

Hutchinson's translation, observing instead that "Hutchinson's imagination is so seized by the Lucretian vision of godly tranquility that she draws upon it in her own description of the deity," he concludes that "I doubt whether we are supposed to register the Lucretian connotations of the language of *Order and Disorder*."⁶⁸ Hammond rightly observes that despite the declamatory language of her preface, Hutchinson often fails to exhibit a strong corrective impulse when citing Lucretius, whereas Dryden succeeds at making his polemical agenda clear. Nevertheless, his suggestion that Hutchinson is almost hysterically 'seized' by Lucretius, replicates a critical tendency, informed perhaps by a too earnest reading of her prefaces, to represent Hutchinson as unaware of what her work is actually doing.

While Hutchinson's approach to Lucretius in *Order and Disorder* may be more syncretic or appropriative than Dryden's, this does not suggest that she simply fails to 'wash out,' as her preface states, the language and teachings of Lucretius. Hutchinson, rather, brings philosophy to bear on scripture because it enriches a tradition of learning that often pales, or seems to pale, in comparison to the classical works that served as the basis for her humanist education. The allusion to Lucretius's deities is masked further by marginal notes that cite only scripture as the source of Hutchinson's verse.⁶⁹ Perhaps the intended effect for readers who recognize the allusion here is to suggest that the nature of the Christian deity is as worthy of philosophical contemplation as that of Lucretius's gods. For the reader who does not recognize the allusion,

⁶⁸ Paul Hammond, "Dryden, Milton, and Lucretius." *The Seventeenth Century*. 16:1 (2001), 166.

⁶⁹ Next to the line 'In undisturbed joy and blessedness,' we see "*Proverbs* 8:22,30." The latter of these two verses is most relevant reading, "Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him," but it is clearly no match for the corresponding Lucretius passage (KJV). As Elizabeth Scott-Baumann has pointed out, the notes to the Geneva Bible translation of scripture were often Calvinist in tone and mainly cross-referenced related passages of scripture. *Forms of Engagement*, 171-78. Hutchinson seems, at least superficially, to replicate this pattern with her own marginal notations but her clear allusions to outside works, I maintain, complicates Scott-Bauman's assertion that "Hutchinson demands a reading practice self-contained within the Bible." *Ibid.*, 185.

Hutchinson recommends further reading and study of scripture. Elizabeth Scott-Baumann has argued convincingly that, especially in the first five cantos, Hutchinson's scriptural references often take on a political valence so that, in effect, "the margins of the poem provide a voice for those marginalized by the Restoration."⁷⁰ While these notes may very well be evidence of radical engagement with political affairs, they have led scholars to overlook an equally radical engagement with philosophical ideas. Even in this very late work, we still see Hutchinson invested in the idea of Epicurean tranquility and attempting to make it consonant with Christian theology. In any case, one does not need to probe very far into her poem to see that the distinction Hutchinson posits between *sola scriptura* or "what is written" and "philosophical clouds" should not be taken at face value.

If Hutchinson's representation of God is indebted to philosophy, so too is her representation of Man. Even if we were to characterize the Lucretian resonances of *Order and Disorder* as a residual effect of her translation, Hutchinson's similar use of philosophers such as Aristotle attests to a more thoroughgoing attempt to posit philosophy as a valid basis for biblical exegesis. When describing what sets man apart from the animals, Hutchinson turns to Aristotle's *On The Parts of Animals* which, as prior chapters have shown, treats laughter as a distinguishing feature of mankind. Aristotle writes, for example, that "man is the only animal that stands erect" and Hutchinson echoes, "He only on two upright columns stands" (3.49).⁷¹ Similarly, Aristotle writes that "no animal but man ever laughs" and Hutchinson echoes, "Hereby glad mirth in laughter is alone/ By man expressed" (3.57-58).⁷² Were it not for the larger narrative context of *Genesis*, one might assume that Hutchinson here resumes her role as translator of ancient

⁷⁰ Ibid., 184.

⁷¹ Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, trans. William Ogle, III.57-58.

⁷² Ibid.

philosophy. When she quickly launches into a poetic description of man's facial features, she similarly highlights his capacity for mirth, stating that beneath his nose lies,

The chief and beauteous gate
About which various pleasant graces wait,
When smiles the ruby doors a little way
Unfold, or laughter doth them quite display,
And opening the vermilion curtains, shows
The ivory piles set in two even rows
(3.95-100)

Scott-Baumann has argued that Hutchinson's blazon imitates a similar passage in another biblical epic by Guillaume du Bartas called *The Divine Weeks and Works*, but Aristotle also spends ample time describing the form and function of the human face.⁷³ Her observation that Hutchinson's exclusive focus on the male body differs from that of both Du Bartas and Milton, however, is especially useful in considering laughter. By attributing laughter to the overtly sensual male body, Hutchinson breaks the common association between laughter and female wantonness. Following Aristotle, Hutchinson instead emphasizes that laughter and rational discourse or "voice articulate" proceed from the very same source. Here, Hutchinson aims with greater success to naturalize and reintegrate the laughter that is suppressed in her Lucretius translation and to make it equally applicable to both men and women.

In *Paradise Lost*, we see a similar reworking of the same passage from Aristotle, but the difference between Hutchinson's and Milton's approach to laughter reflects more generally their differing approaches to classical tranquility. When Eve suggests that a division of labor would be more conducive to their joint productivity, Adam argues that God is not so strict as to

⁷³ On teeth and lips, for example, he writes that "the use of the lips in all animals except man is to preserve and guard the teeth; and thus it is that the distinctness with which the lips are formed is in direct proportion to the degree of nicety and perfection with which the teeth are fashioned. In man the lips are soft and flesh-like and capable of separating from each other. Their purpose, as in other animals, is to guard the teeth, but they are more especially intended to serve a higher office, contributing in common with other parts to man's faculty of speech." Aristotle, *On the Parts*, II.17.

debar us when we need
Refreshment, whether food, or talk between,
Food of the mind, or this sweet intercourse
Of looks and smiles; for smiles from reason flow,
To brute denied, and are of love the food;
Love, not the lowest end of human life.
For not to irksome toil, but to delight
He made us, and delight and reason join'd
(VIII.236-43)

Although Milton's doubling of 'delight' preserves a certain orientation toward pleasure, this passage fundamentally alters the Aristotelian conception of Man as both an *animal rationale* and an *animal risibilis*. Milton's rational man may smile, but he emphatically does not laugh. Indeed, throughout *Paradise Lost*, laughter consistently communicates scorn or contempt, all emotions more befitting of God or Satan than Man. Like Aristotle, Lucretius also associates laughter with human reason but in such a way that Milton regards as incompatible with Christian devotion.

When Adam contemplates the movement of celestial bodies, for example, observing that Earth is but "a spot, a grain,/ An atom," Milton comments that God "his fabric of the heav'ns/
Hath left to their disputes, perhaps to move/ His laughter at their quaint opinions wide" (VIII.18; 76-78). Although Milton invokes atomism as a sophisticated example of human learning, he ultimately condemns the intellectual ambition of Lucretius and renders his cosmology the butt of a divine joke. John Leonard's assertion that Milton "could not shake the fear that our earth is 'An atom' in the void profound of unessential night" suggests that Raphael's account of God's laughter is not sufficient to dispel either Adam's or Milton's doubt regarding the seeming insignificance of earth and of the human history contained therein.⁷⁴ From the perspective of eternity, it is not only astronomical dispute but Man himself that appears laughable.

⁷⁴ Leonard, "The Void Profound," 211.

God's disdainful sense of humor, however, is best on display in Milton's retelling of the story of the Tower of Babel. Here, God not only holds the Babylonians "in derision" but, Milton writes, "As mocked they storm; great laughter was in Heav'n/ And looking down, to see the hubbub strange/ And hear the din; thus was the building left/ Ridiculous" (XII.52-62). Having scattered their language and laid waste to a great monument of human ingenuity, God laughs at the hubris of the Babylonians but also, and more sadistically, at the confusion that he himself has induced. Quite unlike Lucretius's gods who laugh out of indifference to human suffering, Milton's God seems to laugh because of it. Susanne Rupp has convincingly read God's laughter in *Paradise Lost* as a "representation of absolute power" and a "performance of superiority," but she does not account fully for the anti-Aristotelian thrust of Milton's position.⁷⁵ Whereas Aristotle represents laughter as an extension of man's capacity for reason, Milton uses laughter, divine laughter, to re-inscribe the limits of that same capacity.

Throughout *Paradise Lost*, only Satan and his hosts seem to derive pleasure from laughter, although it serves only to foreshadow their inevitable defeat. During the war in heaven following the invention of gun powder Satan, whom Milton describes as "scoffing in ambiguous words," revels in a series of puns on words such as "discharge" and "charge" that effectively mask his violent purpose with the language of peace (VI.558-568). Once he has gained the upper hand, the other Seraphim hesitate out of fear that another failed onslaught "would render them yet more despised,/ And to their foes a laughter" (VI.602-603). While Satan's laughter is also derisive, his jests are both funnier and more sportive than God's. This becomes all the more apparent when Belial, whom Milton describes as "in like gamesome mood," continues Satan's pattern of speaking in double entendres (VI.620). Although Milton does not directly invoke

⁷⁵ Susanne Rupp, "Milton's Laughing God," in *A History of English Laughter from Beowulf to Beckett and Beyond*, ed. Manfred Pfister (New York: Rudopi, 2002), 48,50.

Lucretius when he writes that “they among themselves in pleasant vein/ Stood scoffing . . . and of his thunder made a scorn,/ And all his host derided,” Satan’s irreverent wit here recalls a large portion of the sixth book of *De rerum natura* in which Lucretius furnishes natural explanations for the thunder of Zeus in order to dispel fear of his wrath (VI.620-29).⁷⁶ For Milton, perhaps even more so than for Hutchinson, laughter and atheism are intimately bound together, either because atheists ridicule God or because God in turn ridicules atheists. While the subversive capacity of Satan’s laughter is always already contained by God’s imminent victory, Milton’s epic dramatizes the conflict between philosophical and theological estimations of laughter.⁷⁷ What Lucretius and Lucifer share in common is an absence of fear or a disregard for “superstition” which makes their laughter possible, if not ultimately permissible.

Near the end of *Paradise Lost* Adam learns that in the time of Noah, his descendants “Shall yield up all their virtue, all their fame/ Ignobly, to the trains and to the smiles/ Of these fair atheists, and now swim in joy,/ (Erelong to swim at large) and laugh; for which/ The world erelong a world of tears must weep” (XI.622-627). The use of parentheses here calls attention to the dramatic irony at play in Michael’s depiction of the wicked women who do not foresee their own destruction. Milton’s pun on the word ‘swim’ effectively quells the laughter of those ‘fair atheists’ who will perish with the flood and ensures once more that God will have the last laugh. As he laments the destruction of his progeny, we see Adam’s feeble attempt at making a joke when he comments that “I see the tenor of man’s woe/ Holds on the same, from woman to begin” (XI.632-33). This misogynistic pun on ‘woman’ and ‘man’s woe’ is not only in bad taste,

⁷⁶ Lucretius’s extended meditation on the weather is part of his larger effort to demystify and dispel superstition which he calls *religio*. See for example, his short list of impudent questions regarding thunder: “Lastly, if Gods, dire thunders still bestow,/ Why doe their owne Temples overthrow? Their glorious seates, & images deface?/ Their goodly statues with rude hurts disgrace? Why doe they strike the highest places still? Why is their violence trac’d on every hill?” Hutchinson, *DRN*, VI.451-455.

⁷⁷ On laughter in an early Christian context see Stephen Halliwell, “Laughter Denied, Laughter Deferred: The Antigelastic Tendencies of Early Christianity” in *Greek Laughter*, 471-519.

but also earns the angel's immediate reproach since, "From Man's effeminate slackness it begins... who should better hold his place" (XI.634-35). Adam's laughter presupposes an unrepentant heart and a failure to recognize his complicity in the original Fall of mankind.⁷⁸

Assuming a too familiar rapport with the angel, Adam has not yet learned how to inhabit his new nature which ascribes to man responsibility for and dominion over woman.

If Hutchinson read *Paradise Lost*, she chose strategically to echo and amplify Milton's charge against Adam by sympathizing with the plight of women who, having been joined in marriage to a tyrannical husband, "loathe their bondage, and despise the rule of an unmanly, fickle, forward, fool" (5.145-46). Hutchinson's use of the term "unmanly," however, unlike Milton's "effeminate," undercuts Adam's masculinity without further stigmatizing Eve's femininity and Hutchinson takes pains elsewhere to similarly mitigate the use of sexist language. When she recounts the story of how God created Eve out of Adam's rib, Hutchinson preemptively forecloses on Milton's "woe-man" pun by refusing to translate the corresponding passage from *Genesis* into English. Preferring the Hebrew word instead, Hutchinson's Adam proclaims that "Thou art my better self, my flesh, my body, my bone ... To show that thou wert taken out of me, Isha shall be thy name" (3.409-10). Though etymologically unrelated to *ish*, the Hebrew word for man, *ishshah*, the Hebrew word for woman, enables Hutchinson to preserve the phonological similarity that links Adam and Eve together as two different kinds of the same species without assenting to the theological proposition that the first human, *ha'adam* in Hebrew, was created male.⁷⁹ This denial or subversion of a prelapsarian gender hierarchy is also evinced

⁷⁸ Michael's response here echoes God's original judgement when he says to Adam that "thou didst resign thy manhood" which would never have been the case "hadst though known thyself aright (X.148-156).

⁷⁹ The apparent lack of a gendered hierarchy prior to the Fall is supported by the King James version of *Genesis* 5:2 which reads, "Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created." On Hutchinson's birth and marriage imagery as a critique of patriarchalism in *Order and Disorder* see especially Shannon Miller, "Maternity, Marriage, and Contract: Lucy Hutchinson's Response to Patriarchal Theory in *Order and*

by Adam's reference to 'my better self.'⁸⁰ While Robert Wilcher has argue that Hutchinson's "subtle wordplay" also links *ishshah* with sexual union and progeny, I want to emphasize simply that in *Order and Disorder*, Hutchinson is not at all averse to laughter, only laughter at the expense of women.⁸¹

Like Milton's God, Hutchinson's God also laughs but *with* rather than *at* mankind whose redemption is always assured. Just after the Fall, she writes that

Within the snake the crafty tempter smiled
To see mankind so easily beguiled;
But laugh not, Satan: God shall thee deride
The son of God and man shall scourge thy pride
(4.219-22)

While her rhyming couplets clearly mark the process by which Satan's laughter will redound upon him, Hutchinson's specification that man too will deride Satan alongside the Father and the Son serves as consolation for having been deceived in the first place. At the close of canto five, Hutchinson assures readers once more that the prohibition of laughter, like the victory of the serpent, will not last forever. "And we shall trample on the monster's head," she writes, "then shall we laugh at our now childish woes/ And hug the birth that issues from these throes" (5.579-80). As in Lucretius, Hutchinson's preoccupation with affect and emotion, with laughter as the antithesis of fear and sadness, attests to the therapeutic purpose of her work as a whole. In a

Disorder," *Studies in Philology* 102.3 (2005): 340-77 and *Engendering the Fall: John Milton and Seventeenth-Century Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 107-35.

⁸⁰ Cf. Milton's "Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, my self/ Before me; woman is her name, of man/ Extracted" (VIII.495-97).

⁸¹ Wilcher, "Lucy Hutchinson and *Genesis: Paraphrase, Epic, Romance*," *English* 59.224 (2010): 31.

Christian context, however, tranquility does not result from the triumph of *ratio* over *religio* but from the ever abounding grace of God.

A distinctive feature of Hutchinson's *Order and Disorder* is her double emphasis on sin's outward effect on creation and inward effect on mankind. The affective language that Hutchinson uses to describe a time prior to the Fall when "Heaven still smiles above, th'untroubled deep" recalls her translation of Lucretius who similarly relies on nature to metaphorically characterize the passions and perturbations of the soul. Hutchinson's 'untroubled deep,' however, overturns Lucretius's depiction of a world

Where noe dark clouds heavens constant splendor vaile,
Where light dilateth smiles on euey side,
Where noe disturbance euer can molest
The sacred peace, with which the mind is blest
(3.24-28).

Although Lucretius and Hutchinson both understand tranquility as an emotional or psychological state that follows from true knowledge of nature, Lucretius specifically attributes this knowledge to "cleare reason" which "from noe supernaturall power deriue" (3.17, 16). By reasserting the consolatory power of divine providence, Hutchinson rejects Lucretius's central argument that religion itself is the source of human suffering. After the Fall, Hutchinson frames original sin as the antithesis of tranquility, describing how Adam and Eve "in no darkness can their quiet find,/ Carrying within them a disturbed mind" (4.264-65) Here we see an illustration of how Hutchinson aims to overturn the logic of cause and cure in Lucretius but she clearly derives both her conception of tranquility and the language of therapy itself from *De rerum natura*.

Some of the most powerful imagery of Hutchinson's poem derives from a recognizably Lucretian understanding of the passions. "Their late sweet calm did now forever cease," she writes of Adam and Eve, "Storms in all quarters drove away their peace;/ Dread, guilt, remorse

in the benighted soul/ Like raging billows on each other roll” (4.232-34). Despite having vastly different attitudes toward religion, Hutchinson seems to have learned directly from Lucretius how to depict the internal “weather” of the soul.⁸² Quite unlike the biblical account of *Genesis*, Hutchinson’s poem repeatedly emphasizes the relationship between exterior and interior experience. Postlapsarian man, for example, is “within, without, disordered in the storm” and Eve laments the loss of “all peace without, all sweet repose within” (4.236; 5.406). Having been banished from the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve forfeit the external goods of an earthly paradise, but this loss is compounded by the even greater loss of an internal state of equanimity.

That Hutchinson intends *Order and Disorder* as a response to Lucretius is especially evident in passages such as the one below which invokes *De rerum natura* almost by name:

Love, though immutable, its smiles did shroud
Under the dark veil of an angry cloud,
And while he seemed withdrawn whose grace upheld
The order of all things, confusion filled
The universe
(my emphasis, 5.319-224)

For Hutchinson, oddly, the Christian story of redemption becomes the story of how God or Love will restore tranquility to mankind. If Lucretius revealed the “nature of things” so as to dispel our fear of death and divine punishment, Hutchinson reveals the “order of all things” so as to refute his proposition that religion is incompatible with a happy life. When Adam asks, “Doth Heaven frown?” we learn that God’s smiling face remains unchanged even though sin “hides his pleasing glances from our sight” and he not

only sees, but darts on us his beams,
Ministering comfort in our worst extremes
When lightnings fly, dire storm and thunder roars
He guides the shafts, the serene calm restores
(5.513-520).

⁸² See especially book three on the perturbations of the soul in which Lucretius states that “it now remains, my verses next should treat/ Of all the minds and their interior seate” (3.39-40).

Although her preface frames *Order and Disorder* as a therapeutic remedy for those who, like Hutchinson herself, had been adversely affected by an overzealous study of pagan philosophy, the poem also uses the very philosophy it denounces in order to fashion a therapeutic remedy for those who have been adversely affected by an overzealous meditation on scripture. In her close study of Reformed theology, which Hutchinson undertook alongside her husband, she doubtlessly encountered many images of what Lucretius calls “That plague of humane life, the feare of hell/ Which over all things doth deaths terror spread/ And allays euey pleasure with that dread” (3.42-44). Though she may have been unwilling to go so far as Lucretius, who disregards hell as a mere figment of the imagination, Hutchinson’s depiction of a smiling God, a God of love and mercy, is intended similarly to allay fears of eternal damnation and her consolatory strategies are deeply indebted to his.

As an example of God’s mercy, Hutchinson repurposes Lucretius’s familiar argument that death is a welcome remedy for the miseries of life. Assuring Adam and Eve that their “mortal toils” will not “beyond death’s fixed bound extend/ But there in everlasting quiet end,” Hutchinson seems at first to affirm the mortality of the soul which, Lucretius argues, shares the materiality of the body (5.244-46). Support for this allusion also appears in the next lines which state that “men out of the troubled air depart,/ And to their first material dust revert” (5.447-48). Hutchinson’s specification that the dust is “material” recasts in Lucretian terms, the language of both *Genesis* 3:19, “for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return,” and the *English Burial Service*, “we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life.”⁸³ Here Hutchinson’s penchant for

⁸³ *The Book of Common Prayer* (London: Printed by John Bill and Christopher Barker 1662).

bold syncretism is best on display since Lucretius's argument that while life is fleeting, matter is eternal, could not be more at odds with a Christian conception of the resurrection.⁸⁴ Perhaps influenced by contemporary theological debates on mortalism, Hutchinson concludes that "our scattered atoms shall again condense, And be again inspired with living sense" (5.253-54). Although Lucretius's conception of eternal matter logically excludes a God who creates and exerts control over 'scattered atoms,' Hutchinson nevertheless ascribes this very power to her God. Thus, in many ways, *Order and Disorder* offers an effective "antidote" for the "poison" of Lucretius but since both are derived from the very same text of *De rerum natura*, the modern medical notion of inoculation is perhaps a more fitting metaphor.

Although the vast majority of scholarship on the relationship between Lucretius and *Paradise Lost* has focused on Milton's depiction of Chaos, Hutchinson's example suggests that the moral-philosophical dimensions of *De rerum natura* were at least as compelling to early modern readers and writers of biblical epic as the scientific dimensions.⁸⁵ As we come to the close of this chapter, I want to posit Lucretian tranquility as essential for understanding Michael's final consolatory statement that Adam and Eve "shalt possess/ A paradise within thee" (XII.585-87). While Lucretius certainly contributes to Milton's cosmography, he is perhaps most influential at the very moment when cosmology becomes unimportant. After revealing that the Son of God will conquer death and ascend to Heaven in order to make of Earth a "Paradise, far happier place/ Than this of Eden," Michael turns from the vindication of Man at the end of time to the present moment (XII.463-64). Since they have already been cast out of the earthly paradise

⁸⁴ Cf. Hutchinson, *DRN* 3.1045.

⁸⁵ Most recently, see the full length study by N.K. Sugimura, "*Matter of Glorious Trial*": *Spiritual and Material Substance in Paradise Lost* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Hutchinson also alludes to Lucretius in her depiction of Chaos which she characterizes as "a confused mass of undistinguished seed." Hutchinson, *DRN*, 1.303.

of Eden and are yet unable to enjoy the eternal paradise of Heaven, Michael's 'paradise within' is the only paradise to which Adam and Eve will have recourse during their lifetime.

This psychological conception of paradise, however, defies placement on the map of Milton's universe and blurs clear boundaries between Heaven and Hell. Recalling God's diminutive laughter at the astrologer's pretensions to knowledge of divine mysteries, Michael says, "thou hast attained the sum/ Of wisdom; hope no higher, though all the stars/ Thou knew'st by name" (XII.575-77). Rather than contemplating the heavens, the angel instructs Adam to direct his gaze inward toward the self and toward the cultivation of a new kind of paradisaal garden. While this language is not specifically Epicurean, it is recognizably classical and quite familiar within an English literary context.⁸⁶ As an alternative to "all the riches" and "all the rule," Milton's 'paradise within' suggests that an essentially secular form of consolation can easily be made to serve sacred ends. Philosophical contempt for wealth and power, especially when coupled with Christian virtues, such as those indicated by Michael's exhortation to "add faith,/ Add virtue, patience, temperance, add love,/ By name to come called charity" contribute to a sense of internal happiness and security that is not subject to external evils over which we exert little control (XII.582-84).

Although Michael's "paradise within" suggests Milton's open engagement with Hellenistic philosophy, scholars have been reluctant to view Lucretius, in particular, as exerting a positive influence on *Paradise Lost*. No one has done more to direct Miltonists to the text of *De rerum natura* than classicist Philip Hardie, but even he represents the relationship between Milton and Lucretius as an adversarial one, characterized by "polemical allusion," "imitation from

⁸⁶ Shakespeare's Iago's, for example, says that "our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners." *Othello*, I.3.362-63.

opposition,” and “correction.”⁸⁷ By examining a complex “network of allusion and motif,” David Quint similarly concludes that the “Lucretian subtext” of *Paradise Lost* testifies to Milton’s “anxious preoccupation with *De rerum natura*.”⁸⁸ While such opposition to Lucretius and anxiety about his teachings are evident in the poem, there are also significant moments of harmonious accord.⁸⁹ When Michael concludes his final speech with the assurance that, if Adam abandons the search for vain knowledge and focuses on the cultivation of virtue, “then wilt thou not be loath/ to leave this Paradise, but shalt possess/ A paradise within thee, happier far,” Milton appropriates one of Lucretius’s most central therapeutic strategies (XII.585-587). These famous lines have generated much controversy with some critics attributing the idea of an internal paradise to, among others, the Cambridge Platonists, early modern practices of Augustinian meditation, and the theology of radical religious sects such as the Quakers.⁹⁰

Having already seen how Lucretius informs Hutchinson’s poetic depiction of interiority both before and after the Fall, we are now better able to observe that Lucretius similarly informs Milton’s depiction of heaven and hell as interior states of mind. In book three of *De rerum natura*, Lucretius likens heaven to the tranquility enjoyed by the Epicurean sage and hell to the perturbation of those unacquainted with philosophy.⁹¹ Although *Paradise Lost* treats Heaven and Hell as actual places that correspond to reality, Milton introduces the notion that they are merely

⁸⁷ Philip Hardie, “The Presence of Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*” *Milton Quarterly* 29.1 (1995): 13-15.

⁸⁸ David Quint, “Fear of Falling: Icarus, Phaethon, and Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 57.3 (2004): 870.

⁸⁹ Important exceptions to my previous claim may be found in Jonathan Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things*, Katherine Calloway, “Milton’s Lucretian Anxiety Revisited,” *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* (2009): 79-97, and especially Sarah Ellenzeig, “*Paradise Lost* and the Secret of Lucretian Sufficiency,” *MLQ* (September 2014): 385-409. Ellenzeig calls attention to Milton’s repeated use of the word “swerve” and Lucretius’s contributions to Milton’s thinking about free will.

⁹⁰ For a useful overview of this debate see Beverley Sherry, “A ‘Paradise Within’ Can Never Be ‘Happier Farr’”: Reconsidering the Archangel Michael’s Consolation in *Paradise Lost*. *Milton Quarterly*, 37 (2003): 77–91. Some of the most important works on this subject include: Louis Martz, *The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1964) and Thomas Blackburn, “Paradise Lost and Found,” *Milton Studies* V (1973): 191-211.

⁹¹ On heaven see 3.17-31 and on hell see 3.992-1037.

psychological states very early in the poem when he writes that “the mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (I.255). Since Milton literally puts this argument into the mouth of Satan, he seems to demonize Lucretius, but this is the very same argument that we get at the end of the poem from the mouth of the archangel Michael. Like Hutchinson, therefore, Milton exploits the ambiguity of the poison/antidote that is *De rerum natura* in order to fashion a therapy for mankind’s fear of death and divine punishment. Michael’s “paradise within” is not only the temporal consolation that God extends to postlapsarian man but also Milton’s rendition of Christian tranquility.

In 1640, Robert Crofts published a short treatise called *Paradise Within Us: Or, The Happie Mind* which offers practical advice on how to attain “that true Joy and Tranquillity of spirit which is said to be the fruit and Crowne of vertue or wisdom, and by some Philosophers, The soveraigne Good of Man.”⁹² Although the work contains no explicit reference to Lucretius, the author’s affirmation of “pleasures both terrestriall & heavenly within us” suggests the importance of a specifically Epicurean understanding of tranquility. In 1949, George Taylor tentatively broached the question of whether Milton had read Croft, but Miltonists then were not fully aware of Milton’s engagement with Lucretius or of Hutchinson’s Lucretius translation and rival epic. At the time, Taylor confined himself to pointing out similarities between Michael’s and Croft’s “chain of reasoning,” but now it is possible to claim with greater certainty that *Paradise Lost* retains a vested interest in therapeutic tranquility and in making its pursuit amenable to a Christian context.

⁹² Robert Crofts, *Paradise Within Us: Or, The Happie Mind* (1640).

Epilogue

The Laughing Philosopher of Ljubljana!

For their 2020 season, the Royal Opera House has commissioned from a variety of leading European composers four new operas inspired by the Slovenian theorist and philosopher Slavoj Žižek. Perhaps more than any other contemporary philosopher, Žižek has gained a reputation for his sense of humor, so much so that the Norwegian artist and writer Auden Mortensen compiled a collection of his jokes which was published by the MIT press in 2014.¹ Whether writing copy for Abercrombie and Fitch or Lacanian analyses of the latest Hollywood films, Žižek has amassed a following of young would-be intellectuals whom he entertains as much as he instructs. And yet, despite his clear penchant for comedy, no one has issued a stronger condemnation of laughter in recent years than Žižek who, in his breakthrough work *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, coins the term “totalitarian laughter” to describe yet another instrument of state power that secures an individual’s subservience to and complicity with a particular ruling ideology. While *The Humor of Skepticism: Therapeutic Laughter from Montaigne to Milton* has dealt chiefly with laughter in an early modern context, I want to conclude by considering the ethical dimensions of therapeutic laughter in a contemporary context.

Beginning his examination of laughter, as does the introduction to the present work, with Umberto Eco, Žižek explains that “What is really disturbing about *The Name of the Rose*,

¹ Slavoj Žižek and Audun Mortensen, *Žižek's Jokes: (Did You Hear the One about Hegel and Negation?)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

however, is the underlying belief in the liberating, anti-totalitarian force of laughter, of ironic distance. Our thesis here is almost the exact opposite of this underlying premise of Eco's novel: in contemporary societies, democratic or totalitarian, that cynical distance, laughter, irony, are, so to speak, part of the game."² While a classical Marxist account of ideology implies a certain level of illusion on the part of the subject, Žižek's account suggests a more obstinate form of willful delusion. Since totalitarian ideology does not aspire to be taken seriously, the subject who laughs does so with full knowledge that he or she perpetuates an unjust regime. For Žižek, the threat of totalitarianism lies not so much in the human capacity to commit atrocious acts of violence but in the human capacity to laugh and do nothing while such acts are committed.³ Although laughter poses no real threat to power, it maintains the semblance of a threat and therefore enables individuals to blithely disregard the internal contradictions that make life possible in a late capitalist society.

Although Žižek easily dismisses Eco's antagonist, claiming that "poor old Jorge, the incarnation of dogmatic belief who does not laugh is rather a tragic figure: outdated, a kind of living dead, a remnant of the past, certainly not a person representing the existing social and political powers," he just as vehemently posits laughter as an object of fear and suspicion.⁴ Though he does not make this clear, Žižek fears that cynical laughter will take the place of righteous anger, of resistance, and finally, of revolution. I believe that this fear is legitimate-- that therapeutic laughter can be subsumed by totalitarian laughter-- but I do not believe this outcome to be inevitable. Over the course of this project, concern over the relationship between

² Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 24.

³ Žižek's reading of "canned laughter" or television laugh tracks similarly criticizes the way that laughter makes political subjects complacent and renders unnecessary our passionate, human engagement with whatever is represented on screen. See Žižek, "Will you Laugh for Me, Please?" *In These Times*, July 18, 2003.

⁴ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 24.

ethical subjectivity and political engagement has resurfaced in a variety of different forms and it bears restating here that self care need not preclude care for the other. For all of his writing on totalitarian laughter, canned laughter, and modern cynicism, Žižek does not speak to his own characteristic use of humor and we can look to any one of his jokes for proof that therapeutic laughter and critique of ideology coexist.

During an Occupy Wall Street demonstration, Žižek told protesters the same joke that opens his 2002 book *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. A German dissident gets sent to a work camp in Siberia and, knowing that his mail will be censored, establishes a code with his friends so they understand that whatever he writes in blue ink is true and whatever he writes in red is false. The first letter reports that “Everything is wonderful here: the shops are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, cinemas show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair-- the only thing you can’t get is *red ink*.”⁵ Although Žižek offers the crowd the nonsensical interpretation that “You’re the red ink,” he overlooks the essential function of the joke which is to establish new conditions for speaking the truth and to offer pleasure in the place of pain.⁶

⁵ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (New York: Verso, 2002), 1-2.

⁶ Aaron Gell, “Slavoj Žižek Speaks to Occupy Wall Street,” *The Observer*, October 9, 2011.

Appendix

Latin-English Estienne Translation

Henri Estienne to Henri De Mesmes, Master of Requests at the Palais-Royal¹

To whom shall I give this book of Greek thought
Polished with a stone like the Romans sought?
To you O Memmius, for you always
Delight in the trifles of a Greek phrase.

“What?” you will say at once, if I know you well, “Do you write with such modesty and shame that you would call your little book a trifle or do you really feel this way in your heart, thus you speak and confess the truth frankly?” οὐ μᾶλλον τοῦτο ἢ ἐκεῖνο.² “Does this little book treat serious matters or trifles?” ἐπέχω.³ “Respond to this at least: is the argument philosophical?” οὐ καταλαμβάνω.⁴ “Come on, what is determined and established with this little book of yours?” οὐδὲν ὀρίζω.⁵ “At least reveal your thinking to me concerning this matter, whatever it may be.” But I have no answer, in as much as I have no opinion. “Then what are you doing?” σκεπτόμενος διατελῶ⁶ (xxii). You are amazed, Henri, at the metamorphosis of your Henri into a Skeptic as if he were transformed by the miracle of a divine wand? But now I differ from you only by a single letter. For you are a σκωπτικός [jester], as is the way of very charming men, I however, am a σκεπτικός [skeptic]. But if you hear the tragicomic story of my metamorphosis, you will go away much more shocked and amazed than at any Ovidian tale. But I will tell it nonetheless.

Last year, after numerous παροξυσμῶν ἀγμάς and παραχμιάς [outbreaks and remissions of symptoms] (long and laborious by Jupiter!) and many other incidents, my quartan fever finally reached a turning point. It had not only thoroughly transformed the constitution of my body but also caused such a change to natural ὁρμη [impulse] itself (marvelous to say). Just as honey

¹ Translation based on the printed first edition Latin text of Sextus Empiricus from the Hatcher Special Collections library: *Sexti Philosophi Pyrrhoniatarum Hypotypwsewn Libri III, Quibus in Tres Philosophiæ Partes Seuerissimè Inquiritur: Libri Magno Ingenii Acumine Scripti, Uariâque Doctrina Referti: Græcè Nunquam, Latinè Nunc Primum Editi*. [Paris]: excudebat idem H. Stephanus, 1562.

² These Greek words and phrases derive from Sextus Empiricus’s *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. I have included English translations by R.G. Bury, (London: W. Heinemann, 1933).

“Not this more than that.” I.118

³ “I suspend judgement” I.196

⁴ “I apprehend not” I.201

⁵ “I determine nothing” I.197

⁶ “I continue to investigate” (my translation).

seems sweet to us for as long as we are healthy but most bitter when we are sick with jaundice, so it was for me, to whom nothing was sweeter, nothing more pleasant than the study of letters before the tragedy of the quartan fever, at which point I became the actor of this story. Indeed, I shrunk back from these, so that my books would in no way cause a sad and bitter spectacle. If even some small thought of these things occurred to me, as if reopening a covered wound, it would make my mind fester. As I was saying, I was badly disposed toward letters and truly hated them more than the dog and the snake. It happened one day that, having entered my library (with a hand covering my eyes, lest the sight of books agitate my humor), while I amused myself by perusing I know not which old trifles and nonsense in a box, I came upon some sections of my notes which contained a certain hasty exposition of the principals of the Pyrrhonian sect.

Immediately, at first glance and from the first words, they made me laugh (like medicine as the doctors, who declared such laughter indispensable for me, are wont to say⁷). They pleased me still after ten readings, these were the only writings that suited my taste. And finally, as the Skeptics said, *ἰ οἷοι πέπνυνται* [sic], *τοῖ δὲ σκιαὶ ἀίσσουσι* [alone possessed understanding, but the others are fluttering shades].⁸ Therefore, at once, taking hold of those papers, just as a *ἔρμαιον* [herm], I searched everywhere very carefully and very eagerly for the Greek manuscript of Sextus, from which I had translated those Pyrrhonian principals. Finally, I found it all dirty and all but obscured by a thick layer of dust (I had neglected it to such a degree). What more is there to say? I had abandoned the work while I was in good health, partly discouraged by the difficulty of the argument, partly wearied by the *παραδοξολογίαν* [tale of wonder]. Despairing, I had cast the manuscript out of my hands but this time I returned to it with great enthusiasm as if having recovered new strength. Fighting against all the difficulties, I proceeded with the translation and did not stop until I put my hand to the last lines. But did I conquer them? You will be the judge of that.

Certainly if I was not able to conquer all of them, I deserve pardon before fair judges on two accounts. At one and the same time I battled against a fever, most unrelenting and insidious indeed, and great obscurity of arguments in many passages, that is to say, there was an amazing foreign idiom to contend with. There you have it, my dear Henri, the true account of this recent event. “But who,” you say, “would have ever expected there to be such an affinity between the Sceptic and the quartan fever? And who would be able to elicit from the secrets of natural philosophy the reason for this affinity?” Yet truly, who could be more suited for this than you *Henri φιλοσοφικώτατε* [philosopher par excellence]? Therefore come and rouse your fertile heart!⁹ But if by chance you bring forth nothing from this that satisfies you, indeed you have a house which is frequented by the most learned men, so that it could justly be called a market of most noble debate. Consequently, I want you to pose this question during the frequent assembly of those men, and to report however it is resolved so that I may grasp the fruit of my story.

Surely, as far as I am concerned, after I turned over my reasoning for a long time and thoroughly in all parts and carefully assessed all the circumstances of this event, it seemed to me that I had finally found some reason for it. But this would only satisfy me once I confirmed that it satisfied

⁷ On this colloquial phrase, see Lucian, *Dipsades*, V.

⁸ See Plato, *Meno* 100a and Homer, *Odyssey* X.494. Both of these passages allude to the story of Tiresias in the underworld; he alone among the dead retained consciousness and true understanding.

⁹ In the *Aeneid*, Juno similarly urges the fury Alecto to “Fecundum concute pectus” (VII.338).

others surpassing me in both talent and judgement. I will disclose it in a few words. Since I had contracted the quartan fever from an immoderate study of letters, I heard everyone eagerly reproaching me each day for it and attributing all my misfortune to this one cause. Henceforth, what other viewpoint was it possible to adopt, than that perpetual hate for this certain kind of study conspired against my life? This viewpoint consequently had hit upon the truth, so that I hated not this or that book in particular- though Pindar was more worthy of my hate than any other author because the immense effort I put forth while translating him had made me sick- rather, I attributed the fault of one to all, to the extent that now I did not think to avoid the treachery of Pindaric books or similar ones but suspected all books equally. In this situation the following lines that most talented poet sings came to me by habit.

The fish who is once wounded by the deceptive hook,
Thinks that the curved bronze is concealed in all food.¹⁰

Therefore, since my mind and body were impaired, I had decided to renounce rather than declare war against all books that demanded any exertion in reading. I think that the reason Sceptical books finally regained favor in my eyes more than any others was because I hoped that doubt,¹¹ refuting all professors of all arts, would affirm that hate more and more in my spirit. However, I placed my hope for health in this hate since I reckoned that if I continued in the study of letters, what remained of my life would be a future ἀβίωτον [not worth living]. This my Henri, is the account that I am able to give of my wonderful metamorphosis, while I await a better one from you and yours.

However, if I may finally begin to speak seriously, far from affirming my hatred for letters, the Sceptic reconciled me to them through a certain ἀντιπερίστασις [equal and opposite reaction].¹² And certainly, to disclose my mind freely and frankly now, I do not hold the Sceptic in high esteem on this matter, namely, that in refuting the dogmatists with a clever mind he abuses not only what is bad in them but truly even what is rightly said. Accordingly, I recount not what ought to be done but what actually happened. Nevertheless, if the lesser of two evils must be chosen, the idle *epoche* of the Sceptics may be rightly deemed more tolerable in certain inquiries than the impudent and rash assertion of some Dogmatists. I speak, however, of those disputes which they use to deny even sensory knowledge. For who sins more gravely against the truth, I ask you, he who doubts whether there is movement as the Sceptics do (I will furnish an example of this) or he who dares to assert that there is movement as many Dogmatists do? And indeed, we can speak at another time about the other falsehoods that they peddle to subvert movement, but I will recall this one for laughs.

“If something is moved,” they say, “it is moved either in that place where it is or in that place where it is not. However, it is not moved in that place where it is- for it remains- nor in that place where it is not- for how could it move in that place where it is not even present-; therefore, nothing is moved.” Since the physician Herophilus knew that this argument would please the dogmatic philosopher Diodorus very much, he turned the latter’s sophistry most humorously

¹⁰ Ovid, *Tristia Ex Ponto*, 2.7.9-10.

¹¹ [σκέψιν]

¹² For the medical and philosophical importance of antiperistasis see Terence Cave, “Imagining Scepticism in the Sixteenth Century,” *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies* 1 (1992): 193-205.

against him. For when Diodorus came to him with a dislocated shoulder seeking not a philosophical but a medical remedy, Herophilus said to him “Diodorus, how will you convince me that your dislocated shoulder moved from its place? For your shoulder either moved in the place in which it was or in the place in which it was not; but it did not move in the place in which it was- for remaining still, it could not move- nor truly did it move in the place in which it was not; for how could it move where it is not? Therefore, your shoulder is not dislocated.” Indeed, these things Herophilus said most cheerfully.

However, setting aside such amusements, let us come to serious matters and compare Dogmatists and Skeptics on the notion of god. Who does not know that most Dogmatists, on account of their own more than unbridled rashness in judging matters, have fallen into ἀθεότης [atheism] when, just as censors of divine providence, they measure it according to their own sense? But Skeptics by contrast, who debate about god like philosophers *in utramque partem*,¹³ are lead to ἐποχήν [suspension of judgement].¹⁴ Nevertheless, since they assent to the observation of those things that pertain to life in common, they say that they are urged by a natural instinct to believe in god, by whose providence all things are governed, and to worship and adore him. Whatever they may be in this regard, I still neither wish to be a supporter of the Skeptics myself nor to make others supporters. “Why then” someone may say “do you publish this book?”

First, in order to drive the impious Dogmatic philosophers of our age to insanity. Drive them to insanity, I say? More truly, in order to make them sane. For if opposites are cured by opposites, there is hope that those who have contracted the disease of impiety from dogmatic philosophers will be cured by the help of the Ephectics. Next, so that cultivators of philosophy (those it seems, who employ moderation in the study of this subject so that they never absorb the profanity of profane things) may be relieved from very long and tedious labor. For besides the fact that they will have in one and the same book those things which were sought in various books, they will also find many discussions treated most clearly here which have been very obscurely treated by others. For while this author pursues brevity, which often takes obscurity as its friend, those others who babble and blather on, are overtaken by it. Certainly credit must be given to this man because of his admirable method. Finally, so that those who are accustomed to draw out the diverse stories and especially the philological features of all books may be indebted to me. In almost the whole first book, and especially in the τῶν δέκα τρόπων τῆς σκέψεως, I furnish them with many stories, vast learning, and finally a repository of philology. These are generally the causes that urged me to publish this book.

However, someone devoted to philosophy may perhaps object: how can I believe that the person who seems to have declared war against philosophy will aid my studies in any way? Truly, I consider anyone who has formed this opinion of Sextus to be entirely mistaken. Unless one happens to conclude that whoever inveighs against philosophy sometimes censures philosophers who are unworthy of philosophy and who philosophize badly and sometimes laughs at them or hands them over to be ridiculed, with the result that the very tenants of philosophy cannot be

¹³ This Latin phrase denotes a scholastic method of disputation which requires students to defend both sides of a given issue.

¹⁴ This is a key term in *The Outlines of Skepticism*. By suspending his or her judgement about a contentious matter that Skeptic is able to achieve *ataraxia* or a state of mind free from perturbation.

upheld by such reasoning. Therefore, whenever Sextus refutes someone amongst those who state such things, he always adds, or wishes that the following addition be understood: ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς ὑπ' αὐτῶν λεγομένοις [so far as their statements go].¹⁵ Nevertheless, I am not one to ignore the fact that there is more subtlety than truth in skeptical arguments. Truly, one must not think that Sextus hid this purpose since he is a φιλοσοφικώτατον [very philosophical] man endowed equally with both keen judgement and talent. No indeed, he either wrote these things in such a manner for the sake of displaying the acumen of his talent or out of hatred for philosophical rashness so that he might rouse those who are too idle and abuse their authority and license too much while creating for them as much trouble as possible. But meanwhile you say that disputes of this sort obscure the truth with shadows. Why?

Are you afraid that we might suppress the truth with a lie? Then you should also be afraid whenever you see the sun obscured by clouds, lest the darkness snatch away its light, or whenever you see the sun ἐκλείπειν [eclipsed] with the dense and dark body of the moon between itself and our gaze. Suppose that our fate was governed by the sun's light and weep bitterly for us who will spend the future in κόσμον ἀνήλιον [a darkened world]. For when it happens that fallacies and lies, however sharp or skillful, snatch away the light from the truth, then surely the clouds or the moon will change the splendor of the sun into shadows. Truly, we must not agree with Democritus ἐν βυθῷ εἶναι τὴν ἀληθείην [that the truth is in the depth] even given its very nature. Rather, we must hold that it was the perverse ideas of men that once plunged the truth into the abyss and that while it remains submerged today, it may yet resurface just as it once did and always will. Moreover, it is not so much that the truth, having been assaulted, is conquered or that its light is covered by lies for, just like a hand that obtains heat through ἀντιπερίστασιν [antiperistasis] shortly after touching the snow, so too the truth, having been covered by a mist of falsehood, appears soon after with renewed brilliance. But that's a pig teaching Minerva.¹⁶ Goodbye dearest Henri, accept this little present that proceeds from an agreeable spirit and be persuaded that nothing is more pleasing to me than pleasing you.

¹⁵ Trans. R.G. Bury, II.5.26.

¹⁶ Here Estienne alludes to a common Latin adage used to express the impropriety of a fool who attempts to instruct the goddess of wisdom.

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