

SPACES OF RELIGIOUS RETREAT IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Spaces of Religious Retreat in Seventeenth-Century English Literature and Culture

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Religious spaces are inextricably bound to the seventeenth century's most challenging theological and epistemological questions. In my dissertation, I argue that seventeenth-century writers represent specifically religious spaces as testing grounds for contemporary theological and philosophical debates about the material foundations of religious knowledge and the epistemological foundations of religious community. By examining how religious concerns shape the period's construction of literary spaces, I contend that religion's developing privacy reflects this previously unexamined conversation about religious knowledge and communal belief. My focus on the central theological and philosophical ideas that shape these literary texts demonstrates how this ongoing conversation about religious space contributes to the increasingly individuated character of religious knowledge at the beginning of the long eighteenth century and shapes the history of religion's social dimension.

I explore this conversation in two distinct parts. I first examine those writers who contend with new sensory and experiential bases of religious belief as they represent dedicated religious spaces. After considering how Nicholas Ferrar's family pursues religious knowledge through dedicated religious spaces, I argue that John Milton's *Paradise Regained* evaluates competing bases of religious knowledge through an

extended debate about religious space and knowledge. Finally, I contend that Margaret Cavendish transforms an imagined convent space into an argument that nature serves as the sole source of religious knowledge.

In the second part, I examine writers who contend with the social consequences of individual accounts of religious knowledge. The sequel to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* articulates the writer's struggle to reconcile an individual epistemology with the concerns of the religious community. Like Bunyan, Mary Astell seeks to unify individual believers with her proposal for a rationally persuasive Cartesian religion. Finally, William Penn relies on the solitary space of the conscience in his advertisements for Pennsylvania. As these writers seek to reconcile the individual's role in the production of religious knowledge with religion's social manifestations, they associate religious belief and practice with increasingly private, bounded constructions of space. These complex articulations of religion's place in the world play a significant role in religion's developing spatial privacy by the end of the seventeenth century.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: LITTLE GIDDING AND CAROLINE
RELIGIOUS CULTURE

When Edward Lenton visited the Ferrar family on their estate at Little Gidding in 1634, his hosts had little reason to expect that their hospitality would open the community's doors to the suspicious eyes of the English public. In his 1938 biography of Nicholas Ferrar, A. L. Maycock recounts Lenton's curiosity about this religious community: "[Lenton] had heard a good deal about the community at Little Gidding: about their ascetic manner of life, their long vigils of prayer, their supposedly superstitious practices, their papist tendencies and the rest" (134). During his visit, Lenton had the opportunity to see how Ferrar—a close friend of the poet George Herbert and responsible for the posthumous publication of *The Temple*—and his family sought to separate their estate from the rest of the world through religious ritual, intellectual exploration, education, and charitable acts. In Lenton's letter to his friend Sir Thomas Hetley, he describes the family's quasi-monastic religious discipline and the beauty of the estate's church architecture (Maycock 134)¹.

Apparently without Lenton's knowledge, a later writer composed a vitriolic and harshly partisan representation of Little Gidding based upon Lenton's written account of his visit². Published in 1641, four years after Nicholas Ferrar's death, the anonymous *The Arminian Nunnery: Or A Briefe Description and Relation of the late erected Monastical*

¹ A. L. Maycock notes, "There is a manuscript copy of the letter to Hetley amongst the Ferrar papers at Magdalene College" (133).

² Maycock mentions that Lenton "was shocked and horrified" and "wrote back promptly to John [Ferrar], protesting...that he had known nothing of this 'libellous pamphlet' until its actual appearance" (Maycock 136).

Place offers insight into the contentious debate about religious spaces in early modern England. In John Ferrar's hagiographic *Life of Nicholas Ferrar*, he complains that "nine thousand Copies" of this text were printed and distributed by "Parl[iamen]t men" and describes its contents as "stuffed with abominable falshoods & such Storyes told, as the Devil himself would be ashamed to utter" (62). Although it is hardly an objective account of the Ferrar family's ascetic and ritualized life at Little Gidding, this tract demonstrates the vibrancy and urgency of debates about religious space in early modern England and early America.

The tract's interventions in these issues illustrate the critical role that religious space plays in seventeenth century accounts of religious knowledge and communal life. This dissertation examines how Nicholas Ferrar and his family, John Milton, Margaret Cavendish, John Bunyan, Mary Astell, and William Penn test new ideas about religious knowledge and community in their literary representations of religious space. Their representations of religious retreat participate in the construction of religion as a category distinct from the concerns of public life by the beginning of the long eighteenth century. The range of concerns voiced in this early seventeenth-century diatribe show how the Little Gidding community participates in the seventeenth century's wider debate about the means of establishing specifically religious spaces and the role of space in the construction of religious knowledge. The anonymous pamphleteer's representative objections demonstrate the implications of the century's debates about dedicated religious spaces, which include the function of gender in the production of religious knowledge and the dialectic between individual religious knowledge and communal life.

Purchased in 1624 by Mary Woodnoth Ferrar, the mother of Nicholas Ferrar, John Ferrar, and Susanna Collett (née Ferrar), Little Gidding became the site of one family's attempt to dedicate their home and their lives to religious practice (Charles "Herbert and the Ferrars" 9)³. While Nicholas Ferrar is Little Gidding's most famous resident, the family's experiment with religious space provoked considerable curiosity in their neighbors. In her account of Herbert's interaction with the Ferrar family, Amy M. Charles describes the "hard physical work" the family undertook to renovate the house and to make its church "a place where they might live and follow the tenets of their faith" (10). This process of establishing a dedicated religious space was particularly fraught within the seventeenth century's economy of ideas about the significance of the present world.

Throughout *The Arminian Nunnery*, the anonymous author focuses on "[t]his *Fryer like Familie*" and the sinister implications behind their efforts to dedicate their home and parish church to religious belief and practice (10)⁴. Upon meeting Nicholas Ferrar, "a Batchelour of a plain presence, but pregnant of speech and parts," the presumptive visitor first recalls the rumors that circulated about their estate: "I first told him what I had heard of the *Nunns* at *Gidding*; of *two watching and praying all night*; of their *Canonicall houres*; of their *Crosses* on the outside and inside of the *Chappell*; of an *Altar* richly decked with *Tapestry, Plate and Tapers*; of their *Adorations, genuflections,* and *geniculations*" (2). The author fixates on the architectural markers and bodily

³ Amy M. Charles indicates that the purchase took place in late 1624 but was completed in May of the following year ("Herbert and the Ferrars" 10).

⁴ Throughout this project, I silently modernize the orthography in primary sources but otherwise maintain the idiosyncratic spelling and punctuation of primary texts.

postures that distinguish Little Gidding's religious purposes from those of the rest of the English countryside. The anonymous writer's description demonstrates how the family's attempt to establish a specifically religious space implies a dyadic relationship between marked and unmarked spaces with significant implications for religious knowledge.

In the tract's narrative, the visitor objects to these material and behavioral markers of space because the structural features and practices that mark Little Gidding as a dedicated religious space implicitly devalue the world around it: "I demanded then why hee used not the same solemnite in his *House*, and whether he thought the Chappell more holy then his *House*, he said no, but tha[t] God was more immediately present in the *Chappel* then in the *House*, whilst we were worshipping him, I replied that God was as present at *Paules Crosse*, as in *Paules Church*" (8). At issue in the author's response is the significance of dedicated religious space, the means of establishing a given space as specifically religious in character or function, and the knowledge made available to the subject by means of that religious space. The ideological conflict at the root of the pamphlet's vitriol relates to the formation of religious space and the production of religious knowledge.

The author and the residents at Little Gidding rely on radically different understandings of the means by which people construct religious spaces—the first separates the individual subject's worship from the interference of either commercial or sacred spaces while the second relies on the means of architecture and ritual to establish a space in which the subject encounters the divine. The anonymous author focuses on the house's mantelpiece as a specific example of the communal implications of the group's dangerous religious innovation. In large print, the text reproduces the large "IHS," or the

abbreviated name of Christ, as it appears on the walls of the Ferrar's home and the accompanying inscription that blesses those who come in goodwill and warns those who enter with bad intent.

The writer observes of the Christogram, “[t]he Letters of the top of which Inscription are the proper Character of the Jesuites in every *Booke* and *Exhibite* of theirs” (5). Besides arguing for the dangerously Jesuitical character of the inscription, the writer objects to the means by which the Little Gidding community constructs and uses religious space⁵. The writer connects this objectionable method of establishing religious space with the group's membership in a suspiciously foreign religious society. The text's reference to books affiliated with the Jesuits in particular demonstrates how religious space is inseparable from the social production and distribution of religious and theological knowledge. As the tract's alarmist rhetoric suggests, the actions that demarcate religious space also mark and maintain religious community.

The eye-catching frontispiece that frames the tract's complaint draws the reader's attention to the women who live at Little Gidding and gender's critical relationship to religious knowledge. In front of the community's parish church and tower, a woman in a black habit holds a book and rosary in her crossed arms—likely either the senior Mary Ferrar or her granddaughter, Mary Collett⁶. The author's visual emphasis on the women among the title page's “Company of FARRARS [sic]” and the presence of the women throughout his visit suggests that gender has significant implications for religious

⁵ For the currency of an early modern anti-Catholic discourse, see Arthur Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy*, 32-5.

⁶ Both women take significant leadership roles within the Little Academy dialogues, and Mary Collett assumes the title of ‘Mother’ in the family dialogues from her grandmother, Mary Ferrar (Williams xxxi).

knowledge and the life of religious community in early modern England. In keeping with the tract's argument about Little Gidding's perilously Catholic undertones, the woman's arms are crossed in an implicit suggestion that the community's condemnation is connected with the disordered or unnatural role of women in the community's ascetic rule of life. During his visit, the author frames the family's young women as potential erotic disruptions of the chapel service and chapel tour⁷. This tract's sensationalist concern with the role of the women at Little Gidding suggests that gender plays a significant role in early modern debates about religious knowledge and the place of religion in everyday life. In these debates, seventeenth-century writers reevaluate gender's significance in the individual's encounter with dedicated religious spaces and the gendered individual's role in the shared life of the visible church.

What this highly partisan tract lacks in subtlety, it makes up for in its keen awareness of the fact that descriptions of religious retreat intervene in foundational questions of epistemology and community membership. *The Arminian Nunnery's* anonymous author recognizes that representations of religious space have significant implications for the significance of the material world and the role of that world in the formation of the individual's religious knowledge. In its sensationalist fixation on gender's implications for religious knowledge, the text meditates on the relationship between religious space and the status of the believing subject in the present world. The author's focus on Little Gidding as a potentially dangerous site of feminine religious knowledge reveals significant cultural anxieties about gender's role in shaping the shared

⁷ The anonymous author focuses on the imaginative eroticism of his visit immediately following the conclusion of the daily devotions in the chapel: "Their Service ended, the *Mother* with all her Company attending my coming downe; but I durst not come very neere lest I might happily have light upon one of the Virgins lippes, not knowing whether they would have taken a second kisse in good part or no, with their civill salutations towards me" (7).

ends of religious community. As an imaginative representation of religious retreat, this tract reveals the author's recognition that this discourse of religious space allows writers to contend with questions of religion's boundaries in early modern English society.

In early modern English literary and cultural texts, spaces of religious retreat are deeply contested sites of inquiry into the significance of the present world, religious epistemology, and the shared grounds of religious community. These exploratory works articulate each author's improvisational understanding of religion's role within a period of significant epistemological change. In these texts, early modern writers seek to reconcile their understanding of religion's boundaries with emerging scientific approaches to the natural world and epistemological theories based on the individual. The works in this study draw upon this seventeenth-century discourse of religious retreat, reflect the debates that shape the period's understanding of religious knowledge, and influence the direction of these debates. This dissertation project demonstrates how changes in religion's spatiality over the seventeenth century depend upon this literary discourse that invites writers to imagine new configurations of religion's role in everyday life.

I begin by explaining how discussions of space in literary texts serve as repositories of changing cultural attitudes towards the epistemological significance of the present world. I will then consider how the period's specific spatial discourse of religious retreat allows seventeenth century writers to investigate models of individual and gendered religious knowledge in pursuit of new foundations for the visible church. Rather than mere flights of fancy or expressions of outmoded religious fervor, these

literary texts reveal how writers throughout English society reconfigure and negotiate religion's boundaries in the early modern period.

By making representations of religious space the subject of literary study, I approach the concept of space as a historically contingent cultural construct that reflects the concerns of the early modern English world. My methodology assumes a multiplicity of spaces demarcated by a variety of literary and cultural practices and which serve a variety of cultural functions in contrast with a single, unified concept of space that exists independently from human culture. This approach interprets literary accounts of religious space as interventions in the seventeenth century's ongoing conversation about the status and meaning of the material world. In considering the significance and influence of religious spaces as cultural constructs, my project demonstrates how early modern accounts of religious space articulate competing accounts of religious knowledge.

In my discussion of spaces of religious retreat, I distinguish my analysis of imagined, multiple spaces as cultural constructs from space's more familiar implication as an objective system of Cartesian extent or an unchanging form of Euclidian measurement. This Cartesian account of ideal mathematical space and its corresponding account of human knowledge emerge out of the early modern period's ongoing conversation about the universe's significance and relationship to the human subject. In René Descartes' description of the material world in his 1644 *Principles of Philosophy*, he contends that space is the property of "extension in length, breadth, and depth" and is distinct from the concept of body because "in space...we attribute to extension a generic unity, so that after having removed from a certain space the body which occupied it, we do not suppose we have also removed the extension of that space" (259). Descartes

argues that space operates as an ideal mathematical dimension and that the concept of space therefore is uniform in character regardless of the material contents of that space or the human activities that occur within it.

Descartes' account of space as a uniform measure of static, extended body is intimately connected with his account of human knowledge. For Descartes, knowledge is the product of the mind, which exists as a distinct category from the body and its measurement in space. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Descartes compares the properties of mind and body: "on the one side, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other, I possess a distinct idea of body, inasmuch as it is only an extended and unthinking thing" (190). While he associates thought and knowledge with the disembodied, "unextended" mind, Descartes discusses space as the extended property of material things. As I examine the function of spatial discourse in the seventeenth century, I remain mindful that Descartes' influential model is one of many competing theories of space that articulate accounts of human knowledge. As a result, this project addresses the epistemological and social consequences of the seventeenth century's competing theories of space.

Because many seventeenth-century writers engage with and challenge Descartes' account of space, this project sets aside the universal claims of Cartesian space in order to explore the epistemological, theological, and social implications of these competing spatial theories⁸. Immanuel Kant's later description of space as an intuitive concept originating in the mind challenges Descartes' description of space as an objective,

⁸ For example, my chapter on Mary Astell's *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* examines how Mary Astell and John Norris challenge and reevaluate Descartes' claims about space in their implicit conversation with John Locke's philosophical works.

mathematical measure wholly distinct from the mind's operation. Kant's interest in the human mental faculties as the means by which humanity makes sense of the external world leads him to understand space as an intuitive representation constructed in the mind rather than a necessarily objective property of the external world itself. In his *Inaugural Dissertation of 1770*, Kant argues that the mind produces an intuitive concept of space as an assumption needed to interpret the input of the senses: "*The concept of space...is a pure intuition*, being a singular concept, not made up by sensations, but itself the fundamental form of all external sensations...*Space is not something objective* and real, neither substance, nor accident, nor relation; but *subjective* and ideal, arising by fixed law from the nature of the mind like an outline for the mutual coordination of all external sensations whatsoever" (II.iii, para. 14). Kant's account frames space as an intuitive representation within the mind of the subject rather than a necessary property of the external world⁹.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines intuition as that which arises from "the subjective nature of our mind," and he defines space as "a necessary *a priori* representation which underlines all outer intuitions" (61 [B37, 38; A22, 23], 62 [B39; A24, 25]). For Kant, the concept of space—in addition to time—is a single, unified, and involuntary representation through which all of the mind's other representations are made legible. This underlying unity and uniformity of space leads Kant to suggest that people can only discuss a single concept of space rather than multiple spaces: "What are called *several spaces* are only parts of the same immense space mutually related by certain

⁹ In direct contrast with Kant's account of space as an intuitive concept derived from the workings of the mind, Yi-Fu Tuan argues that space's imaginative power derives from the experience of the body. Tuan suggests that space is organized by "the posture and structure of the human body, and the relations...between human beings" (*Space and Place* 34).

positions, nor can you conceive of a cubic foot except as being bounded in all directions by surrounding space” (*Inaugural Dissertation* II.iii, para. 14). In contrast with my approach to early modern religious spaces as complex configurations of religious belief and practice in conversation with their historical context, Kant argues for the necessary uniformity of space as the mind’s intuitive conceptual framework.

More recent commentators on the subject of space and its cultural history offer interpretive models that attend to the changing cultural significance invested in competing accounts of space and recognize space’s historicity as a concept. While some commentators have framed the work of literary scholars drawing upon these theoretical approaches to spatial discourse as a collective “spatial turn” in literary study, these approaches address vital concerns native to early modern texts and their contexts. In his influential discussion of space and the poetic imagination, Gaston Bachelard observes: “Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination” (*Poetics of Space* xxxvi). Bachelard’s theoretical model focuses on subjective experiences of space rather than space as an abstract concept in order to demonstrate how the physical structures of the modern world influence the possibilities available to the individual’s imagination.

Michel de Certeau likewise separates the concept of place as the configuration of material objects in a fixed moment in time from space and spatial practice¹⁰. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau writes, “Space occurs as the effect produced by the

¹⁰ Of place, de Certeau writes, “A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*)” (117). For de Certeau, then, place is the realm of fixity and exclusivity while space is the sum of social relations.

operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities...In short, *space is a practiced place*” (117). Like Bachelard, de Certeau is concerned with subjective experience of space. De Certeau’s foundational text places particular emphasis on the spatial practices that reify, challenge, or reinterpret space. His work contends that space is inseparable from the social practices that mediate the subject’s relationship to the external world by making it legible or useful.

Henri Lefebvre’s influential study, *The Production of Space*, synthesizes these concerns for the social character of spatial practice and the subject’s phenomenological experience of space. Lefebvre’s broadly Marxist narrative of space’s role in the abstraction of production critiques the dominance of Cartesian accounts of space and describes space as a site of historical change¹¹. He suggests, “We should have to study not only the history of space, but also the history of representations, along with that of their relationships – with each other, with practice, and with ideology” (42). In its analysis of the seventeenth century’s representations of religious retreat, my project takes up Lefebvre’s particular concern for the ideological and social implications of these representations¹².

¹¹ Lefebvre warns of abstract accounts of space, “[t]he notion of the instrumental homogeneity of space, however, is illusory – though empirical descriptions of space reinforce the illusion – because it uncritically takes the instrumental as a given” (285). He suggests, “*there is a violence intrinsic to abstraction*, and to abstraction’s practical (social) use” (289).

¹² Lefebvre frames space as an ideological construct in the sense that it provides an interpretive framework through which the subject may make sense of his or her relationship to the world and other subjects in that world. He writes: “Representational spaces...need obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness. Redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements, they have their source in history – in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people” (*Production of Space* 41).

My use of the term “space” draws most directly upon the methodology that Doreen Massey suggests in *for space*. In this experimental text, Massey proposes that theorists approach “space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions,” that “[i]f space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality,” and that “we recognize space as always under construction” (9). My methodology shares Massey’s assumption that space functions as a historically contingent group of competing concepts that encode and frame social relations. In the case of the contested meaning of religious space at Little Gidding, Massey’s emphasis on space as necessarily both social and multiple explains how textual representations of religious space are implicated in contemporary debates about religious knowledge, the formation and observance of sacred space, and religious space’s mediation of social relations. My project begins with the question of religious knowledge in particular because of the immediacy of the seventeenth century’s epistemological debates.

Accounts of religious space articulate implicit accounts of religious knowledge. As I examine how early modern writers represent religious retreat, I focus specifically on spaces of religious retreat as implicit articulations of competing religious epistemologies. Because these representations of space compete with other contemporary descriptions of religion’s place in the world, accounts of religious space intervene in the seventeenth century’s debates about the sources of religious knowledge¹³. As Charles Taylor observes in his history of secularism in “the modern West,” he admits that the definition of religion

¹³ In addition to the individual and providential sources of knowledge discussed at length in this project, the English Civil War presented an opportunity for many radical groups to explore revolutionary ideas about religion’s role in everyday life and the sources of religious knowledge. See Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*.

“famously defies definition, largely because the phenomena we are tempted to call religious are so tremendously varied in human life” (*A Secular Age* 15). This literary and historical project traces the ongoing definition of religion’s boundaries. For the purposes of this study, I approach the concept of religion more historically as the sum of beliefs, objects, sites, and practices that individuals and communities identify with the pursuit of transcendent ends and focus primarily on forms of English Protestantism¹⁴. In its broadest sense, then, my description of religious knowledge includes the implicit and explicit information, ideas, and concepts that direct individuals or groups towards those religious ends.

In the opening of his *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes directs his reader to turn within for a subjective, individual source of knowledge and experience: “He that is to govern a whole nation, must read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but mankind” (8). From Michel de Montaigne’s unprecedented interest in the experiences of the self as a source of knowledge to Hobbes’ account of human power relations based on the representative individual, early modern writers intervene in an ongoing debate about the foundations of knowledge as they articulate their understanding of human community. For these writers, knowledge and the social are intimately related. In the case of religious knowledge, the question of the authenticity and verifiability of the individual’s knowledge challenges the basis of shared religious ends and—as a result—religious community. In particular, seventeenth-century representations of religious retreat address the tension between accounts of religious knowledge that originate in the individual’s

¹⁴ My highly provisional definition of religious ends as those which direct human energy beyond humanity itself towards the transcendent draws upon Charles Taylor’s useful description of the religious world as one “in which the place of fullness was understood as unproblematically outside of or ‘beyond’ human life” (15).

mind or experience and accounts that rely on the mediation of external sources of authority shared by the religious community.

As a fundamental challenge to earlier providential accounts of space and the natural world's materiality, René Descartes' account of space as extent or objective measure illustrates how definitions of space articulate competing assumptions about human knowledge and the material world. This traditional Christian theological account assumes that the providential ordering of the natural world offers direct insight into the nature of God and the state of humanity¹⁵. For example, Reformation theologian John Calvin asserts in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), "In attestation of [God's] wondrous wisdom, both the heavens and the earth present us with innumerable proofs, not only those more recondite proofs which astronomy, medicine, and all the natural sciences are designed to illustrate, but proofs which force themselves on the notice of the most illiterate peasant, who cannot open his eyes without beholding them" (*Institutes* I.1.5). Calvin argues that the external, created world impresses religious knowledge upon even the least receptive subject.

In this earlier theological account, the providential order in material world's spaces presents the subject with certain—if occasionally vague—religious knowledge. This understanding of the natural world as a source of religious knowledge appears far earlier in Augustine's foundational theological text, *The City of God*, or *De Civitate Dei*. Augustine argues that the natural world signifies beyond itself to offer insight into God's invisible and unknowable nature: "though the voices of the prophets were silent, the

¹⁵ Within this scope of this study, I refer to traditional Christianity as shorthand for the body of Reformation and Pre-Reformation theological writings in western European Christianity. Although I recognize that this theological corpus engages with other faith traditions, the internationalism of early modern Christian thought lies beyond the scope of this project.

world itself, by its well-ordered changes and movements, and by the fair appearance of all visible things, bears a testimony of its own, both that it has been created, and also that it could not have been created save by God, whose greatness and beauty are unutterable and invisible” (*City of God* XI.2). In contrast with Descartes’ account of space and the external world as secondary to the constructive activity of the mind, both Calvin and Augustine imply that the providentially ordered world impresses reliable and authoritative religious knowledge upon the subject. The seventeenth century’s competing accounts of religious knowledge provide an impetus for the period’s renewed interest in representing spaces of religious retreat.

The act of retreating from the rest of the material world in pursuit of religious ends raises questions about the epistemological status of both the space of religious retreat and the rest of the material world. A traditionally providential understanding of the external, created world offers one possible explanation of how a particular space might be designated as specifically religious while another space offers more limited opportunities for religious knowledge or practice. Thomas Aquinas asserts in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, “created things must all fall short of the full Goodness of God, so, in order that things may reflect that goodness more perfectly, there had to be variety in things...the only possible way in which things can vary in resembling something absolutely simple is by closeness or remoteness, things more closely resembling God being the more perfect” (3.97). In contrast with Aquinas’ description of the varied perfection of the visible world that allows a particular cultural space to provide the subject with a heightened awareness of religious knowledge, Descartes’ account of space’s fundamental equality and uniformity positions the individual mind as the site of knowledge’s construction.

Seventeenth-century epistemological theories that depend on the individual subject therefore provoke debate about the significance of religious spaces within a network of other competing spaces in the early modern world.

By focusing more narrowly on a discourse of religious retreat in seventeenth-century England and early America, I address religious retreat as both a category of socially constructed spaces dedicated to religious belief or practice and as the social practices or ideas that establish these spaces as distinctly religious in character or purpose. Rather than the period's more common term, "retirement," I use the word "retreat" to emphasize that these religious spaces participate a network of other spaces and that these spaces are constituted by contemporary cultural practices. As both a noun and verb, religious retreat encompasses both dedicated religious spaces and the active processes by which seventeenth-century writers produce and maintain these spaces. These writers articulate their understanding of religious knowledge as they situate dedicated religious spaces within the present world and reflect upon the social practices and beliefs through which they establish and interpret these spaces of religious retreat.

As descriptions of spaces of religious retreat that converse with other competing spaces and other competing accounts of knowledge, this discourse is distinct from the more broadly utopian discourse of retirement that has been the subject of most scholarly work on religious space in the early modern period¹⁶. Maren-Sofie Røstvig's foundational study of the seventeenth century's heightened interest in the *beatus ille* motif, for example, focuses on idealized literary representations of retirement that embrace "the obscure life of the husbandman" that depend upon the assumption that "a country life

¹⁶ See, for example, Robert Applebaum, *Literature and Utopian Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*, 5.

offers truer and more genuine pleasures than can be found at court or in cities” and “that a veritable Golden Age or Early Paradise can be found among scenes of happy rural innocence” (*The Happy Man* 42). Røstvig’s focus on the classical sources of the retirement motif over contemporary religious concerns separates her discussion of early modern retirement literature from my project’s concern with representations of religious retreat that reflect the vitality of contemporary concerns about religious knowledge and organization of religious community¹⁷.

This concern with the organization of religious community thus distinguishes the scope of my work from other studies of the early modern period that focus on religious space as models of Edenic innocence. A. Bartlett Giamatti’s study of ideal garden spaces as the pursuit of “the earthly paradise” neglects the role of religious ideas in the shaping and construction of dedicated religious spaces in service of a narrative of the early modern period’s shift from the ideal to the actual (360). Joanna Picciotto’s more recent examination of early modern technologies as compensatory means of recovering from the consequences of the Fall addresses the period’s new emphasis on the individual’s intellectual labor but is likewise less concerned with religious knowledge *per se* than with the period’s changing intellectual methodologies¹⁸. Both scholarly projects address change in early modern attitudes towards knowledge and the present world but place

¹⁷ Røstvig’s study suggests that the retirement motif provides a template on which early modern writers map their religious concerns: “as soon as this concept [of the voluptuous Edenic innocent] is interpreted in the direction of a spiritual symbolism, that is, as soon as the Golden Age turns into a spiritual garden inside which a union with God may be achieved, its sensuousness can be reconciled with a complete austerity regarding mere earthly objects or passions” (43). This account establishes a false opposition between transcendental religious concerns and the idea of asceticism or austerity. As this project demonstrates, early modern writers with concerns about the meaning or value of the present world or the information provided by the individual’s mind or senses do not thereby imagine that their interest in retreat wholly displaces their concern for the rest of the world. Instead, these representations are implicated in models of the visible church, or religious community within the present world.

¹⁸ See Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England*, 9.

diminished emphasis on religious ideas as vital beliefs through which early modern subjects approached and understood their world.

This study extends the scholarship of writers such as Andrew Hiscock, whose study of representations of space in early modern theatrical texts makes a persuasive case that “space is not a neutral, fixed, passive container, but socially constructed and constantly in process” (14). It also complements the work of scholars interested in the cultural and symbolic function of urban spaces. Scholars such as Cynthia Wall have explored how architectural spaces and spatial practices influence early modern constructions of knowledge. Wall’s work on the spaces of Restoration London focuses less directly on the epistemological and social implications of religious space and instead addresses the influence of religious space on cultural trends in literary description and narrative¹⁹.

My project argues that literary representations of religious retreat reflect vital religious concerns and therefore examines these representations in light of those concerns. This methodology implies that religious belief and practices shape the world of early modern subjects and that religion’s history is significant in itself beyond the history of its social and political implications. As Debora Kuller Shuger writes in *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*, this emphasis on religion *qua* religion runs counter to the emphases of much of early modern scholarship: “the relation between religion and culture needs careful explication if religion is not to be confused with society itself or narrowed into theology. Religion is, first of all, not *simply* politics in disguise... Religion during this period supplies the primary language of analysis” (5-6). I situate

¹⁹ See Cynthia Wall, *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London* and Alice T. Friedman, “Inside/Out: Women, Domesticity, and the Pleasures of the City,” 232-8.

representations of religious retreat in the context of the period's religious concerns by examining literary texts in light of the contemporary books and tracts on religious topics that literary scholars frequently overlook.

In an essay addressing the question of methodology in religious studies, Brad Gregory addresses frequent objections to scholarship on early modern religion based on the period's radical alterity and the potential unimportance of religious ideas for modern readers²⁰. Gregory responds to a phrase from intellectual historian Quentin Skinner in his argument that "seeing things their way" means "understanding religious people on their own terms" or "depicting them in a manner in which they would have recognized themselves" (25)²¹. As I trace the discourse of religious retreat throughout the seventeenth century, my project shares Gregory's goal of reconstructing the vitality of religious ideas in order to understand how the boundaries of religious belief change over time. Gregory argues that his approach "lays at least part of the foundations for explaining change over time" and observes this is the most fundamental—and challenging—task of historical scholarship (40).

In order to trace how representations of religious retreat participate in the early modern period's conversation about religion's boundaries, I focus on space's role in the formation of religious knowledge and the consequences of that knowledge for the subject's participation in religious community. Doreen Massey suggests that the issue of

²⁰ While he recognizes the difficulty inherent in approaching complex (and not necessarily homogenous) belief systems in the past, Gregory suggests that the presence of debate about the past "presupposes at least some degree of understanding" and the potential of better approaching the limit of understanding's possibility (37).

²¹ Gregory anticipates his reader's concerns in his clarification that "[i]f it is possible to see things as the members of a religious tradition see them, this does not imply that we thereby appropriate or condone their beliefs or ideas" (25). This project likewise pursues an understanding of early modern religious ideas in order to understand their role in shaping religion's boundaries and claims.

space is the challenge of the “social in the widest sense” and the challenge of configuring that sociality (*for space* 195). Because configurations of space are necessarily plural and because these configurations supply competing models of religious knowledge, the seventeenth-century writers in this study contemplate the shared ends necessary to sustain religious community. Aristotle describes the orientation of human community towards the shared end of the good as the foundation of the political: “since politics uses the rest of the sciences...the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the human good” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b). Religious knowledge, insofar as it shapes shared conceptions of the good, is influential in the formation of political community and essential to the function of the visible church as the manifestation of religious community. These issues of space’s multiplicity, religious knowledge, and community formation have wide-reaching implications for literary and historical analysis.

My project’s emphasis on gender provides a way to analyze the tensions between what Reid Barbour describes as the particularly seventeenth-century issue of human circumstance and the shared ends of religious community²². Barbour suggests that the period’s writers scrutinized the significance of human circumstances such as rank, wealth, and gender for religious knowledge and community. This scrutiny is particularly acute when early modern writers consider the gendered implications of religious retreat. As Doreen Massey suggests, “social relations of space are experienced differently, and variously interpreted by those holding different positions as a part of it” (*Space, Place, and Gender* 3). Gender’s role in the construction and interpretation of religious space is particularly illuminating because the period’s changing understanding of privacy and publicity engage with categories of gender and space’s religious uses.

²² See Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture*, 10.

In *Gender and Space in Early Modern England*, Amanda Flather characterizes the seventeenth century as a period in which writers negotiated with fluid categories of privacy and publicity: “The boundary between public space and private space was very blurred in seventeenth-century England...[s]pace was not static but fluid and highly dynamic. Its meaning was constantly shifting...[a]ll of these shifting dynamics were complicated by the intersection of gender with other aspects of social identity” (Flather 177). When writers such as Margaret Cavendish reflect on gender’s interface with the function of religious retreat, they reevaluate gender’s implications for private and public religious spaces and for authoritative religious knowledge.

This dissertation continues this investigation into religion’s role in the history of privacy by considering how representations of religious space explore and theorize new relationships between religious belief and religious space. Recent critics have recognized how emergent categories of privacy and domesticity in the long eighteenth century articulate new divisions of space based on implicit accounts of religious knowledge and the significance of gender. Michael McKeon’s work on domesticity and knowledge in the early modern period addresses “the comprehensive division of knowledge that takes place in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries and that separates modernity from tradition” (xvii). McKeon’s argument focuses primarily on the practices that shaped early modern accounts of privacy and domesticity: “the interiority of conscientious experience and experiment was correlated with the interiority of the domestic spaces in which these activities occurred, a correlation between micro- and macro-, bodily and architectural privacy” (43). In contrast, my study examines representations of religious

space in order to consider how literary texts reevaluate and critique the period's conversation about religious space and religious knowledge²³.

Given the relative dearth of scholarly attention given to accounts of religious retreat in the early modern period, this project offers new insight into the history of privacy and the roles of gender and religious epistemology in that history. Philippe Ariès recognizes the significance of religious change for the emergence of privacy by the long eighteenth century as he links “new forms of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” with religion's spatial practices: “[t]he new religions...also encouraged individuals to examine their consciences—Catholics through confession, Puritans through keeping private diaries. Among laymen, prayer most commonly took the form of solitary meditation in a private chapel or even a corner of the bedroom” (4). Ariès' discussion of religion's role within privacy's history demonstrates the intellectual stakes of representing religious space in the early modern period.

As a whole, this investigation suggests that changes in the spaces dedicated to religious belief and practice reflect religion's changing boundaries at the beginning of the long eighteenth century. Rather than choosing to describe these changes as the result of an inevitable process of secularization, I will demonstrate how conversations about the sources of religious knowledge and the foundations of religious community reconfigure

²³ By focusing on representation, I do not thereby suggest that literary representations of space serve as the sole origin of religion's spatial privacy at the expense of other cultural practices. Amanda Flather's study of the subversive and complex practices of early modern women demonstrates the complexity of early modern descriptions of public and private spaces: “[c]lose attention to the points of connection between the various hierarchies, that is the contexts or spaces where these complex, competing and unstable gender identities were negotiated on a daily basis, allows us to explore the intricacies of these changing dynamics of gendered power” (15).

the divisions between religion's domain and that of public life²⁴. Early modern writers reflect upon the religious space and its social consequences as they interrogate new, individualist accounts of knowledge. Their literary texts articulate their attempts to reconcile the convictions through which they interpret the world with new accounts of space that threaten the foundations of the visible church.

The seventeenth century's sustained periods of conflict and uncertainty begin to explain why English writers take a particular interest in representations of religious retreat during this period. This discourse of religious space reflects concerns about religion's changing role in English society, the foundations of religious knowledge, and the shared ends of communal life. In a century marked by the English Civil War, the Restoration, and the Revolution of 1688, accounts of religion's place in ordinary life take on powerful social and political resonances. When the Ferrar family purchased and refurbished the estate of Little Gidding, their work reflects concerns at the heart of Caroline religious conflict. The polemical condemnations in the anonymous tract reveal how deeply the Ferrar family's account of religious space is embedded in this conflict.

During the 1630s, significant liturgical and architectural changes in English churches redrew "the line between the sacred and the profane," in the words of historian Peter Lake, and sparked debate about the role of religious space in the production of religious knowledge (164). Graham Parry describes this new ecclesiastical emphasis under Charles I's Archbishop William Laud: "All over the country, by the end of the 1630s, the cathedrals had been renewed in their fabric and furnishings, and their services

²⁴ C. John Sommerville's account of secularization in early modern England offers significant precedent for considering religion's role in early modern reconfigurations of religious and secular knowledge. Sommerville observes, "[t]he religious roots of secularization are not a new discovery. Max Weber sensed that Protestantism had been a major force in the 'disenchantment' of this world" (182).

reformed according to the ideals of decorum that Archbishop Laud believed were proper to the Church of England” (*Glory* 57). Achsah Guibbory situates these changes within the period’s reevaluation of religious ceremony. Guibbory observes that the ensuing conflict over church spaces transformed by “stained glass windows, ornate chalices, altar cloths, and crucifixes” and oriented towards the altar “became persistent and intense between those who wanted a ‘purer’ worship and those who approved of at least a moderately ceremonial worship” (13, 12). As Guibbory recognizes, concerns about knowledge and its relationship to the material world reside at the heart of the seventeenth century’s vigorous debates about worship and ceremony²⁵.

The tone of *The Arminian Nunnery* suggests that the activity of the Ferrar and Collett families at Little Gidding intervened in significant and contentious cultural questions. In the early 1630s, the intergenerational community met for a series of instructive dialogues on religious topics with formalized names and roles. The children of Susanna Ferrar Collett and John Collett were at the center of these conversations—particularly young Mary Collett, who begins as the “Chief” and eventually assumes the greater leadership responsibility of “Mother” from her grandmother. A. L. Maycock describes the beginnings of their endeavors: “The first meeting of the ‘Little Academy’ took place on Ash Wednesday 1630-31...[s]tarting from a general discussion about a life of religious dedication and retirement from the world, this first volume...deals at considerable length with the life of retirement embraced by the Emperor Charles V” in his 1556 abdication (“Little Gidding” 72). The Little Academy’s formal dialogues,

²⁵ Guibbory contends, “the Laudian program also was a culturally significant attempt to reassert the interrelation of body and spirit, of material and spiritual things, and the unity of the Christian community...at a moment in history when these beliefs and values were most seriously challenged and eroded” (41).

recorded in locally bound manuscript codices, present the participants with an opportunity to examine the consequences of their commitment to ascetic principles in their order of life.

While the scope of this introduction does not permit a full examination of the Ferrar family's extensive dramatic dialogues, I will focus on one key example that illustrates the group's interest in the construction of religious space and the epistemological implications of religious retreat. In the Little Academy's 1632 dialogue "On the Austere Life," instigated by reservations that Cheerfull—the conversational pseudonym of Hester Collett—held about their Christmas celebrations, the family members rely on a discourse of religious retreat as they consider temperance's role in the formation of religious knowledge (Williams 159-60). Their discussion of temperance relies upon a discourse of religious retreat in order to explain how the individual's ascetic preparation provides privileged access to religious knowledge.

Cheerfull's concerns about the rich food and celebration associated with the Christmas holiday stems from her understanding of temperance's role in the formation of religious knowledge. She observes, "without Temperance wee can neither come to the knowledge of Christ Jesus as Our Saviour, nor continue in grace as his servants & so no way able either to advance his glorie in the world" (Williams 181; 16)²⁶. Her account of temperance suggests that it functions as a precondition for religious knowledge as well as the expression of that knowledge in religious practice and the advancement of the visible church.

²⁶ All citations of the Little Academy dialogues refer to A.M. Williams' scholarly edition. When I cite from Williams' edition of the Little Gidding Story Books, I preserve the edition's spelling and orthography. Within each excerpt, I have repositioned Williams' references to the original manuscript pagination to the in-text citation following the page in the edition from which I have excerpted.

Hester Collett corroborates her claim by comparing temperance's effect of ascetic refinement with an architectural metaphor: "A iust weight layd vpon the summers [supporting beams] within poyseth the Building & makes it stronger; but that, which is ouerheaue, makes it fall & Ruine... The apprehension of Celestial Truth & Loue of Vertue sinks in the mind proportionable to the rise & swelling of Intemperance in the Body" (182; 17[r]-17v)²⁷. In the context of the Ferrar family's refurbishment of the church at Little Gidding, Cheerfull's comparison of temperance with the structural supports of a building articulates the logic underlying the family's efforts to establish an architectural religious retreat in the chapel and serves as a metaphor for the ongoing process of dedicating the self to religious ends. Her language of proportion is both an architectural principle and, in the England of Charles I and Archbishop Laud, a contentious account of religious space that seeks heightened decorum in proportion to the high dignity of the divine.

The family's efforts to demarcate their estate as a space of religious retreat through architectural remodeling persistently resist closure. This active process of dedicating their community to religious ends continues as long as the horizon of the fully dedicated religious space continues to recede. Upon hearing Cheerfull's suggestions for more complete observance of temperance, Mother (Mary Woodnoth Ferrar) responds with renewed resolution, "how then should I not gladly submitt to the vttermost of that, which Temperance shall enoiyn by way of Necessarie preparation for the Entertainment & increase of his Loue & Knowledge in my heart" (189; 21[r]). Mary Ferrar's efforts to dedicate Little Gidding as a space of religious retreat appear to be incomplete as she continues this process of preparation and refinement by resolving to embrace temperance

²⁷ The bracketed explanatory gloss is provided in Williams' edition.

anew. In the case of both the architectural metaphor and the discourse of the temperate self, the dedicatory act explicitly serves the ends of religious knowledge.

At Little Gidding, the members of the family pursue a wide range of dedicatory practices aimed at setting their community apart from the rest of the world. In addition to the family's lavish church decorations and literal efforts to mark the walls of the home with the name of Christ mentioned in the anonymous Parliamentarian complaint, the pages on which Nicholas Ferrar recorded these dialogues reflect this impulse. Maycock describes the locally bound manuscript volumes: "The five known volumes of the 'Story Books' are uniformly bound in black morocco—Spanish leather, as the Ferrars called it. Every page has red marginal rulings and is headed with the monogram IHS" (Maycock "Little Gidding" 72). The community's interest in decorative, dedicatory arts also extends to their lavish gospel harmonies composed by piecing together the printed biblical text²⁸. In the Little Academy dialogues, Mother's vow to refine her pursuit of temperance is not an isolated incident, but one of many such moments. As they discuss the abdication of Charles V, for example, one of the participants (A.M. Williams speculates that the unnamed speaker is Nicholas Ferrar) formally vows to follow a similar course of retirement if the group can prove that the former Holy Roman Emperor benefited from his rejection of the world's pursuits (59-60; 60-61).

These gestures each strive to establish the community at Little Gidding as a more complete space of religious retreat. Each attempt to retreat from the world more thoroughly articulates the community's implicit account of religious knowledge as predicated upon the community's distance from the spaces and practices of the rest of the

²⁸ The gospel harmonies have garnered a considerable body of scholarship. See Paul Dyck, "So rare a use," Joyce Ransome, "Monotessaron," Stanley Stewart, "Herbert and the 'Harmonies' of Little Gidding," and Adam Smyth, "Shreds of holiness."

material world. The Little Academy's discourse of religious retreat—encompassing both religious space and religious practice—links religious knowledge with this necessarily incomplete process of separation from the world. The ongoing, necessarily incomplete pursuit of this knowledge serves as the motivation for both the lavish decorative arts installed in the chapel and the group's need to enact their separation from the world in new religious vows and practices. Their pursuit of knowledge and account of religious space as the product of an ongoing process of separation also influence the Ferrar family's understanding of the social implications of religious retreat.

As Amy M. Charles observes, the group's pursuit of religious knowledge invited all members of the family to contribute to their project: "The discussions of the Little Academy provided opportunity for the women of the family, especially old Mrs. Ferrar, her daughter Susanna Collett, and several of the Collett daughters, to discuss various religious and ethical matters" (14)²⁹. Little Gidding's ambitious purposes required the family to seek newer and more rigorous ways to distinguish their religious estate from the world's concerns. The group's interest (and substantial investment) in the New World situates their religious retreat in an increasingly international context³⁰. Sometimes an unavoidable distraction impinging on their discussion and sometimes a source of hope for the expansion of the church, the Ferrars' involvement in the Virginia Company

²⁹ Kate Riley remarks upon the participation of the young women in the Little Academy dialogues: "The Little Academy is an unusual phenomenon: it is not typical to find oratorical activities in the schooling or leisure pursuits of young women outside of aristocratic or court circles in the early Stuart period, for the obvious reasons that women's public speech and their possession and demonstration of knowledge were not ideologically condoned" (200). Here, Riley recognizes that the unique stature of Little Gidding extends from the community's account of religious knowledge.

³⁰ For more on the Ferrar family's connections to other contemporaries through the Virginia Company, see Florence Sandler, 273.

demonstrates their awareness that the ongoing process of religious retreat has social implications beyond the boundaries of their local community (Williams 107; 134).

The logical extension of this never-ending process of retreating from the world is the endless growth of the space of religious retreat and the family's increasingly severe rejection of the concerns and practices of the outside world. At Little Gidding, establishing a space of religious retreat draws the community into this ongoing process of separation as they continue to seek religious knowledge. Parliamentary objections to the community's religious practices register the profound stakes modern readers frequently overlook—the act of separating a dedicated religious space from the rest of the world makes implicit claims about religious knowledge that ultimately encompass all people.

The conversations of the Little Academy did not resolve the seventeenth century's ongoing debate over religious retreat and the implications of religious space³¹. Writers throughout the century continued to wrestle with the same concerns that the Little Gidding community investigated in their ongoing attempts to establish their community's spaces and practices as a space of religious retreat. This dissertation examines a group of seventeenth-century writers whose representations of religious space offer competing and complementary solutions to a group of shared questions about space's role in religious knowledge, the significance of the present world, and the sources of religious community. I explore this ongoing conversation in two distinct parts. The first part of my study focuses on two writers whose representations of religious space contend with new sensory and experiential bases of religious belief and knowledge.

³¹ In fact, as Joyce Ransome argues, the memory of Little Gidding participated in later religious conflicts as nonjurors modeled their voluntary societies after that of the Ferrars (64-5).

My second chapter examines how Milton's *Paradise Regained* dramatizes two radically different accounts of religious space. Throughout his poem on religious vocation, Milton opposes Satan's approach to religious space, which relies upon visual evidence, and the Son's approach, which relies on internal motions of the divine spirit that operate independently from any visual evidence or sign. This chapter contextualizes the reader's encounter with these diametrically opposed descriptions of religious retreat and religious knowledge with Milton's polemical toleration tracts. I argue that the Son's understanding of the private, dedicated space of religious retreat within the self belies his appearance in the trappings of the traditional Christian ascetic. Milton's challenge to the authority of the senses is based upon his account of an internal mode of religious authority that identifies religious space based upon the criterion of the individual's subjective experience rather than sensory evidence. By describing faith as the domain of an inward self and by defining the visible church as a voluntary community, Milton seeks to carve out a space for religious practice distinct from the domain of the political.

I then consider how Margaret Cavendish's representation of religious retreat in her 1668 closet drama, *The Convent of Pleasure*, articulates her understanding of the relationship between dedicated religious spaces in the present world and the formation of religious knowledge. In this third chapter, I argue that Cavendish's play examines how religious spaces and gender relate to the construction of specifically religious knowledge. Cavendish's play rejects conventional representations of religious retreat as ascetic spaces because Cavendish maintains a strict division between the present, material world and the domain of the spirit. Her convent, in contrast with traditional ascetic opposition to the body as an inert—or unwilling—companion to the self, celebrates the example of

nature as the only authoritative source of religious knowledge. The play ultimately inverts emerging norms of gendered privacy by replacing an architectural space—Lady Happy’s convent for women’s learning—with an analogous but nonetheless material space in her readers’ minds.

The second part of my project focuses on writers whose representations of religious retreat contend more directly with the social consequences of the period’s contested foundations of religious knowledge. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate how John Bunyan’s sequel to his more familiar *Pilgrim’s Progress* articulates his ongoing struggle to reconcile the pivotal role of individual experience with the centralized authority of the visible church and its leadership. In this extended allegory, Bunyan uses the presence of laborious activity to identify the spaces of rest and retreat that his pilgrims encounter on their journey towards salvation. *The Pilgrim’s Progress, Part II* relies on two contradictory modes of authority for the recognition and interpretation of these religious spaces. The unresolved tension between individual and communal modes of identifying religious spaces in Bunyan’s narrative dramatizes the complexity of Bunyan’s unresolved struggle to articulate the role of religious space in the construction of individual and communal knowledge.

My fifth chapter focuses on Mary Astell’s attempt to establish an innovative school to enrich the minds of young English ladies. Her *Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II* outline her plan to build a material space of learning to facilitate the explicitly immaterial activity of the mind and articulate her belief that the mind can only obtain knowledge of the material world through God’s constant mediation. I argue that Astell’s educational program relies upon a process of ascetic cosmopolitanism that

confronts the willing subject with varied experiences that alert the mind to its own immateriality. The division between her proposed space of religious retreat for young ladies and the rest of the material world is a significant part of Astell's educational process, which unseats the distortions of settled custom in order to establish a shared, rational approach to religious knowledge. Astell's religious retreat separates humane, philosophical truths from the religious truths that she contends are universally persuasive in situations of ideal intellectual freedom. The appropriative reconfigurations of her later readers, however, reveal the limitations of Astell's ideal of a universal church united by rational religious knowledge.

Finally, I explore how representations of religious retreat extend beyond England's borders in William Penn's early colonial advertisements. In Chapter 6, I examine how a bifurcated discourse of religious and political space undergirds Penn's description of Pennsylvania as both a space of religious community and a tolerant political state. While earlier accounts of religious space previously struggled to reconcile competing individual and communal ways of knowing, Penn argues for religious toleration in his new colony by distinguishing the solitary purposes of religious spaces from the public spaces of political action and ideas. In this way, William Penn's advertisements offer insight into the changing boundaries around the category of the religious at the beginning of the long eighteenth century.

Overall, my project illustrates how a seventeenth-century discourse of religious retreat allowed English writers to reevaluate the sources of religious knowledge and reconsider the foundations of religious community. Although the limits of this project do not allow an exhaustive description of seventeenth-century representations of religious

space in England, which would include radical experiments with religious space during the English Civil War, it describes the central questions and concerns about space's significance and use that shaped the period's diverse accounts of religious retreat. These inventive and frequently innovative texts allow modern readers to trace the period's changing cultural attitudes towards the category of the religious and the spaces associated with religious practice. This study suggests that literary representations of religious space play a previously underappreciated role in the history of private and domestic spaces. As a whole, this project demonstrates how accounts of religious knowledge contribute to significant changes in early modern accounts of religion's claims and boundaries.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGIOUS RETREAT AND THE “INWARD MAN” IN JOHN MILTON’S *PARADISE REGAINED AND A TREATISE OF CIVIL POWER*

In Nicholas Ferrar’s manuscript account of his family’s efforts to establish a space of religious retreat at Little Gidding in the early 1630s, the Ferrar and Collett family members found that the task of differentiating a specifically religious space was never quite complete. The Ferrar family’s engagement with the dominant religious culture of late Stuart England demonstrates how accounts of religious space participate in debates about knowledge, the material world, and the ends of communal life at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and John Milton investigates these same ideas in the context of his political defeat in the wake of the Restoration.

Although Milton approaches the idea of religious retreat from a radically different political and religious vantage point, his late work shares the Ferrar family’s concern with religious retreat as a means of articulating the foundations of authoritative religious knowledge. John Milton’s *Paradise Regained* (1671) dramatizes the inadequacy of traditional Christian ascetic practices and their associated spaces as sources of religious knowledge in order to articulate Milton’s conviction that inward motivations determine the publicity or privacy of an action rather than the physical space in which that action occurs. Ultimately, Milton’s poem articulates an internal source of authority in which the significance of religious space originates within the individual subject. The poem’s competing representations of religious retreat contribute to the seventeenth century’s ongoing process of interrogating the relationship between religious space and religious knowledge.

In *Paradise Regained*, Milton dramatizes an interpretive conflict over the construction and interpretation of dedicated religious spaces. Milton's brief epic links the Son's search for vocation with the religious knowledge available within a space of religious retreat. At issue in the poem's debate between Satan and the Son is the meaning and function of religious retreat as a source of authoritative religious knowledge. When Satan observes the Son's journey into the desert, he sees what he believes to be the determining spatial privacy of religious space that precludes social concerns and, as a result, the shared ends of political life. In contrast, the Son's responses articulate an individual model of religious retreat that relies on inwardly authenticated criteria to determine the validity of religious knowledge. The Son does not rely upon the interpretive tools of the senses in search of the divinely ordained moment to shift from a private role to a public role. Instead, the private, individually authenticated conviction of the divine prompting motivates the individual's right action¹. As a result, Milton's Son subordinates the evidence of the senses to his inward motivations and purposes. Milton's late epic uses the discourse of religious retreat to expose what he considers to be a false dichotomy between private solitude and public action. The difference between publicity and privacy in *Paradise Regained* relies upon Milton's account of religious space as the site of the individual's inward conviction.

Because literary representations of religious spaces serve as complex vehicles for critical assumptions about the evidence of the senses and its implications for religious knowledge, this chapter considers how Milton's dramatic poem presents two competing accounts of religious retreat through the opposition of Satan and the Son. These complex

¹ Barbara K. Lewalski observes that the Son and Satan's approach historical knowledge in contrasting ways, and she argues that Satan approaches the world through a cyclical model of history punctuated by moments of opportunity ("Time and History" 66-67).

cultural accounts of space are not simply competing measurements or descriptions embedded within a shared system of Cartesian extent². Instead, these accounts of space articulate a relationship between the present, visible world and the spiritual reality beyond the present world's knowledge and perception. A representation of space therefore describes complex network of relations, a means of interpreting the world, and the social implications of that epistemology. As Andrew Hiscock suggests in his study of spaces in early modern drama, "space is not a neutral, fixed, passive container, but socially constructed and constantly in process" (*Uses of This World* 14). The ambiguities in the text's representations of religious retreat reveal Milton's ongoing engagement with the task of representing inward space and concern with the senses' role in interpretation.

By examining how the construction and interpretation of dedicated religious spaces relate to religious knowledge in Milton's work, this chapter furthers our critical understanding of the theological and philosophical foundations of divisions between the public and private in early modern England. In *Paradise Regained*, Satan and the Son's debate about religious space and knowledge provide the foundation for their broader disagreement about the boundaries of religion's claims in both public and private contexts. As a result, Milton's text interrogates the boundaries between the public concerns of the godly state and the private claims of the household. Satan seeks to reify the differences between public and private spaces by arguing that private actions necessarily arise from the Son's religious retreat, while the Son wholly reconfigures

² Descartes' notion of space as mere extent relies on his distinction between the active mind or spirit and the inert matter of the abstract universe. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that this approach to space seeks to impose a violent uniformity upon human experience and the natural world (287). Nevertheless, Descartes interrogates the interaction between the mind and the material world more fully than many modern critics appreciate—most clearly through his attempts to posit the pineal gland as an interface between inert matter and active mind. See Stephen Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, 26-7.

public and private action based on internal, subjective criteria. Although the Son's attitude towards space most closely resembles Milton's own tolerationist arguments, the poem's tensions and ambiguous conclusion demonstrate the text's appropriative possibilities that contribute to an emerging cultural association between specifically religious space and the gendered privacy of the household.

In the context of England's significant political and philosophical upheavals following the Restoration of Charles II, Milton's text participates in an ongoing conversation about the role of religious space in the production of religious knowledge and in establishing the bases of communal life³. Milton published *Paradise Regained* in tandem with *Samson Agonistes* after the restoration of the monarchy and national church that he had opposed during his service to the English republic. In her critical biography of Milton, Barbara K. Lewalski places the pair of poems in the context of the "conditions of severe trial and oppression" and suggests that they constitute a political response to these conditions (492)⁴. While the themes and ideas in these poems resonate with Milton's political climate, critics have debated the degree to which Milton's texts constitute or endorse political action in the present world. In her discussion of *Samson's* likely composition date, Lewalski notes that the complementary texts were published in the aftermath of the "severe repressions of the Clarendon Code" that legislated conformity

³ Andrew Hiscock's *The Uses of This World* examines the social function of spatial discourse and provides an excellent summary of current critical approaches to space in early modern drama (1-2). Henri Lefebvre in particular connects changing attitudes towards an increasingly abstract, disembodied space with the implicit purposes of modern capitalism but also recognizes the consequences of spatial abstraction for theological ways of knowing (*Production of Space* 289).

⁴ Although *Samson Agonistes* shares Milton's interest in interpretation and the interpretive significance of this world, this present study focuses on the competing approaches to spaces within *Regained*. Extending this approach to negatively coded spaces of exile or those spaces that belong to the enemy might further explain Milton's internally authenticated approach to the world's spaces. For the related problem of interpretation within *Samson*, see Barbara K. Lewalski, "Milton's *Samson*," 248-9 and Angela Balla, "Wars of Evidence," 77.

with the state church and other contemporary measures limiting the activity of dissenters and dissenting groups (492).

By reading Milton's dramatic retelling of the Son's temptation on the desert in light of his earlier argument for religious toleration in his 1659 *Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*, this chapter frames Milton's literary account of religious space as an intervention in a seventeenth-century debate about the location of religious belief and practice. As David R. Schmitt explains, "[i]n the polemical pamphlets surrounding debates about indulgence and toleration in the 1660s and early 1670s, what constituted true freedom in religious interiority and how its private practices related to the public religious community were at the center of debate" (107). As in the early Stuart period, tensions between conformist and nonconformist writers continued to revolve around spaces of religious worship and the true location of religious belief and practice. Both Milton's tolerationist pamphlet and his *Paradise Regained* share a skeptical attitude towards any permanent and sure divisions between the religious practices that inhere in ostensibly private spaces and political action's visibility in public arenas.

In Milton's *Treatise of Civil Power*, a late republican pamphlet directed to Parliament under the precarious regime of Richard Cromwell after the death of Oliver Cromwell, Milton exhorts Parliament to establish strict boundaries between the domains of ecclesiastical and civil power. Milton's distinction between the inwardly persuasive power of the mind and the wholly separate domain of force and the body is the basis for his advocacy for a limited form of religious toleration and will later serve as the basis for the Son's rejection of the materiality of dedicated religious space in *Regained*. In the text's introduction, Milton characterizes himself as a concerned orator who invites the

newly convened parliament to take advantage of the opportune moment to secure and protect Christian liberty for the present and the future.

Here, Milton contends that the parliament can only achieve this goal with an understanding of important limits on the reach of civil power. By describing faith as the domain of an inward self and by defining the visible church as a strictly voluntary community, Milton seeks to carve out a space for religious practice outside of the domain of the state⁵. In his account of religion's boundaries, Milton argues that the state's use of force pollutes and damages religion itself and improperly blurs the boundaries between the political and the religious. As Milton challenges the propriety and usefulness of force in religious matters, he begins to establish the individual subject's conscience as the private, internal criterion that invests the external world with meaning.

Milton informs his imagined parliamentary audience that his purpose is to recommend the domain of the "civil only to your proper care, ecclesiastical to them only from whom it takes both that name and nature" (A2v-A3)⁶. From the beginning, Milton asserts that the division between the domain of the state and the community of the church is deeply connected to the issue of force. He writes, "[t]wo things there be which have bin ever found working much mischief to the church of God, and the advancement of truth; force on the one side restraining, and hire on the other side corrupting the teachers thereof" (1). His polemic rejection of force as a means of religious discipline is based on his definition of religious belief and practice as that which is "depending on God only" so

⁵ Achsah Guibbory rightly observes that details remain slim on the exact nature of this voluntary community because of its ultimately internal criteria for association. Guibbory suggests that Milton seems to have difficulty "imagining a positive community" in his later works (*Ceremony and Community* 226).

⁶ In keeping with my editorial practice throughout this project, I will silently update the orthography in primary sources for clarity but will otherwise maintain the spelling of the original text.

that neither is “in the power of man either to perform himself or to enable others” (80). This form of religion is rigorously individualistic, and Milton bases this cultural configuration on a discourse of metaphorical spatial inwardness.

Throughout the *Treatise of Civil Power*, Milton maintains that the individual is the only proper judge of the conscience’s convictions and that the intervention of others violates the “granted rule of everie mans conscience to himself” (34). Particularly in matters of the individual’s conscience, Milton seeks to make the individual’s sincere study of scripture the only valid justification for that same individual’s belief⁷. While the state possesses a form of power that Milton describes as an “outward force,” he strictly divides this external category from the category of “the inward man and his actions” (5, 37). He contends that “Christ hath a government of his own, sufficient of it self to all his ends and purposes...but much different from that of the civil magistrate; and the difference in this verie thing principally consists, that it governs not by outward force” (37). The issue of force, which Milton describes as the primary difference between ecclesiastical and civil power, develops out of Milton’s understanding of the distinct, dedicated religious space of the Christian church. This parallel church government remains wholly divided from the concerns and domain of the state, which remains bound to the material world of the senses and physical compulsion.

⁷ Milton’s argument in *Areopagitica* for a limited form of free printing anticipates his argument that, in the present dispensation, none “can be the infallible judges or determiners in matters of religion to any other mens consciences but th[e]ir own” (*Civil Power* 6). For a polemical account of *Areopagitica*’s influence on modern liberalism, see Nigel Smith’s rejection of Stanley Fish’s Milton as “the apostle of human limitation and the poet of a bigoted faith” and his corresponding emphasis on Milton’s interest in free will and thought (*Is Milton Better* 16). For another representative account of the proto-liberal Milton, see Theo Hobson, *Milton’s Vision*, 164. See also Feisal G. Mohamed’s critique of this position in “Liberty before and after Liberalism,” 954-6.

This Christian government depends on two critical assumptions about religion's place in the world and the consequences of religious knowledge. The first is that the church is founded upon "the inward part of man," which Milton describes as that person's "understanding and his will, and...his actions thence proceeding" as they are shaped by the influence of grace (37, 38). The second is that God's "spiritual kingdom [is] able without worldly force to subdue all the powers and kingdoms of this world, which are upheld by outward force only" (37-8). Both assumptions distinguish between the inward and outward characteristics: the outward commands by force and the inward operates by spiritual means upon the outward. Milton demonstrates this in his summary of all "evangelic religion" as "faith and charitie; or beleef and practice" (38). Both virtues—faith and belief—have an inward source that manifests itself through visible performances of charity and practice. In Milton's account of the church, the invisible and internal remain ontologically prior to the visible and the external.

Milton emphasizes the idea that internal religious knowledge and belief serve as the preexisting sources of religion's visible effects: "both our beleef and practise...flow from faculties of the inward man, free and unconstrainable of themselves by nature" (39-40). In his articulation of the relationship between the inward self and the external world, Milton argues that these external manifestations are ultimately external representations of the "inward man" and government of Christ. As Milton extends this logic, he asserts that an action's internal context—the subject's reliance on either the regenerate will or external influences—determines whether that action constitutes a part of Christ's spiritual government or falls under the domain of civil power.

In Milton's account of religion's boundaries, the exercise of the individual's conscience is the domain of religious faith, and the conscience is answerable only to "the will of God & his Holy Spirit within us, which we ought to follow much rather than any law of man" (4). While scripture serves as the shared language and common ground whereby redeemed believers can communicate and persuade one another, each individual must interpret the meaning of that scripture through his or her direct communion with the divine. Each believer must pursue truth individually, and this pursuit relies upon internal criteria rather than the ideal of a social consensus within the present world⁸. Milton argues, "the scripture only can be the final judge or rule in matters of religion, and that only in the conscience of every Christian to himself" (7-8). In Milton's understanding of the conscience and its internal persuasion, no social institution would be justified in using force to pressure individuals into a shared form of religious practice. The shared, social practice of a religious community is only permissible when the internal belief and conviction of each of the group's individuals is prior to their shared expression of religious belief. Milton thus articulates an ecclesiology of voluntary community in which each member aligns for reasons that must originate privately and internally.

Since Milton maintains that the operation of the "inward man" includes all of the actions extending from that belief, even these visible, social actions fall within the scope of the individual insofar as these actions originate from within rather than in response to external social duties or obligations. Under this assumption, the visible church congregates in keeping with Milton's religious principles when each person's membership is based on the workings of the individual conscience. He rejects the idea

⁸ David R. Schmitt describes Milton's ideal of religious toleration as a "public sphere" in which "[w]hat unifies individuals is not an external force but an internal liberty, not religious belief but true religious practice: the responsible exercise of Christian conscience" (112).

that the institution can have any shaping force over the individual's inward self. Milton summarizes his rejection of any state policy of religious conformity by placing it in opposition to religion's necessary inwardness: "to compel outward profession, which they will say perhaps ought to be compelled though inward religion cannot, is to compel hypocrisy not to advance religion" (40). In addition to its serving as an implicit critique of the increasingly likely possibility of Charles II's return from continental exile, Milton's opposition to Catholicism's formal hierarchy and visible signs of authority extends from his account of religious belief as an internal, individually authenticated motivation for all visible religious practice. He characterizes any form of religious compulsion as a necessarily hollow action imposed upon the outward part of the subject that violates religion's necessarily inward character. As a result, Milton suggests that the same form of religious practice could either violate religion's inherent privacy or embody its ideals depending on whether the source of the action is the inward self or an outward compulsion⁹.

Milton's assertion that the only true forms of religion necessarily originate within the subject allows him to argue that the state and its magistrate are ultimately powerless to interfere with religious matters. While he argues that parliament ought to preserve or encourage Christian liberty, the tract defines religion in such a way that it is immune to any form of compulsion by definition. While a subject's individual practices and beliefs might happen to coincide with the religion of other people, these beliefs originate within instead of being sustained from without. Imposing any kind of external structure onto

⁹ Ken Simpson describes the church of Milton as a voluntary community united in its common but individuated task of interpretation: "The authority of the church rests with each member who voluntarily participates in the interpretation and performance of Scripture and, to a lesser extent, the reading of works compatible with 'the Spirit of Christ'" (141).

religion makes it into a form of public, social conformity rather than religion as Milton defines it. In her study of Milton's theological foundations of toleration, Sharon Achinstein aptly summarizes, "[f]reedom of thought in Milton is, then, quite simply, not a secular principle" (236). In *A Treatise of Civil Power*, Milton boldly argues that the state *cannot* interfere with religion—even if it wished to do so¹⁰. Throughout his polemic, Milton's argument develops out of his description of the boundaries between religion and the concerns of state. This division directly influences Milton's representations of religious retreat in *Paradise Regained* and their relationship to the subject's inward self.

Milton's emphasis on the fact that the inward man includes the actions that proceed from the internal faculties of the will and understanding begin to explain the fundamental difference between the positions of the Son and Satan in *Paradise Regained*. Just as the external social and political force of the state cannot influence the private domain of religion, a dedicated religious space cannot influence the internal self without compromising its freedom. Milton rejects the importance of the traditional Christian calendar, holidays, and seasons and argues that specific places are likewise unnecessary parts of Christian belief. He writes in *A Treatise of Civil Power* that Christian liberty "sets us free not only from the bondage of those ceremonies, but also from the forcible imposition of those circumstances, place and time in the worship of God" (56). Satan's arguments throughout *Paradise Regained* each depend on the interpretive authority of space over the individual's inward self. In this sense, both the disagreement between Satan and the Son and the critical distinction between the domain of civil and

¹⁰ Milton observes in the context of religious debates based upon what Latitudinarians describe as indifferent matters: "in those matters [the magistrate] neither can command nor use constraint" (12).

ecclesiastical power are based on rival accounts of the relationship between religious belief and space.

Individual interpretation is a central concern in *Paradise Regained*. After all, the poem's characters frequently revisit and reinterpret key interactions between the divine order of reality and the present world of human experience¹¹. Those that find themselves in the present world—Satan and the Son—seek to explain the incarnation and the significance of the divine voice at the Son's baptism. Victoria Silver observes that the poem's competing images of the divine “transform the way in which things can and should mean to us, and how we respond to them in turn” (27). Silver rightly suggests that interpretation's significance in Milton's poem relates primarily to the ways in which people assign meaning to objects and spaces within the present world. As it addresses the sources of authoritative religious knowledge, Milton's poem interrogates the present world's sources of meaning.

This interrogation questions the significance of political action and its relationship to the individual's religious knowledge. Some critics have described Milton's late texts as favoring an internal and restrained adaptation of political action in contrast with Milton's more overtly politically engaged texts of his youth and with his direct involvement in the republican government during the Interregnum. James M. Pearce, for example, suggests that the ultimate goal of this visionary “drama of contemplation” is to produce a vision of

¹¹ While Milton's widely accepted Arianism might not emphasize the idea of the Christ renouncing divinity in the incarnation (*kenosis*), C. S. Lewis connects Milton's *ex deo* theology of creation with a general divine renunciation: “to make *room* for anything to exist which is not simply Himself—[God] must contract, or retire, His infinite essence” (*Preface* 87). For this reason, the existence of spaces in the present world that do not share the divine essence is as much an instance of divine renunciation as the incarnation.

“the highest image of human possibility” (295)¹². More recently, critics such as David Loewenstein have begun to challenge simple divisions between Milton’s midcentury republican political activity and his later works¹³. In *Paradise Regained*, Milton dramatizes the broader social implications of religious space and the sources of religious knowledge that invest space with religious significance. In this way, the theologically informed view of the world in Milton’s text challenges the foundational assumptions on which political action depends. The text’s final ambiguity suggests that Milton’s account of religious boundaries in *Paradise Regained* is an improvisatory intervention in an ongoing conversation about religion’s boundaries in early modern England.

The poem begins by placing the Son’s trial in the desert in the context of the broadest Christian history of the fall and ultimate redemption of humanity¹⁴. The narrator’s description of the foreordained victory of the Son as “Eden raised in the waste wilderness” immediately announces the interpretive issues that the reader, the Son, and Satan all face (1.7). By framing the poem in this way, Milton’s narrator invites the reader to compare the wilderness and the Son’s restraint with Eden’s complex resonances as an inaccessible space and an inaccessible prelapsarian past. The poem’s specific emphasis on the location of the Son’s temptation and ultimate victory signals its concern with

¹² Pearce’s assertion echoes the assessment of Louis L. Martz, who contends that Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* culminate in a restoration of the inner part of humanity without addressing the contemporary political context and implications of this restoration (*Paradise Within* 200).

¹³ David Loewenstein’s work on Milton’s prose in particular emphasizes the continuity of Milton’s interest in political activity and action. See David Loewenstein, “Milton’s Double-Edged Volume,” 237.

¹⁴ Laura Lunger Knoppers insightfully suggests that Milton’s seemingly radical emphasis on the temptation in the desert as a central salvific act at the expense of the crucifixion may function as a “response and challenge to the Stuart deployment of Christian martyrology” (11). In addition to this more local political context, I argue that Milton’s focus on the temptation and other sites of contact between the divine and present worlds—particularly the Son’s baptism—demonstrates his foundational concern with interpretation and sources of authoritative religious knowledge.

religious space and its implications for the life of Christian religious community. The poem also compares the Son's temptation and trial with Job's search for authoritative religious knowledge in the Hebrew Bible¹⁵. As in *Regained*, Job and his counselors seek to interpret the significance of events in the present world in relation to the world of spiritual realities and divine will. As a whole, *Paradise Regained* stages an interpretive battle over the source of meaning for the Son's religious retreat and—by extension—the relationship between religious knowledge and religious spaces.

When the Son's inner promptings bring him into the desert to be tempted by Satan, Milton's narrator describes the desert through a more traditional discourse of asceticism and religious retreat. This presents a critical interpretive issue within the poem. The narrator's descriptions invite readers to situate this desert space in the context of religious retreat, but the debate between Satan and the Son ultimately fixates upon the relationship between the space of religious retreat and the subject within that space. Satan repeatedly argues that space confers an advantage or disadvantage over the subject within that space, and his temptations implicitly contend that a private or public space determines the influence and power of human action in the world. In contrast, the Son finds that even dedicated religious spaces do not shape or change the private, internal origins of his actions.

Because of my interest in Milton's contribution to early modern categories of publicity and privacy in *Regained*, I rely on the terminology of publicity and privacy in a limited sense to describe the distinction between responsibilities associated with the shared ends and duties of communal life and those that remain separate from these shared

¹⁵ Barbara Keifer Lewalski considers the influence of biblical models in shaping Milton's seemingly unprecedented innovation in generic mode in her foundational study, *Milton's Brief Epic*, especially 3-37.

concerns and a stance of negation in opposition to these public concerns. In doing so, I recognize that merely categorizing a particular space as unequivocally public or private masks the complex social pressures that contribute to these historically contingent categories. In his anthropological account of privacy, Barrington Moore, Jr. explains the category of the public as a socially cooperative realm whereas privacy structures escapes from the “disagreeable pressures or obligations” of public duty and responsibility (49). Although he uses the nuclear family or household as his primary example of privacy’s opposition to the public, Moore acknowledges that these formations are not universal and reflect complex social changes.

Milton’s dramatization of a debate about the influence of religious space on the publicity and privacy of a particular action contributes to the complexity of these social constructions. Throughout much of the debate between Satan and the Son, Milton’s text relies on the classical opposition between the shared concerns of the public and more limited reach of the household¹⁶. Although Milton’s arguments for toleration might suggest that his poem would fully reject the ability of space to shape the subject, the household’s gendered privacy in *Paradise Regained* ultimately complicates or undermines the poem’s subordination of religious space to the subject’s inward self¹⁷.

When the narrator introduces the Son’s solitary journey into the desert, Milton situates this action in the context of Christian monasticism. As in Milton’s earlier epic of

¹⁶ David Norbrook argues that the “classical republics” serve as a “consistent point of reference” in Milton’s account of religious and political governance (109). These models provide Milton with an account of publicity and privacy that oppose the shared concerns of the state with the more limited concerns of the household (115).

¹⁷ By emphasizing the text’s ongoing interpretive tensions, my study differs from that of Stanley Fish’s more optimistic reading of the poem as an argument for the kind of patient obedience that the Son consistently enacts throughout the poem (“Things and Actions” 183). While Fish characterizes the poem as demonstrating the need to recognize internal rather than external action, *Regained* allows the reader to either embrace internal criteria or submit to the external power of space over the subject.

humanity's fall, the invocation addresses the Christian Holy Spirit as the muse: "Thou Spirit who led'st this glorious eremite / Into the desert, his victorious field / Against the spiritual foe, and brought'st him thence / By proof the undoubted Son of God" (1.8-11). This invocation directly links the Son with the traditional Christian asceticism practiced since the early desert fathers, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes Milton's use of the word "eremite" as a transferred sense of "[o]ne who has retired into solitude from religious motives; a recluse, hermit" ("eremite")¹⁸. The Son's retreat differs from that of his ascetic forbears, however, because of his nuanced attitude towards the world that reveals the ultimately inadequate distinction between the space of the retreat and the space of the world. The religious purpose that motivates the Son's desert retreat functions as the true source of the distinction between the world and the religious retreat away from the world's corrupting qualities.

One might be forgiven, however, for thinking that Milton's narrator reinforces the reader's sense of the Son's religious retreat as a simple echo of ascetic practice. After all, Milton begins the poem by characterizing the Son as "glorious eremite" (*Regained* 1.8). The poem's narrator frequently invokes the framework of traditional monastic retreat and its assumptions about religious spaces as necessarily opposed to the concerns of the world. To interpret the Son exclusively through the context of religious hermits such as St. Anthony and the desert fathers of Christian antiquity, however, is to overlook the poem's ambiguous representation of the Son's hermitage. Satan and the Son wrangle over the role of religious retreat in the categorization of human action into categories of

¹⁸ The *OED* further notes that use of the term "eremite" rather than "hermit," a word that developed an initial "h" from Old French and Middle English, is "differentiated" from "the ordinary and popular word" for poetic effect or "with special reference to its primitive use in Greek," in which the word etymologically derives from the words for "desert" and "uninhabited" ("eremite"). In the context of Milton's poem, the term is particularly evocative of the Son's desert solitude.

publicity and privacy. The paradoxical idea of the “glorious” hermit belies any easy characterization of religious privacy as the rejection of the social, active life in favor of a contemplative and spiritual existence in religious obscurity.

The true nature of hermitage for the Son originates within the subject and extends beyond the confines of a particular dedicated religious space. The interpretive difference that separates the Son’s obedient vision from Satan’s blinded rebellion lies in the fact that the Son relies on internal criteria to define an act or place as private rather than the visibility or political importance of a space and its associated sphere of activity. Just as Milton contends in his plan for religious toleration in England, the Son identifies all religious actions and practices with the subject’s private, individual conviction. Nevertheless, Milton’s poem continues to rely on the evidence of the senses in the narrator’s descriptions of the Son’s actions and appearance. Satan’s argument that public spaces generate public actions and private spaces generate private actions relies directly upon this narrative evidence. By comparing the poem’s diametrically opposed account of religious space and its role in the production of authoritative religious knowledge, I explain how Milton articulates religion’s role in the construction of publicity and privacy and contributes to the reconfiguration of these categories in early modern England.

Milton’s narrator asks his divine muse to “bear through highth or depth of nature’s bounds / With prosperous wing full summed to tell of deeds / Above heroic, though in secret done, / And unrecorded left through many an age, / Worthy t’ have not remained so long unsung” (1.13-17). By modifying the idea of heroism with the secrecy of the Son’s obedient resistance in the desert, the narrator either implies that secrecy is opposed to heroic action or anticipates that his readers may understand heroism and

secrecy as opposed terms. This heroic action “though in secret” is emblematic of Milton’s discourse of religious space in *Paradise Regained* that implicitly argues for the Son’s attitude towards space while it continues to rely upon the evidence of visual description on which Satan’s interpretive stance is based. The narrator’s visual description frames the Son’s appearance in the context of religious asceticism and the solitary religious spaces associated with Christian monastic traditions. The poem’s conflict emerges from the tension between Milton’s reliance on the evidence of the sense for the poem’s narrative and description and the ultimately internal, metaphoric space that supersedes this evidence. Satan’s belief in the space’s power to shape the publicity or privacy of the subject’s action relies upon this sensory evidence.

When Satan reacts to the Father’s display of approval on the occasion of the Son’s baptism, his actions reflect his account of space’s power to categorize the action of the individual subject. After pausing to wonder about the implications of this pronouncement, Satan “then with envy fraught and rage / Flies to his place, nor rests, but in mid-air / To council summons all his mighty peers” (1.38-40). In response to the apparent though yet indeterminate threat of the Son’s exaltation, Satan seeks “his place” in “mid-air” as if he were a military commander locating a defensible position or a safe place from which to plan an attack. As Stanley Fish has noted most famously in *Surprised by Sin*, this kind of maneuvering is ultimately superfluous in the face of omnipotence and the Father’s complete foreknowledge¹⁹. Satan’s response implicitly acknowledges the dominion of space over the subject. Satan’s temptations share the foundational assumption that space can effectually shape the range of possibilities

¹⁹ Fish observes about the reader’s difficulty interpreting Abdiel’s heroism in *Paradise Lost*: “True virtue is a state of mind...and true heroism is a psychic (wilful) action—the decision, continually made...to maintain that loyalty” (*Surprised by Sin* 184).

available to the subject and that the location of actions in space is the key determinant that separates public political activity and invisible private action.

The first guise in which Satan appears reflects this attitude towards space in his framing of the Son's religious retreat as a traditionally ascetic practice. He arrives in the appearance of "an aged man in rural weeds, / Following, as seemed, the quest of some stray ewe, / Or withered sticks to gather; which might serve / Against a winter's day when winds blow keen" (1.314-317). Satan's appearance mirrors his reading of the Son's seemingly ascetic purpose for entering the desert space. By emphasizing the shepherd's strenuous work and living conditions, Satan emphasizes the difficulty he associates with the Son's desert retreat. Satan presents the Son with the archetype of the ascetic carving out a subsistence living in a rural place far from the public eye and from the activity of human social life.

This emphasis is characteristic of Satan's underlying argument that spaces with cultural links to privacy limit the experience and activities of the internal self. For this reason, Satan presents his first temptation as an escape from the limitations of space. Without a miracle, Satan sees the space of religious retreat as a place characterized by forced, ongoing activity: "What other way I see not, for we here / Live on tough roots and stubs, to thirst inured / More than the camel, and to drink go far, / Men to much misery and hardship born" (1.338-341). Satan first insinuates that the shepherd's life is an enforced pursuit of life's necessities, and then reminds the Son that the desert's nomadic residents must travel considerable distances for water. His emphasis on the enforced actions that the desert space requires of its inhabitants—all of which require movement through space—demonstrates his belief in the shaping force of space on the subject.

Satan's temptation assumes a strong and impermeable division between the world of ordinary life in which bread would be available and the enforced subsistence gathering in this space outside of that world's activities. Each space enforces its own way of living. This perspective cannot imagine a public purpose for a private retreat because it assumes that the values of publicity and privacy inhere in the spaces themselves.

On Satan's second appearance, Milton again emphasizes Satan's continuing belief in the power of space to dictate the actions available to the subject. The narrator reminds readers that Satan returns "to the middle region of thick air, / Where all his potentates in council sat" (2.117-118). By returning to this ambiguous space situated between heaven and the earth, Satan attempts to seclude his band of rebels from the obligations and punishments they hope to avoid. In his speech to the other fallen angels, Satan frames the Son's appearance as a threat to their position in their space of strategic retreat. So that his fallen angels may continue to "hold our place and these mild seats / Without new trouble," Satan emphasizes the importance of opposing the Son who "no less / Threatens than our expulsion down to Hell" (2.125-126, 127-128). Having forgotten—or rejected—the idea that "[t]he mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n," Satan and his compatriots seek to protect their secluded position in order to preserve their freedom to act as they please within the divinely-created world (*Paradise Lost* 1.254-5)²⁰. Satan's admonition continues to emphasize the importance of space as a force capable of shaping and constraining the subject's will. The threat that Satan perceives is not a greater form of divine constraint on the fallen angels—the image

²⁰ The difference between Satan's account of space in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* may be exaggerated, however, given Satan's unreliability as an assessor of his postlapsarian state.

Dante imagines at the center of his *Inferno*—but a capitulation to the power that space can exert over them.

When Satan offers the Son a lavish feast in Book 2 of *Paradise Regained*, the implicit value of the table's exotic plenitude derives from its preternatural collapse of spatial boundaries. Milton associates this feast with royal and aristocratic values because of their association with international travel and trade and not simply because of his well known political opposition to the Royalist cause. On the table, Satan presents "all fish from sea or shore...of shell or fin, / And exquisitest name, for which was drained / Pontus and Lucrine bay, and Afric coast" (2.344, 345-347). Satan emphasizes the distance represented by the wide range of fish on the table, which come from "the Black Sea," Italy, and the Nile (Kerrigan, Rumrich and Fallon 659n347). Milton's choice of the word "exquisitest," a term that likely develops out of Milton's familiarity with the Latin *exquirere*, emphasizes the etymological roots of the word as an indicator of that which is sought out ("exquisite"). As the *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates, the sense of the word specifically related to food that is "[c]arefully chosen; choice, dainty, delicious" originates in its original Latin sense as that which has been searched for or sought out²¹.

In this temptation, Satan's appearance is no longer that of the ascetic in search of self-denial and escape from the corruptions of the world, but instead that of an urbane courtier. When he arrives, he appears "[n]ot rustic as before, but seemlier clad, / As one in city, or court, or palace bred" (2.299-300). By associating Satan with a courtly

²¹ While historical precedent suggests that early modern writers used the term "exquisite" to describe particularly choice food without emphasizing its far-fetched status, Milton would certainly have been familiar with the words formation from the Latin words for to seek or search (*quaerere*) and the outward direction (*ex-*) of that search ("exquisite"). While Satan's table looks outward, the Son's interpretive energies are constantly focused inward.

aesthetic, Milton links Satan with the broad networks of international trade and mercantile travel on which that courtly aesthetic was founded. The courtly quality of Satan's feast exemplifies the idea that Patricia Fumerton identifies in her study of the cultural forces behind Jacobean masques and banqueting practices. She argues that the insubstantial, "void" quality of sugar and spices reflects the implicit value of their "great expense and exoticism" and promises a symbolic form of self-preservation that overcomes the limitations of human mortality (134-5). Behind the seemingly insubstantial, exotic elements of the banqueting hall, Fumerton identifies complex and decentralized networks of international trade that challenged economic thought and which stood behind the ornate and lavish aesthetic of courtly entertainments (181-4).

Having already engaged with the genre of the masque and its courtly, Royalist aesthetic in *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634), Milton draws the reader's attention to the networks of trade across great distances that Satan's feast represents. The appeal of the feast's far-flung variety—a significant part of Satan's second temptation—lies in its promise to collapse the boundaries of space that limit the human subject's sphere of activity. The lavish and exotic feast presents the Son with foods that represent great distances, and it develops out of a courtly, ornate aesthetic that promises dominion or control over distance and space. In a sense, Satan already presents the Son with the kingdoms of the world through the exotic food of his courtly banquet. The exotic table in the wilderness is, by extension, the promise of command over the spatial distances that make these foods difficult to obtain. Satan's temptation grants the Son a survey of the world's spaces under the assumption that access to the world's full variety of spaces mitigates the limitations that each space inherently forces upon the individual subject.

Within the temptation that Satan presents in the third book of *Paradise Regained* is a more explicit discussion of space's role in the construction of the categories of publicity and privacy. Satan confronts the Son with a series of historical examples in which political heroes such as Alexander the Great find military success at a similar or earlier age (3.30-36). Satan's argument depends on the strict boundaries that he draws between public spaces of great action and the obscurity caused by private spaces. He asks, "These godlike virtues wherefore dost thou hide? / Affecting private life, or more obscure / In savage wilderness, wherefore deprive / All earth her wonder at thy acts, thyself / The fame and glory" (3.21-25). By implicitly linking the present participle, "[a]ffecting," with the act of depriving the world of heroic action and its consequent fame and glory, Satan seeks to imply that private life results directly from private space. As he characterizes it, simply being positioned within the space of this "savage wilderness" means that the Son will necessarily be bound to the limitations of a private life. Even the same "acts" that should provoke wonder if performed in a public arena would become private and forgotten if the Son performs them in the desert. Satan's argument insinuates that taking on the appearance and entering the spaces commonly associated with private life are the causes that deprive the watching world of the Son's heroic action.

Satan challenges the Son, "think'st thou to regain / Thy right by sitting still or thus retiring?" (3.163-164). Satan seeks to criticize the Son's seemingly passive and inactive waiting—a position that has garnered considerable critical commentary—by criticizing the Son's retirement into the desert as a renunciation of public concerns and public life. Satan mocks the Son's choice to go out into the desert by contrasting the Son's religious retreat with Judas Maccabeus' use of the desert as a rallying point for

military action against Antiochus (Kerrigan, Rumrich, and Fallon 668n163, 668n165). In a fleeting moment of mockery, Satan seems to support the Son's retirement into the desert, but he then chides, "So did not Maccabeus: he indeed / Retired unto the desert, but with arms" (3.165-166). His syntax first emphasizes the similarity between the Son's retreat into the desert and Judas Maccabeus' strategic retreat into the desert in order to gather of military forces, but the sentence's sudden reversal condemns the Son's pious inaction. This reformulation of the idea of retirement as a form of strategic, military action closely resembles the way in which Satan repeatedly returns to his middle part of the air in order to meet with his council of fallen Angels.

This assertion subtly refines Satan's implicit argument for the shaping and limiting power of space over the subject. As Satan characterizes it, a military retreat does not stand in opposition to public concerns and actions. It is therefore the space of specifically *religious* retreat formulated in opposition to the arenas of public life that limits the individual subject to the bounds of private life. Satan asks the Son to consider the limited, private character of the home and the desert space: "Thy life hath yet been private, most part spent / At home, scarce viewed the Galilean towns...and what thence could thou observe?" (3.231-233, 235). Satan argues that the Son's failure to observe the pomp and majesty of the world's great monarchies and lack of worldly experience has made him incapable of the "greatest actions" and instead "ever / Timorous and loth, with novice modesty...Irresolute, unhardy, unadvent'rous" (3.239, 240-1, 243). Satan's argument implicitly argues that the contrast between imperial concerns and those of the Son's quiet life at home is analogous to the contrast between military retreat and religious retreat. By characterizing the Son as a monastic "novice," Satan insinuates that the

problem of the Son's obscurity derives from the Son's association with a secluded and specifically religious space and not merely the Son's political inexperience. As Satan sees it, the Son remains in the private, contemplative space of religious retreat and cannot participate in the active life. In this way, Satan directly links religious space and privacy and connects public space with the military power of the state.

When he presents the Son with a survey of the world's nations from the mountaintop, Satan continues his strategy of collapsing spatial boundaries in order to express a symbolic dominance that reflects his underlying temptation of political dominance. He specifically emphasizes the supernatural way in which they have been able to travel across immense distances: "Well have we speeded, and o'er hill and dale, / Forest and field, and flood, temples and towers / Cut short many a league" (3.267-269). The allure of the temptation depends on Satan's command of space that allows movement beyond the limitations of ordinary travel.

In spite of this apparent dominion over physical spaces, this temptation also attests to Satan's belief in the shaping power of space over the subject. His promise of the ability to choose and change which space shapes the Son's available actions nevertheless continues to depend on the assumption that one's location constrains the publicity or privacy of one's actions. He frames the vast prospect on the mountaintop with the language of empire and military action: "here thou behold'st / Assyria and her empire's ancient bounds, / Araxes and the Caspian lake, thence on / As far as Indus east, Euphrates west, / And oft beyond" (3.269-273). By offering the Son a prospect of the ancient empires of Assyria, Persia, and Alexander the Great, Satan establishes a clear opposition between the possibilities that inhere in the spaces of public military action and the

private, isolated space of the desert²². Satan's promised dominion over the world's geography thereby promises the ability to choose which space frames and categorizes the Son's actions.

In contrast with Satan's understanding of religious space as the source of privacy, the Son contends that the privacy or publicity of a subject's action derives from the individual's inward purposes rather than the space in which that action takes place. In this way, the poem suggests that a specifically religious space does not enforce a form of privacy on the subjects within and can permit either public or private action based on internal criteria. Literary critics of *Paradise Regained* frequently remark upon the Son's consistent emphasis on inwardness. In Fish's summary work, *How Milton Works*, he observes that for Milton, "[w]hat sounds like self-assertion is an assertion of radical dependence on an internalized other" (27). Likewise, Michael Bryson argues that the Son finally discovers that "the divine is to be found within, not without" ("From Last Things" 265). This inwardness, however, does not merely reject worldly concerns. As Ken Simpson notes about the typological consequences of the Son's temptation, Milton's poem does not withdraw from the "ongoing pursuit of Christ's kingdom in the world" (*Spiritual Architecture* 167). Milton's focus on theological inwardness instead reconfigures categories of public and private religious space based upon the metaphorical and immaterial religious space within the subject.

In the same way that the Son leaves the social space of the public to go into the desert space, he seeks an inward space of religious retreat in pursuit of authoritative

²² This category of public military action includes not only nationalistic or monarchical concerns but also forms of religious violence. David Loewenstein rejects the idea of a pacifistic coherence in both *Regained* and *Samson* and instead posits the possibility of religious violence within the volume's moments of tension and internal disagreement ("Milton's Double-Edged Volume" 232).

religious knowledge about his divine vocation. The visible journey appears to spurn a public space for a private space of religious retreat; the second rejects the world and dominion of spaces in general for the internal world of the self. In the second book, the narrator describes the Son's contemplation of his earthly purposes: "The while [Mary's] son tracing the desert wild, / Sole but with holiest meditations fed, / Into himself descended, and at once / All his great work to come before him set; / How to begin, how to accomplish best / His end of being on Earth, and mission high" (2.109-114). Here, the narrator draws the reader's attention to the "desert wild" and the solitary space into which the Son ventures. By setting the Son's holy meditations in opposition to the lonely nature of the desert, Milton's narrator links the isolated space of the desert with the Son's fasting without directly arguing for their causal association.

In the Son's retelling of his decision to go into the wilderness, he recalls the voice of divine approval upon his baptism as his conviction that he "no more should live obscure, / But openly begin" (1.287-288). He then describes his excursion into the wilderness as a continuation of this open ministry: "And now by some strong motion I am led / Into this wilderness, to what intent / I learn not yet, perhaps I need not know; / For what concerns my knowledge God reveals" (1.290-3). Critically, it is the strong motion within the self that prompts the Son to go into the wilderness, and this internal prompting is the distinguishing characteristic that separates public and private action. By making the Son's wilderness fast part of the open beginning of his ministry and no longer part of his "obscure" life, Milton's poem critiques Satan's understanding of visible, social public spaces and obscure private spaces. Throughout *Paradise Regained*, the Son maintains that publicity or privacy originates from within the subject.

While the Son's thoughts lead him into the solitary space, the text's aesthetic task of describing this action provides the material, visible evidence that supports Satan's competing theory of religious space. The narrator insinuates that the Son goes into the desert because of this inward motion but resists a definitive statement: "he still on was led, but with such thoughts / Accompanied of things past and to come / Lodged in his breast, as well might recommend / Such solitude before choicest society" (1.299-302). By emphasizing the forbidding features of the desert space, the narrator's descriptions seem to imply that the Son's religious retreat is strongly divided from the space of ordinary human life. The narrator relays the Son's perception of "[a] pathless desert, dusk with horrid shades; / The way he came not having marked, return / Was difficult, by human steps untrod" (1.296-298). In its description of the desert's emptiness, the passage provides evidence for both accounts of religious space. Just as Moore's anthropological account of privacy contends that privacy escapes the unpleasant obligations or duties of social life, this passage emphasizes the desert's emptiness. In this space divided from the pressures and demands of cooperative human activity, Milton's desert might seem to reify an understanding of religion as a private, internal activity that develops out of its positioning within a visibly private space.

At issue in these competing accounts of space based on internal impression or visual evidence is the individual's access to authoritative religious knowledge. For this reason, the poem focuses on moments of significant dispensational change. In his declaration that the oracles of the ancient world have ceased, the Son signals an epochal change much like the break between ancient demonic powers and the world after the incarnation. The Son's declaration emphasizes the visible quality of the oracles and their

frequent association with a particular place: “henceforth oracles are ceased, / And thou no more with pomp and sacrifice / Shalt be inquired at Delphos or elsewhere” (1.456-458). This shift notably rejects any association between religious inspiration and a material place such as Delphos. In keeping with the Son’s resistance to the idea that a space can generate divine inspiration, it seems likely that Milton expects his readers to recognize the political and religious overtones in the Son’s rejection of the pomp of religious ceremony.

Milton’s intervention into the question of religious ceremony and its role in the production of religious knowledge reflects the seventeenth century’s tumultuous religious conflicts. Milton’s opposition to the ceremonial pomp of the official English church under Charles I and its return in the Restoration under Charles II likely derives from his ideal of an internal and sincere form of religious faith and practice in contrast with the ideals of external conformity in religious practice. These divergent accounts of religious space therefore articulate the sources of religious knowledge and the relationship between divinity and humanity. As Graham Parry observes, Archbishop Laud’s “emphasis on ritual and ceremony seemed idolatrous” to his theological and political opponents (Parry 185)²³. The altar is a site of both pomp and sacrifice and stands as a particularly strong example of a theological understanding of space that Milton opposed. The Arminian understanding of free will implied in the ceremonial focus of late Stuart England depended on the assumption that religious spaces and ceremonies were effective external aids that could convince the souls of the masses. The Son’s condemnation of the oracles

²³ For Milton’s thought in the context of the issues of ceremonial worship and the circumstantial aids of the Laudian church, see Daniel W. Doerkson, “Milton and the Jacobean Church of England,” 5.15.

offers an alternative account of religious belief and practice that emerges from an inward, metaphorical space within the subject.

After silencing the oracles, the Son declares that the spirit of God now speaks within the individual subject: “God hath now sent his living oracle / into the world, to teach his final will, / And sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell / In pious hearts, an inward oracle / To all truth requisite for men to know” (1.460-464). The inward oracle no longer speaks from a particular site of revelation—such as the Laudian altar or the Delphic oracle—and the Son links the oracle’s voice with an inward space in “pious hearts.” In a similar moment of biblical dispensational change, Christ tells a Samaritan woman that the religious space of the Jewish temple has been superseded by an internal, metaphorical space within each individual believing subject. Christ informs her, “the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, John 4:23-4). The Geneva Bible’s marginal commentary summarizes this point succinctly in saying, “God being of a spiritual nature, requireth a spiritual service, and agreeable to his nature” (*Geneva Bible*, John 4:24nK)²⁴. An established tradition of radical Protestant belief represented in the staunchly Calvinist marginalia of the Geneva Bible opposes the physical spaces of Jewish religious practice with a newly internal location for religious practice²⁵. In this framework, the Son’s argument for this pattern of transforming the formerly physical spaces of religious

²⁴ As this edition is a facsimile of the 1560 *Geneva Bible*, I have silently modernized the orthography in this passage.

²⁵ While Milton’s position is certainly distant from traditional or strict Calvinist teaching, Milton is certainly engaged with all kinds of nonconformist Christian belief and practice. David Loewenstein reads the poem in the context of contemporary Quaker and Ranter religious perspectives in “The Kingdom Within,” 64.

worship into internal spaces requires a transformed understanding of religious space as necessarily inward and spiritual rather than material.

In spite of the fact that the Son's monastic appearance temporarily aligns his solitary physical location with his internal religious pursuits, he contends that the subject's inward motives are the sole determinant of an action's publicity or privacy. For the Son, a subject's location within a religious space cannot determine the social consequences of an action because the same action might be public or private depending on the individual's motivations. When the Son rejects Satan's offer of political kingship in the second book of *Paradise Regained*, he emphasizes the role's visible accouterments: "a crown, / Golden in show, is but a wreath of thorns, / Brings dangers, troubles, cares, and sleepless nights / To him who wears the regal diadem, / When on his shoulders each man's burden lies; / For therein stands the office of a king, / His honor, virtue, merit and chief praise, / That for the public all this weight he bears" (2.458-465). The Son's rejection of the king's golden crown echoes the traditional discourse of the contemplative life, but his specific diction connects the king's public role with the underlying purpose of wearing the crown "for the public." After all, Milton's contemporary readers would recall that the Son ultimately wears "a wreath of thorns" in the passion and that he bears the metaphorical weight of humanity's sin in spite of his rejection of the conventional kingly role. The difference between the Son's rejection of Satan's proffered golden crown and his later acceptance of a literal crown of thorns derives from the Son's belief that the internal world of the self is the ultimate source of meaning for the external world. Religious space and religious knowledge both point within the individual.

In this moment, the Son's actions seem to echo the classical discourse of the contemplative life in his rejection of the crown's pressures and demands. As in texts like Milton's earlier "Il Penseroso" (1645), the classical motif of the contemplative life values the pursuit of intellectual pleasures over political activity—often by abandoning the spatial center of power and influence. The Son redefines the idea of kingship in a way that gives priority to the inward self and rejects Satan's fundamental assumptions about the limitations imposed by social or asocial spaces in the present world: "But to guide nations in the way of truth / By saving doctrine, and from error lead / To know, and knowing worship God aright, / Is yet more kingly; this attracts the soul, / Governs the inner man, the nobler part, / That other o'er the body only reigns, / And oft by force, which to a generous mind / So reigning can be no sincere delight" (2.473-480). The Son associates a truer form of kingship with the mind as a realm distinct from the materiality of the body. While he links the mind with persuasion and truth, the Son confines the domain of force to the body alone. In contrast with the classical retirement motif, the Son makes no necessary link between the convincement of the mind and the individual's physical separation from the centers of power²⁶.

The Son therefore does not pursue a space of religious retreat by physically isolating himself from the pressures of the opposed world. His fast in the desert coincides with an inner prompting, but it is not the desert space that provides the Son with authoritative religious knowledge of his calling. By introducing the criterion of "sincere delight" into the Son's description of right rule, Milton prioritizes the action of the

²⁶ By extending this logic, one's actions would depend upon the individual's internal motivations regardless of whether the individual is as close to the center of power as Milton was during the Interregnum or lives in virtual exile from the centers of political power.

inward self over its manifestation in visible political action (2.480). In the Son's account of the inwardness of religious knowledge, Milton transforms the idea of a religious retreat as a dedicated space that opposes the values or practices of the rest of the world into an inward dedication of the self that necessarily reframes the private or public nature of human action. The Son's resistance to Satan's final temptation and triumphant return to his home presents a uniquely challenging task for the poet because true, inward religious space remains wholly invisible and inaccessible to the outside viewer.

In the final book of *Paradise Regained*, Satan's temptation continues to rely on his assumption of a necessary opposition between the wider social concerns addressed in public spaces and the social limitations imposed by private, religious spaces. As in the earlier temptations, Satan begins by promising to collapse the limitations that space places upon the subject and characterizes his solution as a compensatory technological aid. He presents the Son with a survey of the city of Rome: "Many a fair edifice besides, more like / Houses of gods (so well I have disposed / My airy microscope) thou mayst behold / Outside and inside both, pillars and roofs / Carved work, the hand of famed artificers / In cedar, marble, ivory, or gold"²⁷. Satan emphasizes human artifice and technological innovation in order to imply that action in the world is linked directly with the spaces in which those actions take place. His interest in overcoming the limitations imposed by space through technological dominance represents his belief that space determines the visibility or obscurity of human action and that social, public action is ultimately superior to the isolated actions that occur within private spaces.

²⁷ In *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England*, Joanna Picciotto argues that an early modern discourse of technological innovation sought to reform or compensate for humanity's fallen abilities and faculties (12-13).

Satan finally maps this opposition onto the division between the active and contemplative life. This time, rather than tempt the Son to assume a fully visible, public life by choosing to act within public spaces, he invites the Son to embrace what a traditionally contemplative life that promises a complete form of privacy that is wholly divided from the world's social concerns and pressures. He presents the Son with an Athenian scholarly tradition that would allow him to rule by persuasion and ultimately become "a king complete / Within thy self" (4.230). Satan tries to associate this form of self-rule with deterministically private spaces that exclude the pressures and responsibilities of the present world. He insinuates that the Son's natural inclinations oppose the active life: "And thou thyself seem'st otherwise inclined / Than to a worldly crown, addicted more / To contemplation and profound dispute" (4.212-214). The contemplative life, for Satan, stands in direct opposition to "the world." He explicitly divides the wilderness space from the public concerns of the world when he exclaims in seeming frustration, "What dost thou in this world? The wilderness / For thee is fittest place, I found thee there, / And thither will return thee" (4.372-374). The contemplative self-rule that Satan offers physically isolates the subject in order to reject the world's pressures and concerns. When the Son rejects this final temptation, he rejects Satan's assertion that space is the foundation of either privacy or publicity.

Satan's fall is the ironic apotheosis of his ideology of space. When Satan falls, he is made subject to his own belief in the power that space is able to exert over the subject. At the temple in Jerusalem, Satan remarks, "I to thy Father's house / Have brought thee, and highest placed; highest is best" (4.552-553). Behind Satan's frequent retreat to the middle part of the air in the first books of *Paradise Regained* is his assumption that the

space's visible, vertical hierarchy serves as a clear marker of hierarchical value. His belief that "highest is best" mirrors his insistence that the Son will only be able to take part in public or private action in the appropriate public or private space.

In the case of both the pinnacle and his mid-air retreat, Satan assumes that physical spaces irresistibly constrain the subject's powers, abilities, and meaning. Milton uses an epic simile to compare the Son's triumph to that of Hercules over the giant Antaeus, which Hercules accomplishes by holding the giant in the air (4.562-571). The particular power of this image lies in Satan's ironic inability to hold on to his preferred position in the air and the way in which both Satan and Antaeus are made subject to their location in space. Satan's spatial fall and his recognition of his failure to interpret the true source of hierarchical value are manifestations of the same event. Satan's overriding belief that highest is best conflicts directly with the Son's approach to the meaning of space as unfixed and alterable. The poem's composition as an aesthetic, literary representation of religious space implicates it in both of these interpretive strategies. In spite of the Son's final victory over Satan and his understanding of space as the determinant of visible or obscure human action, the poem relies on the same descriptive evidence Satan uses to signal, however approximately, the Son's resort to an inward, spiritual religious retreat. This tension is particularly visible in accounts of privacy in the poem's reception that conflate the poem's representational strategies with the Son's inward and necessarily absent motivations and purposes.

Milton's choice to enact the Son's rejection of the ideology of visible space rather than explain his theological commitments to the reader is not simply a matter of artistic decorum but extends from Milton's theologically founded concern for the individual's

interpretation and the inward form of belief that follows. In other words, to rely on unambiguous external forms to signal the Son's reliance on inward criteria would be to undermine the assumptions of Milton's religious epistemology. In his discussion of the language describing heresy that appears in Milton's prose tracts, Benjamin Myers summarizes Milton's position: "Orthodoxy and heresy are identified...by their underlying epistemologies. Orthodoxy is belief that has been formed in the right way; it is a religious practice in which belief is generated from the individual Protestant conscience in response to scripture" ("Following" 379). The significance of the Son's return to the privacy of his home also demonstrates the tensions inherent in Milton's project of using literary representations to dramatize the victory of the individual's inward, invisible knowledge over the evidence available to the senses.

In addition to enacting Milton's religious epistemology, the closing lines of *Paradise Regained* generate considerable interpretive ambiguity because they illustrate Milton's complex engagement with the seventeenth-century's discourses of religious retreat and gendered household privacy. Following Satan's spectacular fall from the height of the pinnacle, the Son quietly returns to his birthplace in privacy: "he unobserved / Home to his mother's house private returned" (4.638-639). The ambiguity of the word "private" in the poem's final lines allows Milton's imagined reader to understand the Son's return to the world of everyday life in two different ways in accordance with the reader's theory of privacy and its relationship to material spaces. Those who share Satan's belief in the power of private or public spaces to shape the range of human action remain free to interpret the Son's return to the home of his parents as a return to an inherently private space. After all, Satan explicitly describes the Son's

home as isolated from public life and distant from the sophisticated mores of the world's courtly centers of power. Furthermore, this account of the household's private space and its association with the feminine aligns with other early modern accounts of the nonconformist household as a private, feminine site dedicated to religious knowledge and practice.

This position, however, seems to exist in tension with the Son's decision to stand in opposition to Satan's temptation to leap from the pinnacle. This act of standing is, in fact, an internal action with public consequences rather than an outward, visible opposition to Satan's temptation. As David R. Schmitt argues, "The Son of God stands by an internal act of worship, hidden from Satan but...revealed to the reader, that demonstrates his confidence in God" (123). Schmitt's study situates *Regained* in the context of contemporary arguments for religious toleration and characterizes the Son's decision to stand as representative of nonconformist religious practice and its social consequences (123-6). In contrast with Schmitt, I maintain that the poem's closing ambiguity allows but does not compel readers to interpret the Son's return to his the home of his mother as a response to an inward motion. Milton's complex engagement with contemporary accounts of domestic, feminine privacy may be responsible in part for the poem's ambiguity.

The poem's final ambiguity on the subject of the Son's return invites readers to consider how the idea of privacy relates to the idea of the household and its gendered implications as the site of private femininity. Milton intervenes in this question by maintaining the ambiguity of the Son's return as potentially either a return to a necessarily private space or the expression of a necessarily inaccessible inward motion.

In her discussion of the gendered privacy of the household in *Paradise Lost*, Shannon Miller argues that Adam's description of male and female roles divides the private domain of the household from the public realm of political action²⁸. Miller situates this discussion of feminine privacy and male publicity within a broader Puritan discourse of the household as "a signal of the domestic sphere as distinct from larger economic or social practices" (70). Milton's decision to close the poem by associating religious privacy—even that which emerges from an internal space of religious retreat—with the emerging domestic sphere draws his poem into the period's emerging discourses of feminine religious privacy and domesticity.

In its implicit association of Mary's household with the Son's expression of his religious convictions, Milton's poem aligns the household's feminine privacy with religious belief and practice. Critical approaches to *Paradise Regained* have frequently reinforced this interpretation because of its alignment with the dominant binaries of religious privacy and public action in Anglo-American modernity²⁹. Reading Milton's final lines through the lens of his arguments in *A Treatise of Civil Power*, however, reveals the underlying tensions and concerns from which these dominant notions of public and private spaces have emerged. In this ending, Milton's religious epistemology, which rejects the privacy of space for the inward privacy of religious retreat, exists in

²⁸ Miller's analysis of *Paradise Lost* in the context of contemporary women writers emphasizes "the issue, or the growing cultural problem, of women's connection to a political realm" (71). She argues that "Adam attempts to pull Eve away from a more political or social context by domesticating her and her suggestion about a division of labor" whereas Satan promises to collapse the household and political spheres (71).

²⁹ For example, Martz links *Paradise Regained* with the genre of the georgic because it shares "the praise of the temperate, disciplined, frugal life, as opposed to the grandeur, luxury, and vice of empires" (173). This chapter contends that Milton's account of this opposition is not as clear as Martz's analysis suggests.

tension with contemporary accounts of the household's religious privacy and its public implications. As David Norbrook observes, this feminine, domestic sphere also functions as a dedicated religious space, a source of religious knowledge, and an engine of social transformation: "Puritan ideology laid special emphasis on the household as an instrument of godly reformation which could do its work even when the public world was corrupt" (116-7). Early modern accounts of religious privacy are therefore implicated in broader accounts of religion's boundaries and the formation and maintenance of religious community.

As in Milton's ideal for the visible church, the poem's ambiguous spatial language permits its readers the possibility of interpretive freedom without constraint. Milton's poem offers the reader an opportunity to exercise this interpretive freedom in his reliance on representations that can only approximate the individual's wholly inward space of religious retreat. His arguments for toleration argue that religious conviction should extend from the inward self into the exterior world and contend that external forces cannot justifiably constrain or alter the subject's belief without destroying its inherent freedoms. The poem's tensions and ambiguities therefore demonstrate Milton's engagement with the literary problem of representing religious retreat under the assumption that religion's true space lies within the individual subject. In a sense, the issue of interpreting space within *Regained* reflects the broader problem of interpreting the Son's identity, "which bears no single sense" (4.517). Because of the poem's closing ambiguity about the significance of private religious space, it would be reductive to characterize *Paradise Regained* as directly contributing to modern configurations of public action and private religious belief, but Milton's poem nevertheless provides

readers with an ambiguous account of the feminine domestic space's relationship to religious belief.

In order to encompass the plural nature of the poem's discourse of space, Milton's readers must reject the teleological notion that the division of public and private emerged out of necessity during the long eighteenth century. In its place, a new form of historical reading might develop from Stephen Jay Gould's critique of reductive narratives of historical progress that implicitly suggest that life in the present is providentially ordered. Gould writes, "[t]his mistaken view of ourselves as the predictable outcome of a tendency, rather than as a contingent entity, leads us badly astray in many ways far too numerous to mention" (226). He observes that the principle of emergence—an outcome that could not have been predicted by its constituent or previous parts—and of historical contingency challenge grand narratives of predictable, continuous development.

Reconsidering religious space in *Paradise Regained* through the lenses of contingency and emergence reveals how the poem's ambiguity resists the simple association of private spaces and religious belief and reveals the complex nature of historical change. Critics who read *Regained* through the lens of post-Enlightenment modernity understandably risk obscuring the nature of the debate between the Son and Satan about the meaning assigned to spaces in the present world. In *The Secret History of Domesticity*, Michael McKeon describes European modernity's reified abstraction of traditional distinctions into an explicit and seemingly self-evident division between public and private: "the modern disembedding of the public-private dyad entails their separation out not only from the common ground of tradition and social practice but also from each other: the division of public *from* private" (McKeon xix-xx). Milton's

arguments for toleration in *A Treatise of Civil Power* suggest that he shares the Son's attitude towards space characterizes it as an external factor that gains its public, social meaning or private, religious purpose from the inward self. This position is continuous with a number of recent literary critics who have characterized Milton's late work as a continuation of his interest in broad religious reform rather than a rejection the world.

Milton's concern with religious space—both the visible spaces of the private household and the individual's inward, metaphoric space of religious retreat—reflects his interest in the sources of authoritative religious knowledge. Milton's attempts to define the boundaries of religion in his midcentury arguments for toleration allow him to emphasize the role of the individual believer's conscience in the pursuit of religious truth. His account of religious action's publicity and privacy in *Paradise Regained* also allows him to consider how the religious space of the inward man relates to social concerns and social institutions such as the household. In the Restoration closet drama, *The Convent of Pleasure*, Margaret Cavendish similarly evaluates the sources of the individual's religious knowledge through the discourse of religious retreat. Her account of the present, material world as a source of authoritative religious knowledge stands in stark contrast with Milton's inward religious epistemology, but her dramatic and philosophical texts share Milton's foundational interest in the role of the individual's assent in religious and political community.

CHAPTER 3

MATTER, SPIRIT, AND SPACE IN MARGARET CAVENDISH'S IMAGINED WORLDS: *THE CONVENT OF PLEASURE AND OBSERVATIONS* *UPON EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY*

Like John Milton's *Paradise Regained*, Margaret Cavendish's representations of religious retreat address the relationship between the materiality of the present world and the worlds of the mind and spirit. Milton uses the discourse of religious retreat to explore the interpretation of religious space when God's purposes remain outside of the ordinary world of perception at the expense of traditional markers of the ascetic, monastic life. When Cavendish's writings engage with ideal religious spaces, she likewise represents spaces of religious retreat in direct opposition to the familiar model of religious monasticism¹. In Cavendish's 1668 closet drama, *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cavendish implies that dedicated spaces intended to foster ideal intellectual and religious practices can only approximate traditional religious ideals imperfectly because the true immateriality of spirit remains wholly inaccessible. Cavendish rejects conventional representations of religious retreat in her closet drama because she maintains a strict division between the present, material world and the domain of the spirit. This division precludes any certain religious knowledge beyond the individual's consenting choice to imitate nature's model².

¹ Hero Chalmers considers the political implications of Cavendish's dramatic representations of single-sex retreats at greater length in "The Politics of Feminine Retreat," 88.

² I argue that Cavendish approaches the subjects and ideas associated with religious faith in a radically different manner from many of her contemporaries for reasons that derived from her philosophical and scientific opinions. Critic Frances Harris notes that "[t]he Duchess of Newcastle was unusual for a woman of her time in lack of recourse to conventional piety," and observes that Mary Evelyn—who disapproved of Cavendish's work and drew more readily on the resources of conventional piety—and

In *The Convent of Pleasure*, Lady Happy and her female companions dedicate their convent to celebrating the pleasures of the natural world and its seasons rather than one set aside for ascetic religious practice. Lady Happy's religious retreat offers a heightened awareness of reality, but this retreat becomes the same reality available outside of the convent's walls. In justifying an ideal space opposed to the values and practices of the ordinary world on theological and philosophical grounds, Cavendish's play articulates a specifically religious retreat with its own positive practices based upon a consistent vision of the spiritual and material worlds rather than an idealized or utopian escape from the pressures of the world³. The fictional convent promises to orient the minds of those within to the true nature of the material world, and Cavendish's account of religious knowledge ultimately produces an internalized, metaphorical version of the convent within the reading subject. The play's ending, which some critics have interpreted as a failure or disappointing capitulation to traditional gender roles, implicates the individual reader in the task of ordering human life after the pattern of nature.

Cavendish's discourse of religious space reimagines the connections among gender, religious knowledge, and religious space. Her epistemological materialism provides the justification for a new version of shared, communal life modeled after the uniformity of nature that supplants the inequalities of the existing social order in seventeenth-century England. As a space of religious retreat, Lady Happy's convent articulates a model of knowledge and social relations that imitates the uniformity of

Margaret Cavendish represent two very different solutions to the question of religion's role in light of changing scientific ideas ("Living" 211). Harris' article admirably reconstructs the complexity and variety of their negotiation with scientific and religious ideas.

³ In considering Cavendish's representation of ideal spaces, I assume—as Robert Applebaum has argued in *Literature and Utopian Politics*—that imagining an ideal space is a complex process of negotiating one's relationship to the world that can ultimately change or reconfigure that relationship (208–210).

nature as a whole. When Cavendish articulates a space of religious retreat, her corresponding account religious knowledge argues for the whole of the material world as the space of religious belief and practice. As a comedy, the play's apparent resolution in traditional gender roles through marriage masks its radical reconfiguration of social bonds based upon the individual's consent. Cavendish's account of nature's material uniformity justifies the play's reconfiguration of seventeenth-century gender roles and brings her discourse of religious space in conversation with contemporary scientific and political materialism. In the broader history of dedicated religious spaces, Cavendish's play argues that the individual encounters religious knowledge throughout nature and that religion's concerns are therefore only metaphorically linked with spatial enclosure.

In *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cavendish addresses the same kinds of questions about the significance of the material world as she did in her earlier interrogation of the merits of the contemplative life. Collected as part of her second group of dramatic works—her 1668 *Plays Never Before Printed*—this play's representation of religious retreat challenges the gendered power structures of seventeenth-century English society. As in Cavendish's earlier play, *The Female Academy* (1662), the male-dominated power structure within the world of the play is bemused, concerned, and threatened by the idea that women would separate themselves from the world of men in pursuit of an imaginative, intellectual life⁴. This later play also embraces the idea of a single-sex retreat, but Cavendish frames this retreat and its justifications with traditional religious language that relates directly to her theories about the material and spiritual worlds. Religious retreat in *The Convent of Pleasure* is not merely an arbitrary or strategic

⁴ Cavendish's earlier play focuses on the intellectual and reasoning power available to women outside of the constricting limits that men place on their powers and the challenge that women's frequently superior reasoning presents to marriage as an institution.

response to a social injustice. It instead reflects what the play establishes as Nature's true role in the formation of religious knowledge and human life's stark division from the infinitude of the divine.

The first scene of *The Convent of Pleasure* introduces the reader to Lady Happy through the interpretive lens of the play's male establishment. Following the death of her father, Lady Happy is presented to the reader as "extream handsome, young, rich, and virtuous" and the object of the young gallants' desires and envy (98)⁵. The scene represents her desirability to the gallants as a desire to dominate or control her, as the first gentleman remarks that all of these qualities in a single woman are "too much for any other Man" to possess (98). This desire to dominate or control the protagonist of the play, expressed by the "younger brothers" and "Gallants" outside of Lady Happy's standing provides the immediate context for Lady Happy's retreat from ordinary life (97, 98).

Her account of the world and the knowledge it provides, however, is fundamentally different from the people who would seek to destroy her convent and the way of understanding that world that it represents. In Lady Happy's convent of pleasure, she rejects the idea of controlling or dominating nature but instead organizes life in the convent around nature's seasons and encourages those within to fully embrace the pleasure of life that nature makes available. By arguing for and acting upon the fundamental goodness of all nature, Lady Happy seeks to maximize her quality of life within the present world because of her belief that the world of the divine remains outside of human experience and understanding.

⁵ Throughout this chapter, citations from *The Convent of Pleasure* refer to Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson's 2000 edition of the play.

In the sequence that follows, a servant asks Lady Happy if she is willing to take suitors like those in the first scene: “Madam, you being young, handsome, rich and virtuous, I hope you will not cast away those gifts of Nature, Fortune, and Heaven, upon a Person which cannot merit you?” (98). Lady Happy begins the play possessed of unusual beauty, wealth, and virtue, and she reflects upon the claims that the dominant Christian discourse makes upon these gifts. She sarcastically responds by observing that social and religious convention would require her to marry a man without any of these gifts, “if I should place my gifts rightly, I must Marry one that’s poor, old, ill-favoured, and debauch’d...nay, Heaven doth not only allow of it, but commands it; for we are commanded to give to those that want” (98). Lady Happy’s parodic reduction of the idea of Christian charity to a justification of mismatched marriages suggests that she is skeptical towards or rejects many of the assumptions of traditional Christian theology. In this first act of the play, Lady Happy articulates her objections to Christian practices of monasticism and asceticism and their implicit assumptions about the material universe.

At first it appears as if Lady Happy’s rejection of the world of men is exclusively a critique of the exchange of women through marriage. After all, she begins by describing the faults of men as one of the motivations for establishing a convent for women: “’tis only for the sake of Men, when Women retire not: And since there is so much folly, vanity and falshood in Men, why should Women trouble and vex them for their sake; for retiredness bars the life from nothing else but Men” (99). The assumptions that Lady Happy makes about the “folly, vanity and falshood” of men are certainly reinforced throughout the play, and the metatheatrical sequence in which a series of female characters lament the troubles and grief associated with ordinary women’s lives strongly

emphasizes the fact that many of women's problems derive from the power inequalities that make them particularly vulnerable to the whims of fortune. In addition to being an important critique of women's social inequality, Lady Happy's rejection of the ordinary world of men critiques the assumptions of traditional religious belief and its implications for the present world. She staunchly rejects forms of religious belief that subordinate the world of the senses to the eschatological future.

By separating herself from the cares of the world, Lady Happy produces a distinction between the troubled state of the world and the improved world within the convent's narrow walls. The cloister's organization symbolically—and practically—shuts out the world by explicitly refusing to build grates to the outside world like those that served as mechanisms of observation and interference in Cavendish's 1662 *Female Academy*⁶. Lady Happy carefully describes this separation as one that divides her from the world's negative effects and not the benefits and experiences available in the world: "I intend to incloister my self from the World, to enjoy pleasure, and not to bury my self from it; but to incloister my self from the incumbred cares and vexations, troubles and perturbation of the World" (100). Cavendish associates the privacy afforded in the convent with a certain kind of freedom through her language of religious belief and practice, but the convent's significance as religious space depends on its distinct epistemological stance rather than its religious privacy.

Cavendish rejects the assumption that the private, religious space that her character establishes is meaningfully distinct from the rest of the world on the grounds of her philosophy of matter and spirit. This position develops in conversation with

⁶ For the specular character of *The Female Academy*, see Susan Wiseman, "Gender and status," 165-7.

contemporary representations of enclosed spaces. Julie Sanders, in her study of closet spaces in Cavendish's dramatic works, argues that "private female closets and analogous spaces are significant to Cavendish's dramatic works and to her own public self-construction" and identifies "a very public manipulation of images of privacy by the publicity-conscious Cavendish, and gesture towards the paradoxical entity that was 'private space' in this period" (131)⁷. Anna Battigelli likewise observes that Cavendish paradoxically represents herself as alone in the public medium of print and suggests that Cavendish establishes herself as an "exile of the external world" by shifting her focus towards the subjective world of the mind (7, 10). In *The Convent of Pleasure*, we find a synthesis of these positions—Lady Happy establishes an enclosed, private space in the convent that offers positive values, but the convent's epistemological implications ultimately turn away from particular, external space in the world and move towards a version of the convent within the consenting individual.

The fact that Lady Happy's space of religious retreat is one intended to be for women exclusively positions her work as an ironic precursor to later configurations of religion as both feminine and private. Cavendish's vivid portrayal of religious practices in an enclosed, private space provides an imaginative precedent for an increasingly private-coded religious practice in English life, although both Cavendish and Lady Happy would object to this simplification of a complex stance towards the world and its social practices. In conversation with Madam Mediator, Lady Happy places special emphasis on

⁷ Sanders notes that the seventeenth century idea of privacy—particularly in the context of feminine-coded spaces—is performed in public ways, and Sanders suggests that Cavendish finds a revised, empowering form of publicity within her representations of private spaces that compensate for the world she lost as a political exile (136-7). The internalized religious retreat in *The Convent of Pleasure*, however, is less compensatory than it is an articulation of a mechanistic model of religious knowledge that challenges the limitations of privacy and isolation more generally.

the idea that this literally and symbolically separated space produces a state of freedom in the world rather than division from it. This freedom is both the retired life's conventional freedom from the troubles and cares of the world and the ability to embrace the life of the senses freely without the encumbering limitations that society places on women. When she describes the benefits of the convent in her claim that "retiredness bars the life from nothing else but Men," Lady Happy begins to articulate the difference between the negative action of rejecting male domination and her positive embrace of the material world and all that nature has to offer.

In her conversation with Madam Mediator, Lady Happy explains that her rejection of religious vows derives from her theology. Mediator asks, "Will you call those Fools that do it for the gods sake?" (99). Lady Happy rejects the idea of people taking monastic vows "for the gods sake" on the basis that the gods cannot profit from human actions and that people who perform ascetic acts of devotion do so in order to gain the praise of people:

No Madam, it is not for the gods sake, but for opinion's sake; for, Can any Rational Creature think or believe, the gods take delight in the Creature's uneasie life? or, Did they command or give leave to Nature to make Senses for no use; or to cross, vex and pain them? for, What profit or pleasure can it be to the gods to have Men or Women wear coarse Linnen or rough Woollen, or to flea their skin with Hair-cloth, or to eat or sawe throwgh their flesh with Cords? (99)⁸.

Cavendish sets her play in a quasi-Christian, quasi-pagan world in which the nature of the gods are not specified except for their complete dissociation from the material universe of

⁸ Anne Shaver glosses Cavendish's "flea" as "flay, scrape off" in her edition of *The Convent of Pleasure* (219).

human experience⁹. This decision frees her from the possibility of being linked with heresy, and this freedom allows Cavendish's characters to explore Cavendish's theological and philosophical ideas more directly.

Lady Happy rejects the hair shirts and coarse garments of ascetic devotion on the grounds that the gods cannot possibly profit from human suffering (and perhaps more disturbingly, if they did profit from suffering, they would deserve no allegiance from humanity). These gods are wholly different from both humanity and the personified figure of Nature, and the fundamental, unbridgeable divide between humanity and divinity means that the gods do not stand to gain anything from ascetic devotion. She finds fault in those who "cross, vex, and pain" the senses because they cross the designs of Nature. In this way, she interprets the proper ends of nature based on their providential ordering, a position that resembles Thomas Aquinas' medieval and Aristotelian characterization of natural law in the *Summa Theologiae*: "the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way...it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law" (*ST* I-II, Q. 91, a.2). Cavendish's character asserts that the human faculties of sense serve as a divine endorsement of their full embrace and use¹⁰.

When Lady Happy continues her attack on traditional monastic life, it becomes increasingly clear that her points of contention directly engage with the ascetic practices

⁹ This intentionally vague representation of the divine derives from Cavendish's broadly negative theology, which Lisa T. Sarasohn characterizes as "completely negative; we can only know that God is not at all like us" ("Science" 293). Cavendish pairs these strict limits on human knowledge of the divine with strict limits on the possible interactions between God and humanity. As matter and spirit, humanity and divinity have little to do with each other.

¹⁰ Aquinas' discussion of natural law develops out of his Aristotelian focus on final causes. See Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106a15-18.

of the Christian church. She asks, “What profit or pleasure can it be to the gods to have Men eat more Fish than Flesh, or to fast? unless the gods did feed on such meat themselves; for then, for fear the gods should want it, it were fit for Men to abstain from it” (99). For Lady Happy, the practice of regular fasting is not a “fit” practice for people who understand the nature of the gods. She argues that the model for human ends and practices should be the ordered world of nature, because people who act against this order displease the gods who created that order. She characterizes her opponent’s position as being at enmity with Nature: “as if what is displeasing unto Nature, were pleasing to the gods, and to be enemies to her, were to be friends to them” (99). The assumption behind Lady Happy’s statement is that what can best please the gods or earn their friendship is to agree with nature as fully as possible¹¹.

Lady Happy argues that the full powers of the senses and mind are necessary for to the full enjoyment of nature’s bounty and that traditional devotional practices like fasting merely weaken the subject’s ability to embrace nature¹². She tells Mediator, “I believe, the gods are better pleased with Praises then Fasting; but when the Senses are dull’d with abstinency, the Body weakned with fasting, the Spirits tir’d with watching, the Life made uneasie with pain, the Soul can have but little will to worship” (100). By rejecting of fasting in favor of freedom, Lady Happy may refer to a familiar biblical passage from Isaiah in which the Hebrew prophet writes, “Is not this the fast that I have

¹¹ Denise Tillery discusses Cavendish’s approach towards nature—a “more empathetic science”—by contrasting her scientific rhetoric with Hooke’s method and what she characterizes as invasive or reductive traits within modern scientific thought (281). Lisa T. Sarasohn likewise characterizes Cavendish’s approach towards nature as ultimately requiring a cooperative stance—even from the experimentalists that believe than can control or dominate nature (*Natural Philosophy* 157-8).

¹² Cavendish’s reliance on nature as not only the guide to pleasure but the legible will and purposes of the divine distinguishes her representation of religious retreat from the epicurean ideal that Maren-Sofie Røstvig associates with Post-Restoration rural and pastoral discourse (*The Happy Man* 230).

chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" (*KJV*, Isaiah 58:6)¹³. Both texts reject ascetic religious practices in favor of establishing the good life for people in the present world. Happy contends that the weakened and uneasy experience of the ascetic robs the soul of its ability to worship in ways that can best please the gods. In her newly established convent, free worship consists of the pleasures of nature in place of the broad forms of justice described in the passage from Isaiah.

Lady Happy establishes her ideal convent space with the purpose of fostering the right kinds of religious practices that would please the gods in the play's universe in addition to its explicit opposition to the inequalities of marriage and its dangers for women. In her modified version of religious monasticism, Cavendish continues to appropriate the discourse of Christian monasticism in her description of Lady Happy's various roles as the head of the convent. Madam Mediator describes the range of ordinarily male occupations held by women and concludes by describing Lady Happy's roles: "[Lady Happy] is the chief Confessor her self, and gives what Indulgences or Absolutions she pleaseth: Also, her House, where she had made her Convent, is so big and convenient, and so strong, as it needs no addition or repair" (103-4). The convent is a complete, unified space and its ethical and moral law—the unifying principle that organizes life within the compound—reflects the pleasure of its unconventional abbess.

¹³ Erna Kelly has already demonstrated Cavendish's familiarity with scripture and her interest in reappropriating scriptural text. She identifies the dedication of *The Worlds Olio* as a reimagined version of I Corinthians 13 in which she replaces references to humility with references to fame and its power to preserve one's memory into the afterlife (par. 2). In this case, both passages reject a shallow form of asceticism in favor of a richer version of human life.

Cavendish describes Lady Happy's rule according to her *pleasure* as accurate in a double sense: Lady Happy operates as an absolute ruler of her own domain, and pleasure itself becomes the evaluative criterion for all activity. Lady Happy interprets the gods' commands through the goodness and the sensory pleasure that nature provides: "the gods are bountiful, and give all, that's good, and bid us freely please our selves in that which is best for us: and that is best, what is most temperately used, and longest may be enjoyed, for excess doth wast it self, and all it feeds upon" (100). The ambiguity in Cavendish's punctuation, which Bowerbank and Mendelson preserve in their modern edition, permits the reader to understand that Lady Happy's "gods are bountiful and give all" and also that they "give all that's good." In its context, goodness might be best understood in terms of human pleasure in the absence of a way to evaluate human actions in terms of their agreement with divine commands. Ethical human action depends on the criterion of pleasure in the absence of an intervening divine figure or a clear relationship between actions in the present world and a spiritual, eschatological order of reality. For Lady Happy—and perhaps for Cavendish herself—the simple divine command visible in the natural order of the world is that humans should "freely please our selves" through the temperate use of the pleasures of life that can best extend life's greatest natural pleasures¹⁴.

¹⁴ Lady Happy's interest in temperance as a guide resembles Aristotle's discussion of moral virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he observes that the mean can serve as the guide for action: "it is the nature of [matters of conduct and health] to be destroyed by defect and excess, as we see in the case of strength and of health...exercise either excessive or defective destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it" (*NE* 1104a11-18). Aristotle's discussion diverges from Cavendish's play in its treatment of pleasure since he considers pleasure to be a bias that distorts and misleads. He writes, "[n]ow in everything the pleasant or pleasure is most to be guarded against; for we do not judge it impartially" (*NE* 1109b7-8).

Cavendish represents Lady Happy's convent as an institution focused upon extending the range and power of the senses through pleasure. In the absence of meaningful knowledge about the world to come, Cavendish describes nature as an authoritative guide to human actions, and nature's pleasure is the ideal against which all human activity should be measured. In *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, Lisa T. Sarasohn observes, "the imperfect world Lady Happy creates is full of pleasure because pleasure is natural...In Cavendish's philosophic works Nature and God are usually allies, not enemies. Nature and the gods share the same moral universe in 'The Convent of Pleasure': They both want people to have the greatest amount of pleasure possible and the least amount of pain" (179). In the context of the play, because Lady Happy reads the gods' purposes in the best that nature has to offer because humanity is unable to access the commands and will of the gods directly. Based upon this premise, the play's indignant focus on the unhappy state of married women in particular derives more from the social conventions' destruction of pleasure than from an ethical system that condemns inequality as morally wrong.

In light of the play's account of sensory pleasure as the expression of God's purpose in nature, Lady Happy's convent characterizes temperance as the best way to increase and sustain pleasure and rejects temperance's more common use in the condemnation of sensory pleasure as immoral. Lady Happy claims that she means to "live incloister'd with all the delights and pleasures that are allowable and lawful; My Cloister shall not be a Cloister of restraint, but a place for freedom, not to vex the Senses but to please them" (101). In the absence of a transcendental moral dimension that subordinates the present world to the commands of the invisible, spiritual world, nature

itself becomes the guide for right human action. For this reason, life in the convent of pleasure is organized around seasonal changes in the natural world, and categories of the “allowable and lawful” are based on the authority of nature as the source of religious knowledge rather than commands or prohibitions that point towards an immaterial, spiritual dimension.

As if to immediately model the convent’s embrace of the full range of the senses, Lady Happy’s speech turns to verse as she describes how the seasons shape their lives: “*Wee’l Cloth our selves with softest Silk, / And Linnen fine as white as milk. / Wee’l please our Sight with Pictures rare; / Our Nostrils with perfumed Air. / Our Ears with sweet melodious Sound, / Whose Substance can be no where found*” (101). Lady Happy’s convent provides young gentlewomen with exotic, special, and unusual sensory experiences. The sense of touch finds the “softest Silk” and “fine” linen, for example, and she treats the sense of sight with “Pictures rare.” These unusual sensory experiences differ from the ordinary realm of human experience and appeal to the senses’ widest range. Furthermore, she anticipates, “*Variety each Sense shall feed, / And Change in them new Appetites breed*” (101). Not only do these sensory experiences more adequately cover the full range of the senses, Lady Happy believes that change and variety can even extend the range and appetites of the senses. The methodological change wrought in the convent’s residents articulates an epistemological model, but the particular space of the convent is of secondary importance to the individual’s new reliance on the senses. In keeping with Lady Happy’s general embrace of the senses, the text’s shift to meter encourages the reader or audience to pay attention to her speech’s aural qualities.

The purpose of this sensory stimulation is to better align human life with the world of nature. Nature serves as the guide for life in the convent, and the seasonally structured description of life in the convent emphasizes the fact that learning from and imitating nature is Lady Happy's ultimate ideal. The task of exploring nature's endless variety could occupy a lifetime: "their Pleasures and Delights vary with the Seasons; so that what with the several Seasons, and the Varieties of every Season, it will take up a whole life's time" (107). In the second act of *The Convent of Pleasure*, Lady Happy describes life in the convent after the gentlemen of the town object to her decision to sequester herself from the marriage market. She states, "As in the Spring, our Chambers are hung with Silk-Damask, and all other things suitable to it; and a great Looking-Glass in each Chamber, that we may view our selves and take pleasure in our own Beauties, whilst they are fresh and young" (105)¹⁵. The light, airy fabrics of the chambers in spring are analogous to the fresh, colorful new life that returns with the change of season.

The lives of the young women themselves, however, also imitate spring's new life. By placing mirrors in every chamber, Lady Happy encourages the young women to embrace the similarity between their own possession and experience of youthful beauty and the beauty of the natural world in spring. The food available to the residents also mirrors the seasons. Lady Happy explains, "we will have the choisest Meats every Season doth afford, and that every day our Meat, be drest several ways, and our drink cooler or hotter according to the several Seasons" (106). The food is "drest several ways" to encourage the kind of variety needed to stretch the appetites and reflects nature's

¹⁵ Irene Dash's pedagogical narrative of teaching the play characterizes this seasonal focus as an elegant, decorative, or even female-coded characteristic of Cavendish's retreat (389). In contrast, my assertion is that Lady Happy's interest in the seasons is directly related to her attitude towards nature, as I will demonstrate below.

changes throughout the year. Nature serves as a guide both to nature's bounty and as the foundation of knowledge itself.

In the world of Cavendish's play, the whole body of knowledge available to humanity derives from nature. The philosophical foundation for Lady Happy's convent of pleasure emerges out of Margaret Cavendish's theory of matter, nature, and knowledge and her conversation with contemporary scientific empiricism. In Cavendish's *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, which she published in 1666 and revised in a second edition in 1668, she articulates her theory of matter and how people might best interpret the natural world¹⁶. Taking particular exception to Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*, Cavendish decries the distorting effects of artificial tools and experimentation in favor of rational inquiry into nature that could more clearly enable natural philosophers to interpret their experience of the natural world without error¹⁷. For Cavendish, the ability to see further and further into the microscopic world does not imply that people would have the interpretive or conceptual tools needed to correctly interpret what they see, and she argues for a kind of rational, philosophical inquiry into the nature of the material world as an antidote to the monstrous distortions made possible through the artificial means now available to groups like the Royal Society.

¹⁶ Cavendish's *Observations* establishes and defends a theory of matter that serves as the foundation of Cavendish's theory of knowledge, and the attached imaginative text, *The Description of a New Blazing World*, that complements this theory by enacting and rejecting the consequences of her contemporaries' theories. In *The Blazing World*, the Duchess of Newcastle (the fictionalized version of Margaret Cavendish) creates unsatisfactory worlds according to—among others—Platonic, Aristotelian, and Hobbesian rules before arriving at her preferred theory of self-moving matter (214).

¹⁷ Anna Battigelli explores the contrast between Cavendish's rationalism and experimentalism of the Royal Society at greater length and identifies Cavendish's central objection to the use of aids such as microscopes as an issue of "perception and epistemology" (95). For the broader context of artificial aids such as microscopes or telescopes as extensions of humanity's capacity for knowledge, consult Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence*, 252-3.

In her dedicatory letter to her husband, the Duke of Newcastle, Cavendish describes the difference in method between her approach to understanding the natural world and that propagated by the Royal Society's natural philosophers. She characterizes their work with 'artificial' aids to the senses as an irrational pursuit of other worlds that is ultimately divorced from reality: "The truth is, My Lord, that most men in these latter times, busy themselves more with other worlds, than with this they live in" (4). Cavendish positions her philosophical work as a response repudiating the methodological errors of these early scientists through the right application of rational thinking. She states, "I have but little faith in such arts, and as little in telescopical, microscopical, and the like inspections; and prefer rational and judicial observations, before deluding glasses and experiments" (4). Cavendish's rational observations are clearly at odds with the experimental ethos of the Royal Society insofar as she questions the supposed impartiality and clarity of experimentation itself as a reliable basis for knowledge. In opposition to an experimentalist epistemology, Cavendish enacts her rational and philosophical alternative by explaining how the logic of her theory of matter explains natural phenomena such as the operation of the rational human mind.

Crucially, Cavendish founds her mechanistic theory of perception on consent and challenges the Hobbesian principle of force. Cavendish begins by arguing that the whole of the material world is continuous in kind but can differ in degree. She prefaces the beginning of the text with "An Argumental Discourse Concerning some principal subjects in natural philosophy; necessary for the better understanding, not only of this, but all other philosophical works hitherto written by the authoress" (23). Cavendish frames this opening discourse as a key to understanding the rest of her philosophical

works, and her theory of matter is central to both her objections to the natural philosophy of her day and her epistemology more generally. She explains, “as for matter itself, there are no more degrees but animate and inanimate; that is, a self-moving, active, and perceptive, and a dull, passive and moved degree” (30). Throughout *Observations*, Cavendish explains and refines her argument that all parts of matter belong to the greater whole of nature and that each of these parts can be more or less rational, sensitive, and animate¹⁸. Because all matter contains a measure of these three characteristics, all matter has the ability to act and move with volition. This assumption is the basis for Cavendish’s focus on the consent of the individual as the true source of knowledge rather than religious retreat. In Cavendish’s natural philosophy, the consent of each individual part of matter is the basis of all sensation and—as a result—all knowledge.

The debate between Cavendish and the natural philosophers of her day was over the nature and foundation of knowledge itself. In *Observations*, Cavendish argues that the entire world that humanity interacts with, perceives, and rationally understands is part of the material world of Nature. For the mind to perceive and know the material world, Cavendish argues, it must be material as well. Towards the end of the first part of the text in a section titled “Of Knowledge and Perception in General,” she contends that all things belonging to nature must be made of the same kind of matter: “Nature is purely corporeal or material, and there is nothing that belongs to, or is a part of nature, which is not corporeal; so that natural and material, or corporeal, are one and the same; and therefore spiritual-beings, non-beings, mixt-beings, and whatsoever distinctions the learned do

¹⁸ In *The Matter of Revolution*, John Rogers argues that Cavendish understands the phenomena and variety in the natural world as the logical consequence of “the organization and reorganization of [matter’s] three distinct types of internal parts: the ‘rational’ animate matter, the ‘sensitive’ animate matter, and, finally, the inanimate matter” (191).

make, are no ways belonging to nature” (137). As Cavendish describes nature, it consists of the whole of the material universe, and all parts within it are wholly bound by the limits of materiality.

Cavendish describes the actions of the human mind and all rationality or perception in the observable universe as fundamentally material in origin. She writes, “In short, conception, imagination, remembrance, experience, observation, and the like, are all made by corporeal, self-knowing, perceptive self-motion, and not by insensible, irrational, dull, and moveless matter” (149). She contends that each of these perceptive and intellectual activities are rooted in the material world and should not be considered to be the activity of a disembodied mind or an immaterial soul—placing her at odds with emerging Cartesian ideas, the Cambridge Platonists, and orthodox Christian theological tradition. Motion and imagination operate by a principle of imitation that invites a physical, material response so that “there can no abstraction be made of motion or figure, from matter or body, but they are inseparably one thing” (*Observations* 137). Just as motion cannot be understood separately from the matter in motion, the mental image of the imagination and the mind’s perception should not be understood as something abstracted from the materiality of both the mind and the perceived object.

Cavendish’s account of sense, mind, and motion implicitly critiques Thomas Hobbes’ account of the material world and his application of that knowledge in a model of human community based upon force. In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues that human sensation finds its basis in the exertion of “pressure, by the mediation of the nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the brain and heart” (9). Similarly, Hobbes articulates his account of “*animal motion*” as the rule of the

imagination over the consequent movements of the body, passions, and mind: “it is evident, that the imagination is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motion” (33). For Hobbes, the model of the human, in which the more rational motion of the imagination controls the movement of the body, is the foundation of his model of human community. The social implication of Hobbes’ account of sense and motion is an understanding of the social in which the most powerful motion moves unencumbered. For this reason, Hobbes begins his discussion of justice and the ends of the state with the individual’s ability to maintain promises and covenants (95-7).

In contrast with Hobbes’ account of sense as governed by the rule of force and his account of the state as an artificial man governed by the just rule of force, Cavendish’s non-anthropomorphic account of self-moving matter distributes consent throughout the whole of the natural world, and her account of sense implies a model of human community predicated upon the consent of each individual. John Rogers notes, “Cavendish is not, like Hobbes, explicit about the analogical connection between the worlds of material and social organization. However ideologically resonant her philosophy may be, her account of matter in motion is never openly made available for a corresponding prescription for social interaction” (204). Rather than accept competition or force as the cause of even the smallest natural events, Cavendish’s theory of self-moving matter argues that consent is, in reality, the casual principle of the universe. Most notably, she describes the act of perception as a process of patterning, wherein the body and mind echo the perceived object of their own volition.

Within *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cavendish’s theory of the corporeal mind serves as the presumptive justification for a lifestyle that imitates and reflects the natural world’s

seasonal changes. Cavendish's argument that the operation of the mind is a fundamentally corporeal action is the reason she describes the mind's perceptive activity as patterning, or imitating, the natural world. When she discusses the operation of the human eye in *Observations*, she argues for a material, corporeal kind of perception that does not require pieces of the perceived object to be transferred into the mind itself. She writes, "Neither is any perception made by external objects, but by interior, corporeal, figurative motions; for the object doth not print or act any way upon the eye, but it is the sensitive motions in the eye which pattern out the figure of the object" (79)¹⁹. The matter that composes the human eye imitates and patterns the exterior world around it, and it is this way of understanding sensory perception that organizes with world within Lady Happy's convent. Besides enacting the model of human knowledge of the natural world explained in *Observations*, Cavendish's representation of the convent of pleasure reflects her understanding of nature as a whole and the stark boundaries that limit theological knowledge to mere glimpses and guesswork.

At the metaphorical pinnacle of Cavendish's system of natural philosophy, nature stands as a complete and infinite figure. It encompasses everything that exists in the natural world, including humanity, and the peak of nature's knowledge is complete knowledge of itself. What Cavendish describes as nature is the totality of matter and,

¹⁹ The second, related principle that justifies the "patterning" process in Cavendish's epistemology is the idea of nature's fundamental simplicity and wholeness. This leads her to reject proposals that the light enters the eye by others means (such as pressure or the mixture of matter) than a kind of imitation that echoes from the object to the mind: "light is patterned out by the corporeal figurative and perceptive motions of the optic sense, and not that its perception is made by its entrance into the eye, or by pressure and reaction, or by confused mixtures; by reason the way of patterning is an easy alteration of parts, whereas all others are forced and constrained, nay, unsettled, inconstant and uncertain" (76). She rejects other theories not because they are mechanically impossible but rather because they do not present what she considers the simplest, easiest "alteration of parts" and therefore fail the test of rationality that drives her inquiry into the natural world. Cavendish is deeply concerned with the governance and balance of the individual parts of nature because she is ultimately arguing for nature's inherent wholeness and unity.

importantly, the totality of knowledge available to nature is its complete self-knowledge of its own infinite self²⁰. As component parts of nature, humans can strive for knowledge of themselves and some additional perceptual knowledge about the material world, but anything beyond the material world is absolutely different and unknowable. In *Observations*, Cavendish argues, “God must needs be above nature, although nature is infinite and external...by reason nature is naturally infinite, which is infinite in quality and parts; but God is a spiritual, supernatural and incomprehensible infinite” (220). The incomprehensibility of God is a consequence of the fact that—as Cavendish states it—nature “is only bound by the omnipotent God’s decree, not to work beyond herself, that is, beyond matter” (139). The reason for this limit is on one hand the “decree” that organizes the material and immaterial universes, but it also justifies Cavendish’s argument that human knowledge of the divine always has a material origin.

In the first book of *Observations*, Cavendish entertains the question of “Whether an Idea have a Colour, and of the Idea of a Spirit” only to conclude that “it is impossible for man to make a figure, or picture of that which is not a part of nature” because “no part of nature...can perceive an immaterial...it is impossible to have a perception of that which is not perceptible” (89). For Cavendish, God stands outside of nature and is therefore inaccessible to any part of it²¹. Moreover, she argues, “it is impossible to have a

²⁰ While there is not enough space in this project to adequately address the fine differences between nature and matter within Cavendish’s natural philosophy, Lisa T. Sarasohn succinctly states, “Although [Cavendish] often uses the terms *nature* and *matter* interchangeably, nature is gendered as female only when Cavendish personifies it as the externalized self-governing principle of the totality of self-moving matter, rather than the inherent life and motion of matter” (*Natural Philosophy* 129). Cavendish describes the balanced and self-governing whole as ‘nature,’ which Cavendish insists is wholly made of matter, but her use of the term ‘matter’ differentiates the parts from the infinite, permanent, self-knowing whole.

²¹ As Lisa T. Sarasohn observes in her survey of Cavendish’s scientific writings in “A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish,” “[Cavendish’s]

corporeal idea of an infinite incorporeal being; for though the finite parts of nature may have a perception or knowledge of the existence of God, yet they cannot possibly pattern or figure him; he being a supernatural, immaterial, and infinite being” (88). Again Cavendish’s description of patterning as humanity’s way of perceiving the world necessarily limits it to material things that the senses can “pattern” or “figure” in the mind.

At best, Cavendish describes humankind as necessarily limited to secondhand knowledge of God from effects in the material world attributed to divine intervention or action: “as the sensitive perception knows some of the other parts of nature by their effects; so the rational perceives some effects of the omnipotent power of God...but not his infinite nature, nor essence, nor the cause of his infiniteness and omnipotency” (90). Because the rational powers of the human mind remain embedded within nature’s epistemological bounds, they cannot search beyond it to any sure knowledge of God. Lady Happy radically reshapes monastic life because of her investment in these theological and philosophical ideas. She reestablishes life in her convent on the principle of nature’s pleasure and, in the absence of any other means of evaluation, the existing stratified class structure²².

theology is completely negative; we can only know that God is not at all like us” (293). As I will demonstrate below, Cavendish’s philosophy of matter and its material epistemology is the foundation of this rigorously negative theology.

²² Fully considering Cavendish’s unbending belief in the classed social order—an idea that persists throughout her writing as clearly as her desire for fame or her rejection of fortune’s treatment of her family—requires that modern critics consider how that order reflects contemporary religious and philosophical thought. Theories about the material world’s relationship to the spiritual world described in religious and theological discourse have important implications for the justifications of political ideas and the forms of religious practice in ordinary life. Because seventeenth century religious and political ideas are frequently intermingled, critics must consider them together in order to avoid assuming a categorical distinction between them that would not have been fully recognized in the seventeenth century. In *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, for example, Jacqueline Broad notes that Cavendish’s contemporaries recognized the affinities between Cavendish’s ideas about the universe and radical thinkers

As for Cavendish herself, she appears unworried about the state of her own soul despite (or perhaps because of) the strict limits she places on the kind of theological knowledge available to humanity. Continuing her more general argument that nature has competing principles of unity and disunity within it despite its infinitude as a whole, Cavendish emphasizes the idea that parts of nature must necessarily know in part: “since nature is divisible in her parts, each part has but a particular knowledge of God, which is the cause of several religions, and several opinions in those religions; and nature being also compoundable, it causes a conformity and union of those opinions and religions in the fundamental knowledge, which is the existence of God” (216). The limitations placed on each individual person’s knowledge explains the variety and disagreement of competing religious systems, and Cavendish responds to these competing accounts by counseling a theologically passive stance that allows people to remain confident in the belief system to which they already belong²³.

Although she claims that not all people would be included among the elect, she remains confident she “may be one of them...as long as I follow the instruction of our blessed church, in which I have been educated” (217). Rather than suggest that the debates and disagreements—particularly over the last few centuries in Europe—are cause for despair, Cavendish argues that the limited, particular knowledge available to individual parts of nature is in fact a consolation for the soul:

such as Spinoza and Hobbes, and she intriguingly suggests that Cavendish’s philosophy shares considerable ground with Henry More’s theology despite its resistance to any form of mind/spirit dualism. The breadth and implications of Cavendish’s works mean that attempts to make distinctions between philosophy, science, and theology within Cavendish’s work will likely always be a provisional and perhaps misleading heuristic.

²³ For a similar stance in its emphasis on shared universals over fine theological points, see Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695).

[I]f man do but love God from his soul, and with all his power, and pray for his saving graces, and offend not any creature when offences can or may be avoided, and follow the only instructions of the sacred church, not endeavoring to interpret the word of God after his own fancy and vain imagination, but praying zealously, believing undoubtedly, and living virtuously and piously, he can hardly fall into despair (218).

In theological matters, the individual fancy and imagination that characterizes Cavendish's desire for achievement and lasting fame in poetic and intellectual matters becomes a liability in matters beyond the knowledge of nature and its parts. Because no sure knowledge is available, Cavendish suggests that the individual cede authority to tradition because it represents a greater body of knowledge (and thus a larger, more knowledgeable part of nature) and because no other credible option remains²⁴. By representing God as absolutely different from humanity and thus wholly incomprehensible to the rational mind, Cavendish makes a stark division between the scientific knowledge available within the natural, material world and the kind of knowledge best left to the domain of the church.

My contention, then, is that organizing a space of religious retreat from the world in the context of this understanding of the divine's stark difference from and absolute distance from the natural world produces a space much like Lady Happy's convent of pleasure. She establishes this space based on strictly limited claims about the present world that rely on nature and its pleasures as the resident's guide in the absence of spiritual or otherworldly dimension to human activity and experience. Within the walls of the convent, Lady Happy imagines an independent, feminine world unto itself that models the kind of unity Cavendish identifies with the infinite world of nature and the

²⁴ Auerbach summarizes, "[Montaigne] had the clearest conception of the problem of man's self-orientation; that is, the task of making oneself at home in existence without fixed modes of support" ("L'humaine Condition" 311).

infinite divine²⁵. In its conscious rejection of traditional public spaces of worship that Cavendish finds intellectually and philosophically untenable, *The Convent of Pleasure* contends that a physical space of religious retreat is ultimately illusory and reimagines the convent of pleasure within the domain of the individual mind.

The ending of *The Convent of Pleasure* presents an interpretive crux for modern literary critics and is a particularly significant series of events for critics interested in how Cavendish represents seventeenth-century gender roles and the inequalities of marriage. The play's stance towards Lady Happy's marriage to the male prince who had previously been disguised as a female princess and the object of Lady Happy's affections has been described as both an uncourageous capitulation to the social demands of heterosexual marriage and a disappointing defeat of her attempt to establish a space of individual agency. Andrew Hiscock, for example, characterizes Lady Happy as a figure of disorder whose transgression ultimately "[restores] the governing principles of heterosexuality, monogamy and gendered behaviour" with the aid of the Prince's threat of "brute force" (416). In this light, the play seems to stage a cathartic expression of women's frustrations while simultaneously legitimizing the existing social order.

By considering the text and its representation of religious retreat in the context of Cavendish's classification of the play as a comedy, however, I argue that the text concludes by reconfiguring the convent of pleasure as a metaphorical space within the individual [female] subject's mind rather than a physical space. As a closet drama—and

²⁵ Critic Catherine Gallagher has famously argued that Cavendish's interest in independent, subjective worlds of the mind is in part a response to the social pressures that limited Cavendish's opportunities as a woman writer: "[Cavendish's] emphasis on the microcosm of the self does suggest a compensatory withdrawal; because her sex conflicts with her ambitions, she retreats to the domain of subjectivity" (27). In a sense, Cavendish's independent worlds—like that in *The Convent of Pleasure*—are figurative representations of a retreat away from the damaging social conventions that excluded women from meaningful intellectual and political roles.

thereby necessarily positioned between imaginative space and the material space of performance—the play dramatizes the collapse of religious retreat as a physically bounded space and its renewal as a metaphoric space within the mind of the consenting individual²⁶. Cavendish argues in *Observations* that nature is the only authoritative guide to the divine will and that pleasure serves as an index of nature’s will in the world. Lady Happy’s marriage represents Cavendish’s unwillingness to condemn the institution of marriage entirely despite having devoted almost an entire act to directly condemning its particular dangers and inequalities for women. Instead, the individual’s pleasure and consent become the criteria by which readers can evaluate Lady Happy’s individual case rather than the more tantalizingly direct critiques of marriage that appear at the center of the play.

These critiques appear almost from the beginning of *The Convent of Pleasure*, as Lady Happy describes many of the benefits of her convent as their retreat from the abuses of men. At the beginning of Act II, the gentleman Monsieur Adviser draws on the same religious terminology used earlier by Lady Happy in his complaint against her decision to remove herself from the town’s marriage market: “Her Heretical Opinions ought not to be suffer’d, nor her Doctrine allow’d; and she ought to be examined by a Masculine Synod, and punish’d with a severe Husband, or tortured with a deboist Husband” (104)²⁷. Even at this early point in the play, however, Cavendish is already articulating an

²⁶As Hero Chalmers has argued in *Royalist Women Writers 1650-1689*, closet drama provides both a space of retreat and collective empowerment (132). Chalmers argues more generally that Cavendish’s interest in the empowerment of isolation during her midcentury continental exile reflects the model of the exiled court of Henrietta Maria (141). In contrast, this chapter finds that Cavendish’s rejection of the isolation of religious retreat in *The Convent of Pleasure* extends from her account of matter and human knowledge.

²⁷ Editors Bowerbank and Mendelson gloss the term “deboist” as “debauched” in their modern edition of *The Convent of Pleasure* (104n1).

alternative framework for understanding the problems and suffering generally caused by marriage.

A few moments earlier, Madam Mediator explains Lady Happy's rejection of the world of men, "instead of increasing Pleasure, [men] produce Pain; and, instead of giving Content, they increase Trouble; instead of making the Femal-Sex Happy, they make them Miserable; for which, she hath banished the Masculine Company for ever" (104). Lady Happy has made her judgment based on the test of pleasure, and Cavendish relies on the fact that one does not need to be a contemporary social historian to understand that the contemporary hegemony of men has caused the suffering of women throughout English society. The happy state of women, then, is a pleasurable existence, and a miserable state is generally one caused by women's subordination to men and the state of greater vulnerability that this subordination causes. From Lady Happy's understanding of nature as the guide to God's will, it is the *men* whose doctrine is "[h]eretical," and her retreat away from the social problems caused by men is equally the pursuit of an ideal form of religious practice.

Within the convent, the women frequently remind themselves of the miserable state of women living outside of its walls. In Act III, the center of *The Convent of Pleasure*, Lady Happy and her companion the princess (who has not yet been discovered to be the disguised prince) watch a series of theatrical scenes depicting the suffering that marriage causes for women of all social classes. The verse epilogue of the play summarizes its argument: "*Marriage is a Curse we find, / Especially to Women kind: / From the Cobler's Wife we see, / To Ladies, they unhappie be*" (117). Regardless of women's social status, the play argues that institution of marriage causes unbearable

suffering for women. In a series of short scenes, the women in Lady Happy's convent provide examples of the problems outside of the convent's walls caused by drunken and unfaithful husbands, the pain and mortal dangers of childbirth, the death of a child, and the broad threat of sexual violence that forces women into marriage (112-117).

The play may also suggest that the conventions of love and infatuation also contribute to women's state of unhappiness. Lady Happy exclaims in private, as she might in a prose romance, "My Name is *Happy*, and so was my Condition, before I saw this Princess; but now I am like to be the most unhappy Maid alive: But why may not I love a Woman with the same affection I could a Man?" (118). Nevertheless, the solution to the problem of love or desire is its consonance with the rule of nature. She concludes in verse, "No, no, Nature is Nature, and still will be / The same she was from all Eternity" (118). If pleasure generally functions as the guide to the divine will for human action, the rules of nature that generate this pleasure are the underlying justifications that produce or deny pleasure in the material world.

It is difficult to explain Lady Happy's eventual capitulation to marriage in light of these assertions about marriage as a fundamentally miserable state without considering these statements in the context of the play's other metatheatrical performances. In a kind of symbolic masque performed just before the discovery of the prince's identity, Lady Happy—as a sea goddess—describes fleeing the uncomfortable heat of the sun for a crown of her own: "But when the Sun begins to burn, / I back into my Water turn, / And dive unto the bottom low: / Then on my head the Waters flow, / In Curled waves and Circles round; / And thus with Waters am I Crown'd" (126). The disguised prince's speech likewise concludes with the idea of the sovereignty of the individual subject. In

the guise of Neptune, the princess states, “I am sole Monarch of the sea, / And all therein belongs to me” (127). The ideal of the self as a microcosm functions as an analogy to nature and shares nature’s wholeness and complete self-knowledge. Although nature remains the ideal in *The Convent of Pleasure*, Lady Happy seeks to emulate or pattern the wholeness of Nature within herself rather than seeking to merely experience its passing pleasures.

The evidence suggesting that this play ends with a tragic loss seems at first almost overwhelming, and modern critical attention has focused almost exclusively on the nature and operation of these losses. Jacqueline Pearson suggests that the “central theme” in Cavendish’s plays is “women’s access to language in a world dominated by man and the language of men,” which might suggest that Lady Happy’s almost complete silence following the Prince’s discovery represents the loss of everything she attempted to achieve within the convent’s walls (“Women” 37). Even more explicitly, Anne Shaver observes that the play’s heroine, “so valuable and opinionated as long as she was in control of her “convent,” speaks only a few inconsequential lines, mostly to Mimick, a professional fool, who treats her with little respect. Thus by argument, by illustration, and by the silencing of its heroine, even as it ends conventionally *The Convent of Pleasure* takes aim against marriage for women” (“Agency” 189). Without discounting or marginalizing the tragic qualities of the play’s ending, it is worth considering the reasons that Cavendish chose to classify her work as a comedy.

One possible solution to this interpretive problem would be to merely observe that the play ends in a marriage, however happy or miserable, and this alone is sufficient to characterize it as a comedy. When Madam Mediator responds to the secondhand news of

the Prince[ss] and Lady Happy's agreement to marry, she remains skeptical towards the state's anticipated "advantage by the match" and cautions, "Yes, yes; but there is an old and true Saying, *There's much between the Cup and the Lip*" (131). It might be possible to consider the marriage as an extension of Lady Happy's broader principles at the expense of her local rule—the pleasure of one ideally happy marriage might align it with the rule of nature even if the majority of marriages fail to pass nature's test. One might even turn to the biographical paradox that Cavendish, such a staunch critic of marriage's negative effects, seems to have enjoyed a relatively happy marriage²⁸.

Taking Cavendish's philosophical and theological approach to the material world into account invites readers to accept her classification of *The Convent of Pleasure* as a comedy despite the convent's closure in the final act of the play. When the new bride and groom leave the stage in the final scene of Act V, the "Mimick," described by Bowerbank and Mendelson as a "pantomimist or buffoon" remains on the stage to deliver the epilogue (131n2). During the scene, he calls attention to the action of mimickry or imitation by observing, "you've now a *Mimick* of your own, for the *Prince* has imitated a Woman" (132)²⁹. His epilogue, which emphasizes the supreme power and potential violence of "*our Poetess*" who may "*kill me with her pen,*" likewise calls attention to the imitative power of sight: "*But I shall weep, my inward Grief shall show / Through Floods of Tears, that through my Eyes will flow. / And so poor Mimick he for sorrow die. / And*

²⁸ Anne Shaver notes, "There is even more evidence than in [Mary] Wroth's case, including direct autobiographical accounts too numerous and consistent to doubt, that although young Margaret Lucas had dreaded marriage before the fact, she was in love with William Cavendish and he with her. Their life together, both in the vicissitudes of foreign exile and in their post-restoration retreat to country life at Welbeck, seems to have been a warm and unusually companionate one" ("Agency" 178). Shaver observes that positive descriptions of marriage within Cavendish's oeuvre, when they occur, are those that most resemble her own.

²⁹ *The Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that contemporary uses of the noun "mimic[k]" referred to imitation and the act of miming in addition to the person of the jester or buffoon.

then through pity you may chance to cry: / But if you please, you may a Cordial give, / Made up with Praise, and so he long may live” (134). As before, Cavendish reminds her reader of the idea of imitation: the tears of the character on stage invite the tears of the audience through pity, and the generous praise of the audience permits the Mimick to enjoy a similar lively state. Consent and imitation, then, return as the focus on the play’s finale.

At this point in the play, Cavendish reminds her audience and readers of the idea of imitation, because this final sequence of the play enacts the principle of patterning that she uses to explain the mind’s perception of the material world in *Observations*. The figure of the Mimick draws attention to the act of mimicry, and does not merely serve as a comic epithalamion. Even in Cavendish’s earlier 1662 play, *The Bridals*, the Mimick appears as a professional fool, but one whose actions are characterized by linguistic echoing and satirical imitation³⁰.

This epilogue encourages listeners to reflect upon the action of imitation and its role throughout the play. The convent itself is therefore no longer necessary because perceiving the convent reproduces it within the mind of the play’s readers and audience. As a material act based on a principle on self-moving matter, perception grants consent and reproduces what has been seen within the self. The convent becomes a material part of the audience, and it therefore is not destroyed with Lady Happy’s departure. In a sense, it offers what critic Alessa Johns describes as an imagined world with a “reproductive model” that “contains within itself the power to proliferate the replicate itself” (19). By perceiving—in a necessarily material, imitative way—the operation and ideals of the convent, Cavendish’s model of sense and knowledge suggests that the readers and

³⁰ See Cavendish’s *The Bridals*, Act II, scene 1 and Act III, scene 2.

audience of the play can continue to embrace the values and ideas of the convent beyond its original, material location.

The material basis of the mind's reasoning and perceiving activity in Cavendish's philosophy implies that Lady Happy's space dedicated to the pursuit and valuation of nature is not lost but is instead imitated and patterned in the minds of those who have perceived it. Creating an imagined world, then, is not merely an act of imagination, but an action that intervenes in the material world because the activity of the mind is located within the category of the material. As Johns argues about what she terms "feminist utopias," in these imagined spaces "human behavior is guided not by external forces but from within" (14). By dramatizing the shift between the material space set aside from the rest of the world to an analogous internal version of that space, Cavendish emphasizes the continuity between the material nature of the mind and the present, physical world. As both the convent and the internal patterning of the convent in the reader's mind are sites of the individual's consent, both model Cavendish's final representation of religious retreat.

The unresolved consequence that remains in Cavendish's method is in some senses an ethical and possibly theological problem apparent in the play's silence on the issue of Lady Happy's marriage. The closing of Lady Happy's cloister at the end of the play clearly signals a monumental shift in the state's power relations that reinstates the values of hierarchical class and the traditional norms of aristocratic marriage. Lady Happy's choice, after all, is the greatest possible match for her in light of the mere gentlemen and younger sons that sought to woo her from the beginning of the play. Cavendish's reliance on traditional forms and structures of power ultimately derives from

her model of human knowledge. As this chapter has demonstrated, her later seventeenth-century work strictly divides the materiality of human knowledge and perception from traditional guides to ethical and virtuous action. Cavendish frequently indicates that she prefers to leave the discussion of fine religious points to the divines, but—more importantly—she argues that human knowledge cannot access or comprehend the immaterial or infinite.

The idea of placing Margaret Cavendish's representations of ideal spaces in the context of debates about the materiality of spirit and the nature of God is contentious and at first seems to conflict with the content and spirit of much of her work. In "Playing with Religion: Convents, Cloisters, Martyrdom, and Vows," Erna Kelly summarizes the prevailing critical assumption that Cavendish generally avoids or dismisses religious belief, but Kelly ultimately suggests that concerns that are traditionally understood as religious are nevertheless relevant to Cavendish's work. She admits that this argument seems to conflict with most of Cavendish's work at first, as there is a striking "relative lack of religious references in [Cavendish's] texts, especially when compared with contemporary women writers" (par. 3). Furthermore, Kelly observes that Cavendish's "texts often appear to dismiss belief in God" and concedes that it is tempting to conclude that "[Cavendish] does not temper her humanist ideal with Christian ideals" because her works often address the negative effects that religious ideologies frequently have on contemporary women (par. 1, par. 3-4). In particular, Kelly points to Margaret Cavendish's focus on fame as tempting alternatives to ordinary Christian understandings of the afterlife and the value of the virtue of humility (par. 2). Looking back at the increasing number of Cavendish's works that have come to light and the increasingly

nuanced criticism of her work that has become available in the last few decades, however, Kelly modifies her position to allow for the possibility that Cavendish may have at least some admiration for religious ideas or practices³¹.

Even if religion as ordinarily understood is “relatively unimportant to [Cavendish],” Kelly allows for the possibility “that religion, especially Roman Catholicism, held some attraction for [Cavendish] beyond the utility she ascribes to religion in general” (par. 6). The factors that Kelly identifies include Roman Catholicism’s support of the hierarchal relations that Cavendish supported and the support that the vows of a modified form of monastic life provides for Lady Happy in *The Convent of Pleasure*, “with whom Cavendish could identify,” that may represent “the religion of the continental countries that gave Cavendish and many other English exiles a home” (par. 10, 13). Some of the more utilitarian possibilities that Kelly suggests include religion’s use “as a means to defend her ideas about the material universe or, even more importantly, as a means to improve society, for her class, but also for all, since a well-run society, she would argue, benefits everyone, including the upper classes” (par. 6). It is my contention, however, that critics cannot fully separate Cavendish’s “ideas about the material universe” as a philosophical end from her means of articulating the relationship between the divine and the world of human knowledge and experience. Her physics is her metaphysics.

³¹ In doing so, my approach to Cavendish’s work differs from Katie Whitaker’s assessment of Cavendish’s religious faith. She writes, “Margaret was a practicing Anglican who frequently asserted her unquestioning belief in that faith, but her true religious feelings were open to question...Margaret herself clearly lacked the profound Christian sense that informed the lives and occasional writings of many more devout women” (*Mad Madge* 317). Rather than seek to assess the sincerity of Cavendish’s faith through the litmus test of contemporary devotional expressions or a unified Christian sensibility, I instead allow for the possibility that her assertions of faith may be genuine, albeit based upon assumptions about the world and the limits of human knowledge that differ significantly from many of her female contemporaries.

Although many modern critics like Katie Whitaker have characterized Margaret Cavendish as wholly unorthodox or radical in her religious and philosophical opinions, her work might be more clearly understood in light of the religious language and ideas with which she engages. Her representation of an ideal space in *The Convent of Pleasure* continues to directly engage with the language of the dominant Christian discourse of religious vocation—convents, nuns, and the senses—and her work might be understood as a space of religious retreat because its differentiation from the ordinary world is directly based on her theological principles. Cavendish’s convent is shaped by her understanding of the divine object of religious faith as absolutely different from humanity and therefore only accessible through material approximations inherently limited by the bounds of nature itself.

With no intellectually defensible knowledge of the spiritual world, Cavendish implicitly falls back upon what she considers to be England’s traditional hierarchical system and its church—not because it can be proved to be absolutely correct, but because no political and religious system can be proved absolutely correct. In her imaginative *Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*, for example, the inhabitants of the Blazing World argue that the monarchy is a natural form of government in stating, “as it was natural for one body to have but one head, so it was also natural for a Politick body to have but one Governor” (*Blazing* 164). Because of the strict limits she places upon human knowledge of spiritual or immaterial orders of reality, Cavendish does not argue for an alternative system of values capable of compelling the allegiance of all people in an intellectually defensible way³².

³² In the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, Cavendish seems to maintain a partisan preference for the hierarchically ordered political world that she aligned herself with through her role in

Situated in the context of contemporary debates about the material world, Cavendish's philosophical positions are conversant with religious ideas in spite of her seemingly conscious effort to avoid the traditional language of piety. Her model of a convent oriented towards the senses based on her theory of mind and matter is implicated in religious and philosophical debates about the material world. Cavendish's account of religious space therefore converses with the Royal Society's claims to empiricism and Thomas Hobbes' mechanistic account of the universe's basis in force. In its broader context, Cavendish's work contributes to a growing association among enclosed, private spaces, religious practices, and the individual's mental activity in the English Restoration and long eighteenth century. Cavendish understands nature to be the only possible guide to right human action in the present world, and by ultimately transforming the convent of pleasure into a dedicated space in the mind rather than a space in the world, she allows women to continue to pursue nature's goods from their existing stations in the world. In doing so, Cavendish links her revised religious epistemology with private, enclosed spaces that reflect the individual's consent.

Cavendish's *Lady Happy* rejects the idea of a traditional form of ascetic religious retreat because it resists the values and pleasures of nature, and Cavendish's philosophical writings likewise argue that nature is the only available guide to human action in the present world. As a consequence of her emphasis on the materiality of the human mind and its perception, her political and imaginative writings argue for the

Henrietta Maria's court as a young woman and through her marriage to William Cavendish. Many of Cavendish's plays draw upon a presumably natural hierarchically ordered class system even as they begin to ask questions about women's marginalization and political participation in England. Erika Mae Olbricht's reading of Cavendish's drama *The Lady Contemplation*, for example identifies it as a play in which "[s]ocial mobility is here shown to be not only undesirable, but also impossible...social mobility is denied in preference for the always-already noble" (88). Although willing to permit a certain degree of fluidity in social roles, Olbricht finds that Cavendish's play ultimately maintains the existing stratified order through the idea of innate virtue that essentializes the differences between the classes.

absolute difference of the divine and its absolute incomprehensibility to human minds³³.

The result of this position is that Cavendish draws sharp boundaries around religious and theological claims that divide theological ideas from other forms of human knowledge, such as natural philosophy and politics. Her dedicated space of religious retreat ultimately does not require a physical manifestation because a convent, entrenched wholly in the material world, cannot approach the divine any more than the human mind. Conversely, both the bounded space of the convent and the retreat of the necessarily material mind are places in which the consenting individual may pursue the pleasures and joys of the natural world.

Margaret Cavendish's representation of religious retreat in *The Convent of Pleasure* resembles Milton's account of religious knowledge in the sense that she argues that the present world offers limited knowledge or, in her case, no knowledge of an inaccessible spiritual reality. Her interest in reconciling the idea of dedicated religious

³³ Cavendish's commitment to the materiality of human thought, knowledge, and reason opposes the material world of nature with the inaccessible world of true spirit. Her works generally consider spirit and divinity in particular as absolutely other and therefore completely incomprehensible to minds embedded within the material world. In its strict negativity, Cavendish's philosophical and theological commitments anticipate Søren Kierkegaard's account of divinity in *Philosophical Fragments*:

[I]t is the absolutely different for which one has no distinguishing mark. Defined as the absolutely different, it would appear to be on the way to being revealed, but this is not so, because absolute difference cannot even be thought; because the understanding cannot absolutely negate itself, but uses itself in order to do this and thus thinks this difference in its own terms, that it thinks via itself; it cannot go beyond itself absolutely and thus conceives this thing which transcends itself by means of itself (117).

Kierkegaard's principle of absolute difference assumes a subjective model of human knowledge in which the subject's perceptual limits are based on self-knowledge. For this reason, the human subject cannot understand or interpret anything that is absolutely different, and any inkling that the subject has of being or existence beyond itself is in some way derived from the self. As the absolutely different in Kierkegaard's terms, Cavendish understands the divine to be wholly inaccessible and incomprehensible and considers the material world to be the absolute boundary of human knowledge. This commitment stands on the boundary between what modern readers might characterize as theological and philosophical forms of knowledge. Cavendish's negative approach to religious space and religious knowledge is surprisingly modern even as it demonstrates how the categories of the religious and the philosophical are interrelated in the early modern period.

space with an account of knowledge based upon the individual's consent demonstrates her engagement with contemporary scientific and philosophical concerns. The social implications of Lady Happy's convent and its reinstatement of traditional gender roles on the new foundation of individual consent anticipate the concerns of later writers such as John Bunyan, Mary Astell, and William Penn. Just as Cavendish's play wrestles with the social consequences of her account of nature as the source of authoritative religious knowledge, each of these writers struggles rely on a shared discourse of religious retreat as he or she seeks to reconcile the individual's ways of knowing with the shared ends of religious community.

CHAPTER 4

LABOR, INTERPRETATION, AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN JOHN BUNYAN'S *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*, PART II AND *SOLOMON'S TEMPLE SPIRITUALIZED*

After the English Restoration, both John Milton and John Bunyan turn to representations of religious retreat in order to address the problem of locating authoritative religious knowledge in the present world. For the Son in Milton's *Paradise Regained*, this process of interpretation develops out of the individual's inward self but remains in tension with literary representation's reliance on the outward evidence of the senses. Bunyan's allegorical continuation of his popular *Pilgrim's Progress* articulates the tension between the interpretive authority of the individual's experience and the authoritative voice of the visible church. Spaces of religious retreat in Bunyan's text reveal the instructional and experiential modes of authority that offer two radically different foundations for the visible church. These representations of religious space illustrate Bunyan's engagement with the seventeenth century's changing bases of human knowledge and the implications of that knowledge for the shared ends of religious community¹.

Both parts of the *Pilgrim's Progress* are concerned with the activity of the Christian church in the present world. In this chapter, I focus on *Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II (1684) in particular because it considers how the interpretation of religious space

¹ In this study, I have considered the ways in which the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* further articulates or explains themes and ideas present in much of the rest of Bunyan's work. In exploring the unity of these texts, my work in this project reflects N.H. Keeble's assertion that critics might productively consider the two parts together rather than assess their relative merits ("Christiana's Key" 1). Melissa D. Aaron has remarked upon the critical consensus that the second part of the text is focused more directly on the issues of communal life within her broader argument for the text's staging of an alternative society's establishment in the present world with political connotations ("Christiana and her train").

affects the visible church as Christiana and her train travel towards the Celestial City in imitation of her late husband's heroic journey. In his extended allegory, Bunyan uses the presence of two complementary forms of laborious activity to identify the spaces of religious retreat that the pilgrims encounter on their journey². I describe the first of these identifying factors as grace, which consists of God's already accomplished work on behalf of humanity³. The presence of grace in Bunyan's spaces of religious retreat includes God's providence on behalf of the created world and Christ's sacrifice to restore that creation. Bunyan models this account of grace upon John Calvin's account of salvation and election. The second identifying factor of human labor more closely resembles Martin Luther's account of sanctification as a necessary human response to God's grace and providence.

In Bunyan's allegorical continuation of his popular *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), dedicated religious spaces are sites where grace and labor are intertwined. Bunyan's representation of religious space in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II rejects the idea that these are merely spaces of rest. When his pilgrims find rest and safety, Bunyan reminds his reader of the presence of a complex background of laborious activity that distinguishes these spaces from the fallen world⁴. He relies on the complementary labor

² In light of recent historical study of privacy and space in the early modern period, my study considers included spaces as well as spaces marked by more obvious architectural boundaries. For the role of outdoor spaces as a form of privacy in the early modern period, see Mary Thomas Crane, "Privacy and Outdoor Spaces in Early Modern England," 8.

³ By placing God's activity under the category of work rather than labor, I distinguish between the status of grace and providence as completed tasks and the ongoing process that characterizes the reciprocal labor of human activity. I make this distinction in light of Hannah Arendt's discussion of the fundamental difference between work and labor in the context of human artifice in *The Human Condition*, 136-7.

⁴ For a broader sense of the shifting cultural attitudes towards labor in the seventeenth-century and the idea of labor as productive of a different kind of ideal, Edenic space, see Joanna Picciotto's *Labors of Innocence*, 460-1.

of God and the church to distinguish spaces of religious retreat from the ordinary, fallen world.

In this way, the task of identifying these spaces of religious retreat relates directly to the shared life and work of the church. Bunyan's representation of these religious spaces precipitates an internal crisis in interpretive authority that extends from the text's competing modes of internal and external authority. Because Bunyan's allegory subordinates the individual experience of its female characters to a centralized, masculine religious authority, it creates tension between the authority of experience and that of the visible church. In this chapter, I refer to these spaces of rest as spaces of religious retreat in order to emphasize the connotations of "retreat" as both a culturally constructed space and an ongoing process of interpretation⁵.

Bunyan and his readers must be able to identify the presence of the text's two categorically different kinds of labor in order to distinguish the church's space of rest from its worldly antithesis. For Bunyan, grace separates the ordinary labor of humanity from God's providential labor capable of carving out a space for the visible church in this

⁵ Bunyan's literary critics have considered the pilgrims' spaces of rest—comparable to the religious spaces of the Hebrew Temple and the apocalyptic New Jerusalem that appear elsewhere in Bunyan's work—through the question of church membership and conversion and in light of the practices and beliefs of Bunyan's nonconformist congregation. Richard L. Greaves, who along with Christopher Hill rejuvenated Bunyan criticism by drawing attention to Bunyan's nonconformist and revolutionary contexts, identifies "a place of relief and security" in the narrative of *The Pilgrim's Progress* with "the Separatist church" (Greaves 123). As Greaves characterizes it, the pilgrim's reception into the Palace Beautiful mirrors the believer's reception into Bunyan's nonconformist church. As Greaves describes it, the believer is planted into this congregation by the action of divine grace alone: "The church, in effect, was a garden—the soil in which the elect were planted and cultivated by the Master Gardener" (125). His discussion of the parallels between the practices of this space and Bunyan's church offers an important historical perspective that locates Bunyan within the intellectual currents and ideas of his own time. Nevertheless, this reading does not address the complex formation of religious spaces in Bunyan's work and, by extension, the epistemological problem of locating oneself within this garden or palace. If the processes of establishing one's relation to a space and establishing a community that participates in a shared religious space do not share an epistemological ground, this vision of Bunyan's ecclesiology is a far more complex and tenuous project than critics generally appreciate. Emphasizing the role of divine work and human labor in the formation of these religious spaces along the way in *The Pilgrim's Progress* illuminates Bunyan's sense of the tension between the individual interpreter and the visible church.

world. His pilgrims distinguish the church's religious space by searching for God's participation in the labor of humanity, but they find that this labor is only visible in the presence of human activity. As the author of the prominent *Pilgrim's Progress* as an active participant in a range of late seventeenth century theological debates, Bunyan focuses on the identification of religious space and the epistemological consequences of this interpretive process⁶. Finally, Bunyan's account of the reader's experience recalls the space of religious retreat in his suggestion that the allegorical text depends upon the complementary activity of the text and its reader.

To situate Bunyan's representation of religious space in the context of Bunyan's overarching concerns about the interpretation of space and the foundations of religious community, I begin by considering Bunyan's *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized* (1688). This detailed typological treatise on the construction and practices of the Hebrew temple is Bunyan's most sustained analysis of religious space⁷. *Solomon's Temple* demonstrates how the complementary relationship between labor and grace serves as the marker of religious space and provides the clearest articulation of Bunyan's theory of the relationship between labor and religious spaces that shapes the experiences of his more famous pilgrims. In this comparatively minor prose tract, Bunyan outlines the design and layout of the temple and describes how its features prophetically anticipate Christ's life

⁶ These issues appear throughout Bunyan's writing in the late seventeenth century. In his 1688 verse text, *A Discourse of the Building, Nature, Excellency, and Government Of the House of God*, he considers the idea of retirement more directly and draws upon a shared set of images as *Solomon's Temple* (3). His earlier polemical tract, *Questions about the Nature and Perpetuity of the Seventh-Day Sabbath* (1685), offers evidence that Bunyan consistently links the idea of rest with particularly religious spaces—in this case, the land of Canaan, which typologically overlaps with the images of both Jerusalem and the Hebrew Temple (51).

⁷ Dayton Haskin succinctly describes the typological method as “contemplat[ing] the resemblance between two historical events” that “afforded a privileged position to the later event without denying the significance of the earlier” (82).

and activity. His interest in the temple's ornamentation emphasizes the role of the artisan's labor even as it highlights divine providence as a complementary form of divine labor. The space of the temple is therefore a specifically religious space because it depends upon the intersection of human labor and the divine work that invests human labor with meaning.

In Bunyan's typological tract about the Hebrew Temple and its mystical realization in the ideal church, Bunyan consistently calls attention to the ornamentation and artistry that separates the temple space from the raw material of the mundane world. Throughout this tract, Bunyan asks his reader to interpret these signs through the lens of divine providence and the symbols' typological fulfillment in Christ's sacrifice⁸. In doing so, he directs the reader's attention to complex symbols that blur the boundaries between the work of humanity and divine grace and providence. Bunyan describes a profound connection between the labor of the temple's builders and God's providential activity.

When Bunyan describes the foundation and construction of Solomon's temple, he focuses on the workmen's skill and labor as the force that shapes raw materials into the building blocks of the temple. The craftsmen's labor is key to the appropriateness of the material for use in the temple's construction: "The timber and stones with which the Temple was builded, was *squared* and *hewed* at the *Wood* or *Pitt*; and so there was made every way fit for that Work" (17). The labor of squaring and hewing the temple's stones and timber distinguishes them from their ordinary state and dedicates them to the purpose

⁸ Michael Mullett briefly discusses what he describes as an almost pathological Christocentric typological method in *Solomon's Temple* in *John Bunyan in Context*. Mullett observes that the "intensity with which the typology is pressed home" to make each element of the temple into a Christological symbol in this tract is frequently surprising and startling (275).

of generating a religious space that is likewise distinguished from the ordinary spaces of human life.

This labor overwrites the inherent unworthiness of the original materials. Bunyan writes, “the Materials of which the House was builded, were (before the hand of the Work-man touched them) as unfit to be lay’d in the building, as was those that were left behind; consequently that themselves none otherwise but by the Art of others, were made fit to be laid in this building” (17). For Bunyan, then, human labor plays a central role in separating the temple’s space from the rest of the world. The art of the “Work-man” lends distinction to the naturally “unfit” raw material. In this sense, Bunyan implies that human labor is capable of transforming space’s meaning and purpose. Labor therefore appears to be an important part of distinguishes this specifically religious space from those spaces full of unfit material.

While labor is necessary for this transformation, Bunyan’s tract deliberately hides it from view. He reminds readers that this work occurs “even before they were brought to the place where the house should be set up. *So that there was there, neither Hammer, nor Axe, nor any Tool of Iron heard in the house while it was in Building*” (17). In Bunyan’s narrative, the workman build the temple far away from the lumberyard and the clatter of workmen’s tools. Bunyan is careful to observe that the labor that generates the temple’s building materials remains at a remove from the temple grounds themselves. The hidden labor underlying this dedicated religious space indicates Bunyan’s broader interest in the intersection of human labor and divine grace. As a whole, Bunyan’s text argues that the human labor implied in the material processes of building the temple finds its fulfillment in Christ’s sacrifice for the individual subject and the church more generally. The shift

from the criteria of visible labor available outside of the subject's religious experience to an internal and more individual understanding of labor and space will play an important role in the formation of religious spaces in Bunyan's later allegorical narrative.

For this reason, Bunyan identifies the temple as the site of a dispensational shift in the origin of labor even as his text maintains labor's importance. He identifies the temple's workmen as types that foreshadow the future gospel ministers: "as he was famous of old, who was strong *to lift up his Axe upon the thick boughs, to square Wood for the building of the Temple: So a Minister of the Gospel now...if much used by Christ for the converting of Sinners to himself, that he may build him a Temple with them*" (16). In the old dispensation of Solomon's temple, the workman's labor directly shapes the building materials, but in the "New-Testament-Temple," the minister-laborer becomes a conduit through which Christ converts and reshapes the raw material of the fallen subject (17). In Bunyan's account of the changes wrought by Christ's sacrifice, Bunyan distinguishes the labor of the workman from the labor of the evangelist because the fame attributed to the former results from the worker's own abilities while the latter's fame is secondary to his or her instrumentality in God's work. Bunyan directs the reader's attention to the difference between the activity of Nature and Grace to explain this difference: "those...who are counted worthy to be laid in this building, are not by Nature, but by Grace made meet for it; not by their own Wisdom, but by the Word of God" (17). In both cases, labor enriches the raw materials, but the work of God's grace—extended through Christ's already completed sacrifice—acts directly upon these truly worthy members of the church's metaphorical building.

This alignment of human labor and God's work appears throughout Bunyan's account of the temple. He pauses to consider how the foundation stones' value came from "those additions which they received from the Kings charge" (19). The value added to the building materials comes from both the craftsman's shaping labor and the added gemstones that lend their value to the otherwise worthless base material. Bunyan identifies the value in the foundation stones as emerging first from the "labour which was bestowed upon them in *Sawing, Squaring, and Carving*" and second, "so, as it seems to me, they were *inlaid* with other Stones, *more precious than themselves*" (19). While the labor of the craftsman creates a form of value bound up in the material object—the unornamented foundation stone is more valuable than the uncut stone—the adorning gemstones transfer their own independent value to the stone. In the context of Bunyan's method of identifying the symbols throughout the Hebrew temple with their typological fulfillment in Christ, Bunyan's description of the foundation stones distinguishes the complementary categories of human labor and God's work of grace.

Bunyan's provided source text occurs in the context of Christ's prophesy of the temple's destruction and, as a result, the fulfillment of his sacrificial work in his crucifixion. In this passage, Jesus promises his followers that the temple's destruction would be followed by their own trials in the world: "When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, [Jesus] said, 'As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down'" (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Luke 21:5-6).

Bunyan's typological method allows his readers to understand that his reference to the first verse as evidence of the decorated temple falls within the broader salvation narrative

implied in Christ's prophesy of his coming execution. By calling the reader's attention to these separate categories of value, Bunyan distinguishes between ordinary human labor and the work of grace.

Representations of the lily are carved throughout the temple, and the biblical resonances of this image reveal how Bunyan articulates the relationship between human labor and God's grace in the production of dedicated religious space⁹. In the New Testament, the lily refers to the superiority of God's providence over humanity's labor. Bunyan explicitly reminds his reader of this biblical imagery, "*The Lilies*, saith Christ, *they toyl not, neither do they spin and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Matt. 6. 28, 29. Luk. 12 27, 28, 29*" (30)¹⁰. This passage is a foundational text for the traditional Christian doctrine of God's providence for the natural world, and Christ's explicit reference to Solomon in Bunyan's quoted passage emphasizes the superlative provision of God.

By referring to this scriptural text, Bunyan invites the reader to compare the construction of Solomon's temple with its typological realization in God's fashioning of the believer into a member of the church. In this way, the lily functions as shorthand for the idea that God's work is necessarily greater than the necessarily incomplete work produced by human labor. For example, Bunyan asserts that the lilies carved on the temple's pillars demonstrate how far Christ's true apostles "should be from seeking carnal things... There was *Lilie-work* upon them: That is, they lived upon the bounty and

⁹ The lily is also prominent in the iconography of the annunciation—a critical moment that aligns divine grace with the specifically feminine labor of childbirth.

¹⁰ Bunyan's inclusion of the direct scriptural references reinforces his assumption that his readers will have a familiarity with both reading the scriptural text and the non-linear reading practices that link these scriptural passages with shared themes or ideas.

care of God, and was content with that glory which he had put upon them” (30). He argues that God’s work of providence places glory upon them and that this glory therefore does not arise out of their own work or effort. Nevertheless, Bunyan’s reference to this “*Lilie-work*” plays a more complex role in the context of this tract and its formation of religious space because it refers to carved works of art rather than the naturally occurring flowers of the field.

In *Solomon’s Temple*, the lily calls attention to both God’s providential work and human craftsmanship. It is therefore an appropriate emblem of Bunyan’s attitude towards the role of human labor in the production of spaces of religious retreat. Bunyan directly associates the God’s providence, represented in the lily, with God’s grace in his discussion of the lilies visible in the temple porch. This association implicitly places both providence and grace within the category of God’s work on behalf of humanity. He observes that these lilies are overlaid with gold and reflects, “Gold oft-times was a type of grace, and particularly *of the grace of love*” (36). In Bunyan’s firmly Protestant theology, grace indicates God’s free gift or attribution to the fallen subject and stands in implicit opposition to a doctrine of earned works. Labor remains important as a sign to interpret this temple space as a specifically religious space, but grace’s work originates with God rather than humanity. Bunyan conflates grace and providence in order to emphasize the fact that both are divine works on behalf of humanity, and these ideas are continuous with those of the English religious establishment throughout the seventeenth century.

Earlier in the century, John Donne draws upon the image of the lily and the idea of God’s providence as an example of God’s work to form and sustain the individual

subject. Donne first compares this process to the biblical image of the potter shaping the clay of humanity and then expounds, “the Lord plants me, and waters, and weeds, and gives the increase,” before he concludes that God “assures me of clothing, in clothing the Lillies of the field, and is fitting the robe of Christ’s righteousness to me now, this minute” (17). For Donne, the work of the artisan, the farmer, and the tailor are fitting analogies to the work of God on behalf of the human subject. Like Bunyan, he aligns the providence of God for the lilies of the field with the grace of God that restores righteousness to the fallen subject. Both writers agree that the lily functions as an image of God’s work for humanity. In this context, Bunyan’s close attention to the carved and gilded lilies in Solomon’s temple articulates the complementary relationship between the artisan’s labor and the lilies’ function as a sign of the vast superiority of God’s work in his account of religious retreat.

Because these carved lilies refer to God’s grace and providence as much as they celebrate the ability of the human craftsman, Bunyan’s text seems unconcerned about the idea that artifice effaces or rejects God’s natural order. Based on the evidence of the temple’s metalwork, Bunyan suggests that the early modern church must “live without worldly care, as did the Apostles, the first Planters of the Church” (36). Bunyan’s interest in the work of the “Planters” of the church, however, does not signal his summary dismissal of artifice or an exclusive focus on the wild and uncultivated flowers of God’s providential care.

The gilded flowers in Bunyan’s account of the temple refer to human artifice as well as to the providence bestowed upon their natural originals—one need only think of the “painted flowres” and “burnisht gold” plants in Spenser’s *Bower of Bliss* to be

reminded of the role of artifice in producing ornate and potentially suspect imitations of the natural world (*Faerie Queene* II.xii.55.1, II.xii.58.5). Spenser's famously critical attitude towards human artifice stands in contrast with John Calvin's praise of divine artifice in the *Institutes*, in which Calvin compares the created world to an adorning garment: "God for the first time was arrayed in visible attire when, in the creation of the world, he displayed those glorious banners, on which...we behold his perfections visibly portrayed" (*Institutes* 1.5.1). Calvin's theological exposition of the created world draws the reader's attention to the beauty and skill exhibited in the natural world as legible manifestations of God's craftsmanship. Calvin's account of providence relies upon an analogy of human artifice in order to discuss God's providence and opens the door to the possibility that this artifice can make God's work legible to the interpreter.

Calvin's account of providence begins to explain how Bunyan describes and establishes the temple as a space of religious retreat in *Solomon's Temple*. Although Bunyan emphasizes the importance of the artisan's labor behind the scenes in the Hebrew temple, this labor only becomes meaningful in alignment with the divine work of providence or grace. While Bunyan suggests that human labor is important in the temple's construction, its meaning and function as a specifically religious space derives from God's work of grace. For Bunyan, religious spaces are those places in the present world where human and divine labor join together. The carved lily, as a symbol of both human artifice and divine providence, is a fitting emblem of this stance.

Bunyan connects the interpretation of these spaces with the shared concerns of religious community. Bunyan specifically associates the future city of the New Jerusalem with the space of Solomon's temple: "*The Foundations of the Wall of the City...were*

garnished with all manner of precious Stones...for that which is before called a Temple, for its comparative smallness, is here called a City” (19). Like the temple that functions as its spiritual type, Bunyan’s heaven is a sacred space defined by both human labor and divine grace. Understanding Bunyan’s account of dedicated religious space reveals how the process of interpreting this space relates to the life and maintenance of religious community in his more famous allegorical works. Bunyan’s allegorical characters face an epistemological challenge in correctly interpreting and locating the conjunction of human labor and divine work in order to distinguish between spaces of religious retreat and the ordinary world’s perils. The allegorical tensions in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Part II reveal Bunyan’s efforts to reconcile a religious epistemology based upon the individual’s experience with the centralized authority of the visible church.

Bunyan’s more familiar first part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* focuses on Christian’s allegorical journey from despair through his journey into the afterlife. Christian’s interaction with spaces of rest, such as his vision of the Celestial City, plays an important part of his individual journey towards salvation. *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Part II follows the pilgrimage of Christiana, Mercy, and their family under the interpretive guidance of Great-Heart, whose role—as readers have observed—likely reflects Bunyan’s pastoral role in his Bedford congregation¹¹. In contrast with the experience of the soul in isolation, which Bunyan explores in *Grace Abounding* (1666), this later work explores the process of interpreting religious knowledge and the role of

¹¹ Critics frequently observe that the second part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* reflects Bunyan’s role as a leader in his Bedford church and therefore emphasizes the communal and ecclesial parts of the Christian life more than in Part I. Kathleen M. Swaim observes that Great-heart’s role in the narrative as “the experienced conductor of parties of pilgrims” allows him to absorb a broad authority, which includes “pastoral and patriarchal roles in the extended family of pilgrims, as knowledgeable guide, wise counsellor, and militant protector of his ‘congregation’” (190). Swaim explains, “As is often remarked, Greatheart acts out Bunyan’s biographical history as Bedford minister (1672-88)” (190).

this knowledge in the religious community. In Bunyan's sequel, the narrator and Great-Heart seem to offer objectively reliable identifications of God's work in the world that allow the traveling group to rely upon their interpretive authority. Nevertheless, Bunyan separates the individual's religious experience from the concerns of the group, and this experience plays a significant role in the identification of the text's dedicated religious spaces. The epistemology of the individual's experience therefore challenges the text's centralized forms of authority and, most radically, the possibility of confidently participating in the visible church. In Part II, the tension between Bunyan's representation of the boundaries of individual religious experience and the text's centralized forms of authority articulates this problem of reconciling the individual's experience of space with the church's communal practices.

Perhaps to counterbalance the challenging mountains and valleys they encounter on their way, Bunyan punctuates his pilgrims' path with spaces of rest and refreshment. When Christiana, her Children, and her friend Mercy reach the Wicket-Gate after the first of their journey's physical trials, the gatekeeper invites them to rest upstairs: "he left them a while in a Summer-Parler below, where they entred into talk by themselves" (191). In this enclosed architectural space, Christiana and Mercy rest and recall their strenuous efforts to reach the wicket gate and their corresponding internal struggles. As they seek entrance, the group takes fright at a vicious dog outside of the gate that has been permitted to "come up to the Walls of this Place" but no further (192). Upon their arrival, Mercy then recalls, "I...thought that I must either knock again or dye. So I knocked; but I cannot tell how, for my spirit now *struggled* betwixt life and death" (191).

The rest they find here appears to be the consequence of their physical and spiritual labor, but the text resists the suggestion that they have earned their rest.

Just as the gatekeeper leads them up to the summer parlor, he demonstrates that this space the product of God's work on their behalf: "He also had them up to the top of the Gate and shewed them by what *deed* they were saved, and told them withall that that sight they would have again as they went along in their way, to their comfort" (191)¹². Bunyan frames the summer parlor and the rest it provides with God's sacrificial activity on behalf of the pilgrims. As a *fait accompli*, Christ's death serves as the broader context for their journey and its struggles. In case this deed is unclear to his readers, Bunyan's marginal note steps in with interpretive authority: "*Christ Crucified seen afar off*" (191). This space of religious retreat illustrates how Bunyan's narrative links the labor of the traveling party with God's sacrificial work on their behalf. Their laborious journey does not endow them with salvation, but it allows them entry into a resting place from which they perceive and embrace God's grace. This summer parlor establishes a pattern that appears throughout Part II: Bunyan associates physical spaces of rest with God's work on behalf of humanity and the responsive human labor of sanctification that extends from God's earlier work.

While God's labor and humanity's responsive labor produce the text's spaces of religious retreat, Bunyan struggles to find a single, authoritative mode of interpretation that can identify these spaces on behalf of an ecclesial community. The unresolved tension between Mercy's vivid experience of contrition and the interpretive authority of

¹² Kevin Seidel examines the various modes of reading present within Bunyan's allegory such as letters and deeds. In "*Pilgrim's Progress and the Book*," Seidel distinguishes among a wide range of reading practices that complicate the notion of the text or book as a single kind of object. While Bunyan's characters carry some texts as physical tokens, others are used for more traditional modes of reading—particularly in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I.

the text's marginal note is symptomatic of Bunyan's ambiguous approach to the interpretation of religious retreat. The interaction between the characters' experience and the author's intervention in the margins illustrates Bunyan's contradictory approach to interpreting space on behalf of a community. In *The Key in the Window*, Maxine Hancock argues persuasively for the authorial origin of Bunyan's marginal notes and highlights the importance of the interplay between margin and text (13-15). Although this episode is a shared experience of rest for Christiana and Mercy and although they share the labor of their journey towards salvation, the reader relies on Bunyan's narrative voice to link the parlor with the crucifixion. Without an authoritative voice to identify the labor of grace on behalf of the group, individuals cannot reliably share this version of religious retreat. While the pilgrims can recognize and retell reliable accounts of their labor, Bunyan dramatizes the act of locating God's activity in the world as a precarious and uncertain process that negotiates between a central authority and the individual's experience of spiritual struggle.

Bunyan informs his pilgrims of their salvation in this specific space in order to associate labor and rest. The source of the pilgrim's rest is God's prior labor imparted to humanity through the work of grace. In this way, Bunyan shares John Calvin's emphasis on the theological idea that grace is prior to any human response. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin describes God's intervention on behalf of humanity's frailty: "if [man] would obtain succor in his necessity, he must go beyond himself and procure it in some other quarter. It has farther been shown that the Lord kindly and spontaneously manifests himself in Christ, in whom he offers all happiness for our misery, all abundance for our want, opening up the treasures of heaven to us" (*Institutes* 3.20.1).

Calvin argues that God extends this grace “so that we may turn with full faith to his beloved Son” and “rest in him” (*Institutes* 3.20.1). In Calvin’s theology, God’s work of grace allows for the possibility of rest. Because this work on their behalf is existentially prior to their journey, it is the precondition that makes Mercy’s internal struggle possible

Bunyan’s implicit contention that human labor is a response to the rest that God’s labor provides more closely resembles the emphases in Martin Luther’s account of the believer’s ongoing sanctification in response to God’s grace. While Calvin focuses on knowledge and obedience as responses to God’s grace, Luther’s “Preface to Romans” asserts, “faith does not free us from sin to the extent that we can relax into laziness...[t]hroughout our whole lives, we shall be kept fully employed with our own selves” with the task of self-discipline and embracing the law anew (29). Bunyan shares Luther’s emphasis on human labor as a necessary response to God’s work on behalf of humanity. The text’s spaces of religious retreat implicitly draw the pilgrims into a reciprocal labor of sanctification that refines their religious practice and supports their involvement in the visible church. Retreat spaces in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Part II reflect Bunyan’s complex engagement with both of these Protestant theological accounts of labor, grace, and religious community.

Later, as the pilgrims climb the Hill Difficulty under the Great-Heart’s guidance, Christiana, Mercy, and their party reach the Prince’s Arbor. As in the earlier case of the summer parlor, this sequence reveals how Bunyan’s text struggles to reconcile its individual epistemology of religious space with its centralized sources of religious authority. On their arrival, Mercy exclaims, “*How sweet is rest to them that Labour! And how good is the Prince of Pilgrims, to provide such resting places for them!*” (216). This

building or garden feature is not simply a naturally occurring grove of trees, but God's craftsmen have built and cultivated it for the passing pilgrims.

Bunyan's emphasis on the pilgrim's labor in reaching it reminds his reader that human and divine labor meet within these spaces of retreat. God's providential work is manifest in the arbor's construction on the pilgrims' behalf¹³. Bunyan's Christ, the "Prince of Pilgrims," builds the arbor on the pilgrim's behalf, but this fact does not abrogate the pilgrims of their need for vigilance. Mercy cautions, "here let us beware of sleeping: For as I have heard, for that it cost poor *Christian* dear" and young James responds with the observation that "the way to Heaven is as up a Ladder, and the way to Hell is as down a Hill" (216). Enjoying this space dedicated to their fortification and refreshment requires that the pilgrims actively participate in an ongoing labor of interpretation.

Based on the evidence of their laborious climb, the pilgrims can provisionally identify the Prince's Arbor as a space of religious retreat. This epistemology of individual experience, however, exists in tension with the role of the group's designated interpreter. The band's spiritual guide, Great-Heart, leads the group towards their destination and directly identifies where they may rest safely. As they ascend, Great-heart exhorts James to continue because he already knows the way: "Come, come, said *Great-heart*, sit not down here, for a little above is the Princes *Arbour*" (216). His interpretive mediation allows the pilgrims to know whether the space has been shaped and provided by the divine without the risk of any ambiguity. Like Bunyan's earlier marginal gloss that definitively identifies the crucifixion, Great-heart's interpretive authority provides a sure

¹³ The second part of the *Pilgrim's Progress* in fact serves as one of the *OED*'s textual sources for the word. For an analysis of the arbor as an architectural feature in early modern England, see Paula Henderson, "Adorning the Arbor," 104-6.

means to identify the presence of God's providential work that characterizes true spaces of rest. The consequence of Great-heart's authoritative role is that Christiana, Mercy, and their fellow travelers must experience the work of divine grace and providence at a remove¹⁴. Critics interested in Part II of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, including Margaret Soenser Breen, have frequently commented on the text's gendered hierarchy, and this hierarchy extends to the task of interpreting spaces in this world. While the responsive labor of human activity is visible to all interpreters, Bunyan relies on Great-Heart's authority as the group's male leader to identify the Prince's Arbor as a site in which human labor and divine provision intersect.

Bunyan's most explicit representation of religious retreat in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II is the country house situated in the Valley of Humiliation. Great-heart describes this country house as a retirement from the world that promotes the religious practices and virtues that characterize traditional Christian asceticism—solitude, contemplation, and humility. He explains that Christ's example shows how this religious retreat rejects the world's usual concerns: "In this Valley our Lord formerly had his *Countray-House*...here a man shall be free from the Noise, and from the hurrying of this life...Here a man shall not be so let and hindred in his Contemplation, as in other places" (238). Bunyan's representation of this estate makes explicit many of the assumptions characteristic of retreat spaces throughout the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This space of retreat is divided from the "Noise and Confusion" of state business, and its concerns are not primarily social since Great-heart associates the Valley of Humiliation

¹⁴ Margaret Soenser Breen discusses the hierarchical and particularly gendered properties of this mediating relationship. Breen observes, "Great-heart's mediation on the difficulties that Christian faced punctuates her journey from the Interpreter's House onwards" (456). The gendered hierarchy Breen identifies in the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is characteristic of the text's conflicted modes of interpreting spaces of religious retreat.

with solitude and literally empty space. As an authoritative interpreter of space and the reader of the group's map—a technology that divides and interprets space—Great-heart intends to identify the presence of God's labor on behalf of his believing community¹⁵. His authoritative role, however, conflicts with the text's focus on the individual's experience as a means of identifying these spaces of religious retreat and, by extension, the space of the church.

As before, Bunyan's text frames this space as a site of both human labor and God's grace. Great-heart describes this interface: "Behold, how green this Valley is, also how beautified *with Lillies*. I have also known many laboring Men that have got good Estates in this Valley of *Humiliation*...for indeed it is a very fruitful Soil, and doth bring forth by handfuls" (237). In light of its prominent role in Bunyan's analysis of *Solomon's Temple* only a few years later, Bunyan likely uses the symbol of the lily as a sign of God's providence, which cultivates and sustains this place of retreat¹⁶. Repeating the common biblical theme that God rejects the classed order of the present world and favors the lowly "laboring Men," Great-heart also draws the reader's attention to the human labor of cultivation in the pilgrims' substantial estates. This labor of cultivation exists in tandem with reminders of God's providential work on the laborer's behalf. Great-heart explains, "to the People that live and trace these Grounds, [the Lord] has left a yearly

¹⁵ Beth Lynch describes the text's most extreme uses of this kind of authority as the basis of pastoral teaching as "a form of exegetical violence" (165).

¹⁶ The marginal reference to Song of Solomon draws the reader's attention to a passage in which the lily represents both the special status bestowed upon the king's beloved and, soon afterward, the providential ordering of the seasons that ultimately sustains the flowers more generally. Therefore, although the image of the lily within this passage may not immediately refer to the providence of God, Bunyan is likely to be aware of the passage's context. Within the narrative, Bunyan places the lilies of the field in the context of the King's country house and the provisions that he has made for travelers passing through the valley.

revenue to be faithfully payed them at certain Seasons, for their maintenance by the way, and for their further encouragement to go on in their Pilgrimage” (239). In Great-heart’s description, the Lord’s provision makes the pilgrims’ responsive labor possible. In the Prince’s arbor, God’s provision meets sincere human labor without respect to its merits so that its fertile ground rewards the diligent laborer.

In yet another moment of interpretive mediation, Bunyan’s marginal note reiterates the notion that the Lord of this estate represents the figure of Christ. The margin reads, “*Christ, when in the Flesh, had his Countrey-House in the Valley of Humiliation*” (238). This partial allegorical interpretation simply places Christ within the existing allegory and thereby resists a metaphorical transformation of the country house space into a mental or spiritual state of deprivation. Bunyan’s note preserves the episode’s spatial implications¹⁷. The centralized authority of Great-heart and Bunyan’s marginal intervention exist in tension with the text’s significant interest in the role of the individual’s experience in the identification of religious space.

Under Great-heart’s leadership, Christiana and her group of pilgrims come across another arbor much like the one they enjoyed earlier after ascending the Hill Difficulty. Although someone has prepared this arbor for the pilgrims, danger lurks behind the arbor’s appearance. Bunyan’s narrator explains the space’s visual appeal: “Then they came at an *Arbor*, warm, and promising much Refreshing to the Pilgrims; for it was

¹⁷ We can begin to see the broader consequences of separating religious spaces from those of the political world, and this representation of space aligns the solitude of the individual’s experience of humility with religious contemplation and Christ-like religious activity. This distinction alone, however, does not reform boundaries between religious and political activities and their associated spaces since the idea of the religious contemplative’s opposition to the demands and desires of the active life is present in earlier writers such as Boethius or the desert fathers of Christian antiquity. The consequences of Bunyan’s conflicted epistemology of religious retreat are more significant in the history of religion’s boundaries in the early modern world.

finely wrought above-head, beautified with *Greens*, furnished with *Benches*, and *Settles*. It also had in it a soft Couch whereon the weary might lean. This, you must think, all things considered, was tempting” (297). In this final sentence, Bunyan’s narrator delays identifying the danger in order to address the reader and highlight all of the visual evidence that would tempt the pilgrims—and the reader—to identify an uncanny resemblance to the Prince’s Arbor.

By addressing the reader directly, the narrator gently acknowledges the fact that this space represents an interpretive that the pilgrims cannot solve based on visual evidence. The difference between this dangerous arbor and the one that was safe for the pilgrims is based on criteria that are not apparent to the pilgrims outside of their individual experience in those spaces¹⁸. In the margins, Bunyan simply cuts the Gordian knot by directly informing his reader that this is actually “[a]n Arbor on the *Inchanting Ground*” (296). While the pilgrims can identify the visual evidence of human labor that makes this space appealing—its constructed benches and cultivated shade—it is their individual, subjective experience that provides them with the evidence they need to recognize its danger. This process of discernment requires more than a general inference of grace or providence based on visual evidence. Instead, Bunyan’s pilgrims use their subjective experience to identify the presence or absence of God’s work.

¹⁸ Space registers the individual’s experience elsewhere in Bunyan’s corpus. In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan frequently refers to the biblical cities of refuge as a description of his own desire to enter into a place of safety and rest in his search for confirmation of his elected status. In his autobiographical text, Bunyan’s experience becomes the index of his place in this metaphorical space. Bunyan recalls, “I was convinced that I was the slayer; and that the avenger of blood pursued me, that I felt with great terror; only now it remained that I enquire whether I have the right to enter the City of Refuge (*GA* 68-9). Considering this question, Bunyan turns to his own experience as a marker of his place in this metaphorical space: “I thought verily I was the man that must enter, for because I had smitten my Neighbour *unwittingly*...I hated Him not afore-time... Wherefore I thought I had right to enter this City” (69). Bunyan is able to locate himself in this world by means of his experience of reading the scripture and by reflecting on his own actions. In *Grace Abounding*, the experience of the individual, inaccessible to the outside observer, is Bunyan’s way of placing himself inside or outside of the city of refuge.

The difference between this ground and the Prince's Arbor is experientially available to the individual subject who feels its soporific effects. When Christiana and her band pass through, Great-heart's guidance allows them to interpret their experiences. None of the pilgrims consider pausing in the Enchanted Ground's arbor because "they continually gave so good heed to the Advice of their Guide...that usually when they were nearest to [dangers,] they did most pluck up their Spirits and hearten one another to deny the Flesh" (297). Great-heart teaches the pilgrims to differentiate between the Prince's Arbor and the arbor on the Enchanted Ground based their individual experiences in these spaces rather than the map's interpretive authority over space. Because the Enchanting Ground encourages pilgrims to sleep and abandon their labor, it undermines the alignment of human labor and divine work necessary for Bunyan's religious retreat. In the Prince's Arbor, the pilgrims rest with a keen awareness of the divine providence that provides for their rest and coincides with their responsive labor of cultivation. By contrast, the pilgrims perceive danger in this second arbor by recognizing the desire for sleep that would distract them from their quest.

By considering how Bunyan produces this negative example of space, we can understand how his account of religious space relies upon the presence of human labor and the individual's experience of grace more clearly. Christian and Hopeful's passage over the Enchanted Ground in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I demonstrates the role of subjective experience in the identification of religious spaces. At this point in their journey, Hopeful wishes to stop on the Enchanted Ground, but Christian chides, "*Do you not remember, that one of the Shepherds bid us beware of the Incharned ground? He meant by that, that we should beware of sleeping*" (PP1 136). Instead of providing them

with a map, the shepherd teaches Christian and Hopeful to interpret their individual experience of drowsiness. This mode of teaching differs in kind from the direct instruction that usually characterizes Great-Heart's function as the leader of the ecclesial community in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II. The experiential evidence that allows the subject to recognize divine grace in specifically religious spaces conflicts with Bunyan's use of the margins to directly identify the space. Bunyan's traveler must treat his or her own experience as evidence of God's grace and the responsive human labor of sanctification.

This experiential criterion that allows the individual to recognize God's work and identify religious space exists in tension with text's centralized forms of interpretive authority. While the marginal note seeks to explain the kind of space the pilgrims encounter directly, the pilgrims must identify the space based on their own subjective experience. Bunyan reminds his reader of the interpretive caution necessary to determine whether an arbor is safe for the pilgrims to rest through the names of those pilgrims who fall asleep there, "*Heedless and Too-bold*" (297). Great-heart provides them with a set of interpretive guidelines, but the sojourning individuals must apply these guidelines to their own experiences in order to determine the presence of God's activity there.

The difference between the space of religious retreat and the deceptive trap is not immediately visible and requires a careful process of discernment in which each pilgrim reflects on his or her experience. Great-heart, Bunyan's central authority figure in Part II, finally identifies the source of the Enchanted Ground's dangerous effects after the fact. Hearing of Stand-fast's direct encounter with Madam Bubble and her expansive, Circean offer of hospitality, Great-heart authoritatively defines her as a witch and informs the

party, “it is by Virtue of her *Sorceries* that this Ground is *enchanted*” and “[t]his is she that maintaineth in their Splendor, all those that are the Enemies of Pilgrims” (301, 302)¹⁹. This clear and unambiguous declaration is representative of the centralized interpretive authority in Bunyan’s text visible through the marginal glosses and Great-heart’s pronouncements. Madam Bubble’s Enchanted Ground presents an oppositional counterpart to religious space because Bunyan characterizes her gifts and maintenance as parodic expressions of providence. Because this identification occurs after the pilgrims have already discovered the danger, it fails to resolve the tension between this centralized interpretive authority and the individual’s epistemology of experience.

Just as God’s labor of grace is the foundation of the party’s rest in the summer parlor and his providence likewise underwrites the pilgrim’s safety in the Prince’s Arbor, Madam Bubble’s already completed work ensnares those pilgrims foolish enough to stop here. Unlike the earlier spaces of religious retreat, this work of counter-providence encourages pilgrims to eschew their labor entirely and abandon their overarching quest. The pilgrims’ encounter with the arbor on the Enchanted Ground is important, however, because Great-heart’s pronouncement serves as an incomplete corrective to Stand-fast’s experiential account. Because Bunyan introduces an experiential criterion for the production and identification of specifically religious spaces, the pilgrims’ experiences allow them to evaluate whether the space facilitates or smothers human labor. The tension introduced by maintaining two different ways of knowing whether a space functions as a religious retreat allows the text to support an understanding of religious

¹⁹ In keeping with this impulse to centralize the interpretive authority of the text, Bunyan’s marginal note confirms that Madam Bubble represents “*The World*” (301). In a similar vein to Great-heart’s interventions, the margin’s textual authority simply identifies her, while the experience of the party, by contrast, serves as the basis of their recognition of the space’s danger.

space that relies on the individual's experience and which could potentially undermine the external authority that interprets the purpose of the space on behalf of the religious community.

This conflict of authority demonstrates how *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II struggles to reconcile the role of individual experience with the communal life of the church, and this conflict remains unresolved on this side of the gates to the Celestial City. The pilgrims cannot reliably share this mode of interpreting space: they build no new enclave or garden in their final resting place—the land of Beulah—and they can only anticipate the shared life of the invisible church across the river in the Celestial City. When the pilgrims finally arrive in the land of Beulah, the reader again relies on the narrator's identification of the place as belonging to the King. Their rest in Beulah, “where the Sun shineth Night and Day,” is permitted “because this Country was common for Pilgrims, and because the Orchards and Vineyards that were here, belonged to the King of the Celestial Country; therefore they were licensed to make bold with any of his things” (303). In keeping with Bunyan's pattern of describing religious spaces, God's providence is a necessary precondition that separates this space from those throughout the rest of the world.

The means by which the pilgrims identify this space are again both the pronouncement of centralized authority and the evidence of experience. The pilgrims ask Great-heart to consult his map after their encounter in the dangerous arbor, and he is able to identify the “Land [of] *Beulah*” in advance based on its proximity to the Enchanted Ground (299). Upon the group's arrival, the text's marginal gloss immediately alerts the

reader to the fact that the Land of Beulah appears in Christian's earlier journey (303)²⁰. These direct pronouncements are soon confirmed with experience, as the pilgrims confirm that the space offers a form of rest that allows them to remain wakeful and alert: "a little while soon refreshed them here, for the Bells did so ring, and the Trumpets continually sound so Melodiously, that they could not sleep, and yet they received as much refreshing, as if they had slept their Sleep never so soundly" (303). What Christiana and her traveling group had been told in advance is now confirmed through their experience. Bunyan implicitly holds both epistemologies of space together in this final representation of the church in the present world, particularly as the land's most prominent geographical feature, the river, is experientially different for each pilgrim that passes through it.

In light of the experimental criterion for recognizing and participating in religious spaces that appears throughout *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II, Bunyan's minimalist representation of the church in the present world seems to be a significant concession to the individual's central role in identifying religious space. Bunyan resists imagining the church as detailed space of religious retreat at the conclusion of the narrative despite the fact that types that anticipate the church are present throughout the text. The safe havens, arbors, and houses that the pilgrims visit along their journey fade from view when Great-heart leads Christiana and the other pilgrims into the land of Beulah.

While Bunyan is willing to establish a link between space of the Hebrew temple and the invisible Christian church in *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized*, Bunyan resists

²⁰ Bunyan's pattern of referencing Christian's journey in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I and the allegorical text's popularity during Bunyan's lifetime (and beyond) suggests that Bunyan expects his reader to be familiar with the first part's geography and events when he or she reads the sequel.

associating the church in the present world with a specific place. One by one, the group's guides and leaders receive their summons to cross the river of death and enter the Celestial City. As a result, the community that remains on the banks of the river continues in the absence of their interpretive guides and continues beyond the end of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II. After Stand-fast's final speech and death, the narrator summarizes the life of the community that remains on the river's banks: "As for *Christian's* Children, the four Boys that *Christiana* brought with here, with their Wives and Children, I did not stay where I was, till they were gone over. Also since I came away. I heard one say, that they were yet alive, and so would be for the Increase of the Church in that Place where they were for a time" (311). This epilogue completes the text's almost imperceptible shift from a centralized authority that identifies dedicated religious spaces based on external criteria to an internal epistemology of religious space based on the individual's experience. Bunyan's narrator carefully distinguishes between the community in the land of Beulah and the church itself. As a result, the text rejects the idea that the visible church can be identified with a particular space of worship outside of the individual's religious experience. In the context of the seventeenth century's ongoing debates about the materiality of religious spaces, Bunyan's intervention emphasizes the priority of the invisible church.

Labor is present in the final encampment, but this time, the pilgrims' labor is now one of discernment. In addition to the explicitly sexed labor of the church's "Increase," this community's population thrives as a result of its members' ongoing diligence and wakefulness (311). The pilgrims' continuing labor takes the form of their constant wakefulness and vigilance, which continues until their eventual death and reception into

the Celestial City. Mr. Stand-fast observes in the midst of his own death while crossing the river, in the manner of Foxe's martyrs, "I see my self now at the *end* of my Journey, my *toilsome* Days are ended" (311). The text's interest in each pilgrim's individual testimony suggests that the group's task in the present world is not the labor of sanctifying Beulah to become a space for the church. Beulah does not change, and the pilgrims do not seek new places of retreat from the world. Nevertheless, each individual pilgrim can enrich his or her communion with the space of the invisible church by drawing on experience as a source of authoritative religious knowledge. The text's final, metaphorical space of religious retreat within the self is the product of God's grace and the pilgrim's responsive attentiveness to God's role in his or her experience.

In the land of Beulah, Bunyan replaces the laborious journey to the Celestial City with a period of active waiting for the King's summons. Before this point, the pilgrims have passed through a number of spaces of rest or retreat that seemed to offer glimpses of the life of the church in the present world. Bunyan's marginal glosses and centralized figures of authority have heretofore mediated between the reader and the external evidence that identifies the text's spaces of rest. When the pilgrims necessarily stop moving and begin waiting on their summons from the King, however, the risks and tests that they face are no longer external. Instead, they arise from within the individual's subjective experience. As Bunyan reminds his reader throughout the first part, the possibility (and danger) of turning back remains all the way to the very gates of his allegorical heaven.

In contrast with the arbors and resting sites the pilgrims encountered on their journey, the church's growth in Beulah does not include the construction of an

architectural space. Bunyan's representation of religious retreat in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II fails to resolve the tension between the centralized forms of authority that led the pilgrims on their journey and their growing reliance on individual experience. The rest of the community cannot share this experience—the pilgrims build no new enclave or garden within the land of Beulah—and the pilgrims can only anticipate fully sharing their ecclesial experience in the Celestial City. The final space of religious retreat that the text produces is a subjective, metaphorical space that develops out of the individual's experience of God's grace. In avoiding the trap that claims Heedless and Too-bold on the Enchanting Ground, Bunyan's believer must treat his or her own experience of space as reliable evidence of God's grace rather than trust in appearances or an external authority.

For Bunyan, the interpretation of experience closely resembles the interpretive work of reading because both make human labor secondary to the text's revelatory work on behalf of the reader²¹. His approach to textual interpretation begins to explain the spatial language that Bunyan uses to frame the reader's work in interpreting his own allegorical text. Bunyan's approach to the interpretation of scripture suggests that human and divine activity are both present, but that the grace of God is the means by which the scripture speaks, and this grace is necessarily prior to any meaningful human activity.

My argument that Bunyan's account of scriptural interpretation involves the active participation of the reader differs from Thomas Luxon's description of Bunyan's exegesis. Luxon situates Bunyan's understanding of the relationship between "talking

²¹ For a historical study of allegorical form that describes Bunyan's work as producing or reflecting a radical form of individualism, see Brian Nellist, "*The Pilgrim's Progress* and Allegory," 152.

and doing” in the context of Martin Luther’s concept of “passive knowledge” (“Pilgrim’s” 74). Beginning with *Grace Abounding*, Luxon identifies “Bunyan’s belief that the work of understanding (laying hold of) the scripture is not something he does as reader and interpreter, but something the Word does to him” (77). He argues that Christian’s exercise of memory and will are therefore manifestations of the Word acting upon the passive subject. In this way, Luxon suggests that Bunyan extends the Protestant foundational principle of *sola fide* to attribute all forms of action in the first part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* to God: “the progress in the Christian life occurs only at those points when one stops trying to do something to effect his own righteousness and rests wholly in the power of the Word to effect...knowledge” (81). Described in this way, one can hardly imagine a space for human labor at all.

Bunyan’s focus on the presence of both divine grace and human labor in the Hebrew temple and spaces of religious retreat in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Part II demonstrates his concern with the reader’s labor of interpretation. While Luxon rightly rejects the efficacy of remembering itself as a means of salvation in Bunyan’s work, this does not thereby mean that Bunyan dismisses the importance of labor altogether. As I have demonstrated above, spaces of religious retreat such as the Prince’s Arbor invoke a responsive labor in the pilgrims passing through. Great-heart likewise teaches Christiana and her fellow pilgrims to continue their vigilance and work for the increase of the church as they wait to enter the Celestial City. Labor and the experience of divine grace are present in both of these moments of interpreting and responding to dedicated religious spaces.

When Stand-fast crosses the river in the final speech of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II, he makes the activity of the divine and human labor inseparable: "His Word I did use to gather for my Food...my Steps hath he strengthened in his Way" (311). Stand-fast links the sustaining nourishment that he once derived from the scriptures with the concept of walking on borrowed strength. He indicates that God's work is prior to his own as he recollects, "wherever I have seen the print of his Shooe in the Earth, there I have coveted to set my Foot too" (311). Stand-fast asserts that God's work on behalf of humanity makes his task of walking possible. In the moment of reading the scripture, then, God's revelation provokes and requires the reciprocal human labor of interpreting and responding to the text's divine message.

Bunyan's model of scriptural interpretation closely resembles his description of bounded religious spaces in which human labor and divine work coincide. In the same speech, Stand-fast compares his interaction with God through the scriptures to an enclosed container that holds strong smelling perfume: "His Name has been to me as a *Civet-Box*, yea sweeter than all Perfumes" (311). The civet box, like the religious retreat, is an image of spatial enclosure with boundaries that divide it from the rest of the world. Bunyan's interest in similar images of religious privacy reflect the influence of a long tradition of Christian ascetic ideas that links the denial of self with the receptivity that Bunyan's scriptural hermeneutics requires. This account of reading as an individual, private task is similar to Bunyan's account his own text's work upon the reader in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II.

The fact that Bunyan uses an image of spatial enclosure to describe the function of his own allegorical text confirms his interest in using private space as an analogy for

reading. In Bunyan's defense of his use of a novel allegorical frame in the Apology of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I, he uses the image of the cabinet to describe his book as an enclosed space from the most private rooms and containers of the early modern home: "My dark and cloudy words they do but hold / The Truth, as Cabinets inclose the Gold" (4)²². This focus on spatial privacy takes on an implication of specifically feminine privacy in Part II.

In his introduction to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II, Bunyan holds a conversation with text as a personified "pilgrim" in which his address to his female readers similarly associates his text with a series of spaces, both literal and metaphorical: "Young Ladys, and young Gentle-women too, / Do no small kindness to my Pilgrim shew; / Their Cabinets, their Bosoms, and their Hearts / My Pilgrim has, 'cause he to them imparts / His pretty riddles in such wholesome straines / As Yields them profit double to their paines / Of reading" (169-170)²³. Bunyan connects the text, as the pilgrim, with the private space of the Ladies' cabinets and the increasingly inward spaces of the readers' bosom and heart. Bunyan's preface explains that the ladies hospitably accept the text into the private spaces of the home and self because the text's generous profit overmatches the pains they take in reading it.

²² In *Cultural Aesthetics*, Patricia Fumerton explores the publicly performed character of these spaces of culturally produced privacy through the example of "Nicholas Hilliard and Sir Philip Sidney," who "crafted precious, gemlike decorations that hid the self's 'secrets' behind a series of gorgeously ornate public rooms, cabinets, lockets, frames, paints, metaphors" (70). Fumerton's work attentively explains the material bases of categories of publicity and privacy and the ways in which these categories are mutually constitutive.

²³ For a focused account of female literacy and sites of reading in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II, see Maxine Hancock, "Identity, Agency, and Community," 74. N.H. Keeble discusses the hierarchical relationship of masculine and feminine language and interpretation in "'Here is her Glory, even to be under Him': The Feminine in the Thought and Work of John Bunyan," 143.

Bunyan's statement adds a gendered element to Bunyan's account of allegorical interpretation. As a metaphorical private space, Bunyan describes the text as the combined product of the imagined female reader's interpretive labor and the active contribution of the personified text. In *Closet Devotions*, Richard Rambuss traces a seventeenth-century pattern of relegating sacred eroticism and self-definition to the private, enclosed space of the prayer closet in *Closet Devotions*. Bunyan's text participates in a related process of associating the interpretive process with specifically feminine and private spaces. In addition to exploring the densely erotic overtones of "cabinets and closets" in the work of seventeenth-century poets, Rambuss characterizes the space of the cabinet as "a material structure...as well as a set of subjectifying structural relations, one moreover that was framed, particularly in its early modern forms, with a religious referent" (28, 103). In Bunyan's closely related language of closets, bosoms, and hearts in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II, he connects the process of reading the allegory with the enclosed religious spaces his pilgrims encounter throughout his narrative.

This connection between interpretation and religious space is at the root of the tension between the individual's experience and Bunyan's attempts to establish shared religious spaces through the authority of the narrator or figures of authority such as Great-heart. By giving the individual's experience a central role in his model of interpretation, Bunyan must also make the individual's experience of space a constitutive part of the religious spaces throughout his allegory. The text's efforts to centralize the ecclesial authority are visible through the authority of its marginal glosses and the prominent role given to Great-heart as an interpretive leader of the group. Nevertheless,

this declarative mode of authority remains in tension with the experiential mode of reading on which many of Bunyan's dedicated religious spaces depend and on which his model of scriptural interpretation is based. While Bunyan's text does not fully resolve its internal debate about the role of the individual's interpretation in the religious community, it does contribute to a broader cultural association of religious knowledge with private, feminine spaces that culminates in an eighteenth-century discourse of domesticity.

In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II and *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized*, John Bunyan represents dedicated religious spaces as the site of both human labor and divine work. The recuperative places of rest situated throughout the pilgrims' journey in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II illustrate how God's free providence inspires a responsive labor in the pilgrims passing through. Bunyan's model of scriptural interpretation likewise matches the labor of the individual reader with the text's active intervention. He frequently uses the metaphor of enclosed, contained spaces to describe this interpretive process, and it is therefore notable that he depicts specifically religious spaces in these same terms. By representing this individual epistemology as the foundation of private religious spaces that stand in contrast with the shared social world, Bunyan associates these private spaces with the foundational reading practices and experiences of his religious faith.

In the context of the ongoing conversation about religious space in early modern England and its significant implications for religious belief and knowledge, Bunyan's work articulates his concerns about the role of experience in religious knowledge and an implicit sense of the shared social world as separate and distinct from the individual's

religious experience. The internal tensions and contradictions in Bunyan's work connect religious space with both social and individual ways of knowing. Historians of privacy such as Roger Chartier have examined the role of social institutions and economic changes as a significant means by which the modern category of the private is produced during the early modern period²⁴. Bunyan's representation of religious retreat and the religious epistemologies on which these representations rely complicate this narrative by demonstrating how literary texts like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II play a critical role in the construction of religion's privacy.

The conflicting means by which Bunyan describes and reveals these spaces to the reader offer insight into the text's unresolved attempt to reconcile individual and corporate ways of knowing in the religious community. Bunyan's text sometimes relies upon a declarative basis for establishing religious spaces that uses the authority of the text and figures of central interpretive authority to produce definitive religious spaces that could be shared by a believing community. Although Bunyan's sequel is deeply concerned with the shared life of the visible church, it also frequently relies on the evidence of the individual's experience, which cannot provide the shared, reliable evidence of God's work necessary to unite Bunyan's religious community.

Understanding the complex means by which Bunyan represents religious space makes it difficult to attribute Bunyan's work to a developing form of modern individualism with any confidence. Instead, Bunyan's religious convictions motivate his search for an epistemology that would be capable of fully uniting a religious community,

²⁴ Roger Chartier's account of the institutional changes that produced the social divisions of modern privacy engages inseparable question of the formation of publicity in the early modern period. See Chartier, *A History of Private Life*, 15-19.

although his representation of the highly individualistic church in the land of Beulah suggests that this ideal way of knowing will continue to elude him in the present world. Both parts of Mary Astell's *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* articulate her similar efforts to articulate a form of religious knowledge capable of uniting a worldwide religious community in their emphasis on the mind's freedom and rationality.

CHAPTER 5

FAITH, SPACE, AND KNOWLEDGE IN MARY ASTELL'S *SERIOUS PROPOSAL TO THE LADIES*, PARTS I AND II AND *LETTERS CONCERNING THE LOVE OF GOD*

In the late seventeenth century, Mary Astell famously sought to establish an innovative school to enrich the minds of young English ladies. In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, For the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest*, first published anonymously in 1694, Mary Astell outlines her seemingly contradictory plan to build a material space of learning to facilitate the explicitly immaterial activity of the mind. The second part of *A Serious Proposal* (1697), explains Astell's epistemological framework and articulates her belief that the mind only obtains knowledge from the material world through God's constant mediation. Astell's educational program relies upon a process of ascetic cosmopolitanism that uses a dedicated religious space to alert the mind to its own immateriality. This educational method is ascetic in its explicit rejection of the world and its values and cosmopolitan in its cultivated attitude of disinterest towards the material world and the customs that inhere in its spaces.

While Milton and Bunyan's accounts of the material world are characterized by significant reservations about the relationship between visible and invisible religious communities, Cavendish's representations of spaces of retreat demonstrate her attempts to reconcile her valuation of imagined, ideal spaces with her belief in the world's spiritual and material uniformity. Astell's keen interest in the relationship between the space of religious retreat and the individual's religious epistemology is closely connected with her

interest in the intellectual grounds of religious community. Her account of religious space articulates her belief in the possibility of a shared, wholly rational form of religious faith.

Astell's proposal for a new approach to women's education depends upon her assumption that human reason can apprehend religious truth immediately and incontrovertibly. In order to justify her space of religious retreat, Astell distinguishes between religious and secular spaces on theological and philosophical grounds. This justification participates in an ongoing conversation with thinkers such as René Descartes about knowledge, belief, and the material world. Most broadly, Astell's arguments for the symbolic significance of religious spaces and the incontrovertible persuasion of religious knowledge play a previously unacknowledged role in the long eighteenth-century's developing separation between the interiority and interior spaces of religious belief and the public world of social and political interests, which Michael McKeon traces in *The Secret History of Domesticity*¹.

In order to improve women's intellectual and religious selves, Astell situates her educational program in a quasi-monastic retreat away from the world's distractions: "Now as to the Proposal it is to erect a *Monastery*, or if you will...we will call it a *Religious Retirement*, and such as shall have a double aspect, being not only a Retreat from the World for those who desire that advantage, but likewise, an institution and previous discipline, to fit us to do the greatest good in it" (*SP* I 73). I characterize her project as a retreat (instead of the more archaic "retirement") to capture the word's modern sense as a noun and verb within a religious context—a bounded, physical space and an active, reflective process. Astell's *Serious Proposal* relies upon a dichotomy between her religious space and the ordinary world analogous to the Christian liturgical

¹ See McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 42-43.

calendar's distinction between the sacred seasons and Ordinary Time. Both sets of terms are only comprehensible in their role as part of a theologically grounded whole, and this underlying theological wholeness undergirds Astell's account of religious knowledge. *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Parts I and II, rely on Astell's distinction between a space marked as religious—a term that encompasses religious belief and the practices that support and express that belief—and the unmarked ordinary world from which this space emerges.

The division between this proposed space of religious retreat and rest of the material world is a significant part of Mary Astell's educational process. The contrast between religious and ordinary space is ultimately more useful to her model of mind than the particular set of cultural practices that she prescribes. In imagining a space of religious retreat, Astell finds that she must articulate the relationship between the spatial part and whole and explain how a material space can instruct an immaterial, rational mind. By examining how Astell's stated religious commitments inform her imaginative construction of her proposed school as a space of religious retreat, I will explain how Astell's final reliance on the idea of the present world as symbolically significant fails to account for the disillusionment of religious disagreements that emerge from a model of knowledge that originates from the individual. As in John Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, a text founded on premises Astell that vehemently opposed, Mary Astell's *Serious Proposal* allows her readers to sharply distinguish the private ways of knowing associated with religious knowledge from the knowledge under debate in public, political life².

² Michal Michelson writes of Astell's opposition to the ideas of Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, "She agreed in essence with the conservative Anglican cleric Charles Leslie...who saw the

That Astell's *Serious Proposal* produces an academy in print rather than a material, architectural structure does not mean that the intellectual and social consequences of her imaginative boundary making are thereby fictive³. Instead, Astell's imagined religious space reevaluates the place of religious knowledge and her work exerts significant influence on later cultural constructions of religion's boundaries. By describing Mary Astell's educational institution as a space of religious retreat, I distinguish the abstract concept of space from her particular articulation of a constructed space with bounded interior and excluded exterior spaces⁴. In contrast with the abstract, geometric accounts of space that Henri Lefebvre associates with modernity's violent, dominating attitude towards space, Astell's educational program relies upon the cultural ideas and practices that inhere in spaces (*Production of Space* 289). In *for space*, geographer Doreen Massey explains how "implicit conceptualisations of space...are a crucial element in our ordering of the world, positioning ourselves, and others human and nonhuman, in relation to ourselves" (*for space* 105). For Astell, understanding the relationship between self and space is essential to understanding the rational basis of religious knowledge.

theological postulations in Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695)...as deifying reason rather than using it to uphold faith" ("Our Religion" 132).

³ In her foundational early twentieth-century study of Astell, Florence Smith situates these works in the context of Astell's later "sociological efforts towards the establishment of a charity school for girls in Chelsea" (33). Smith observes that this school, established "by the group of friends closest to Mary Astell" in 1729, operated continuously until the nineteenth century (33, 33-34). Astell's arguments about the foundations of religious knowledge, however, extend beyond her neighborhood in her tracts' reception and broader influence as devotional and conduct literature.

⁴ Astell's proposal for a religious retreat is "particular" insofar as it is a single imagined, bounded partition among other potentially competing spaces in this world. As a culturally constructed part of a larger whole, Astell creates a distinction but not a separation between her monastic community and the world it rejects.

Astell contextualizes her proposal by arguing that establishing a dedicated space of religious retreat is necessary to improve the lives of all women. Astell contends that women need a robust education for life in the present world in addition to their preparation for the spiritual world to come because this kind of education produces spiritually competent women suited to the complex task of managing an estate⁵. She retrospectively describes her text as a simple request for “a reasonable provision for the Education of one half of Mankind, and for a safe retreat so long and no longer than our Circumstances make it requisite” (*Christian Religion* 235). Astell eschews aristocratic vanities and courtly dalliances for an educational model that nurtures the spirit and mind. In contrast with ladies those who seek social status through marriage, Astell dedicates her work to those female readers who seek to “improve your Charms and heighten your Value” with “something more truly illustrious, than a sounding Title or a great Estate” (*SP* I 51). In her *Serious Proposal*, this “truly illustrious” profit consists of women’s intellectual and spiritual development. Astell explains that a properly ordered religious space can shape the willing subject by facilitating the mind’s complete freedom.

Something implied by the word “monastery” remains important to Astell beyond an aesthetic affinity based upon her well-known conservative commitments. Rather than avoiding the potentially damaging Catholic connotations of “monastery,” Astell distances herself from her critics by acknowledging that the “scrupulous” might take issue with the word. J. David Macey, Jr. observes, “Convents did not exist in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and any serious discussion of a ‘*Religious Retirement*’ for women had to take English anti-Catholicism into account” by drawing a

⁵ On the relationship between Astell’s school and the socioeconomic changes that changed the role of women in managing estates and that produced the cultural type of the female “spinster,” see Bridget Hill, “A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery,” 129.

stark contrast between the Catholic monastery and the imagined one (174). As Macey notes, Astell's emphasis on the freedom within the "institution and previous discipline" of her monastery by eliminating monastic vows could have established a clear difference for her audience (174). Nicole Pohl suggests that Astell and writers like her appropriate "traditional preconceptions about enclosed and all-female spaces" for their own purposes (95). The cultural power that the Catholic monasteries and convents once held in England suggests that ideally constructed spaces can oppose negative cultural practices and nurture individual and institutional religious practice. The cultural archetype of the recusant Catholic women in the seventeenth-century Stuart court and in the rest of English society may also have offered Astell a model of women opposed to society's values based upon religious belief.

In the first part of her *Serious Proposal*, Astell argues that young ladies must learn to recognize their true worth in the context of a society that values them as aesthetic objects rather than as possessors of eternal souls. Her solution is an educational program of ascetic cosmopolitanism—a systematic engagement with the whole of the material world that allows the subject to comprehend the epistemological limits of that world from a position of renunciation—as the remedy to this social distortion. Astell contends that women will see religious issues more clearly at a distance: "From this sacred Mountain where the world will be plac'd at our feet, at such a distance from us, that the streams of its corruptions shall not obscure our eye-sight; we shall have a right prospect of it" (97). Like her proposed monastery, Astell's image of Mount Sinai is sacred and marked as distinct from the rest of human life in spite of the fact that it remains embedded within

the material world that it seeks to transcend⁶. Astell's imagined mountaintop vantage point reveals the nature of the material world it surveys and frees its inhabitants from the destructive habits of custom and thought associated with the world below.

This metaphor of the sacred mountain articulates the seeming paradox at the center of Astell's proposal and model of knowledge. Her proposed construction of a religious retreat within the present world promises the production of knowledge of the world that lies beyond the present world's limits and perception. Astell addresses this issue by discussing two separate theological approaches to space. The first appears in Astell's discussion of the space of the body and its relationship to the inward self.

Sharon Achinstein identifies Astell's ascetic attitude towards matter within Astell's more famous polemic against the gendered inequalities of marriage: "[Astell's] approach was surely ascetic, and as such a brace against the controlling structures of marriage and patriarchal authority. It was, nonetheless, a revolutionary assault on matter *tout court*" (26). Achinstein's analysis rightly characterizes Astell's rejection of the idea of the female body as a material space capable of limiting the mind's absolute freedom. This account of the inward soul has biblical precedent in the image of the Holy Spirit's dwelling within the redeemed subject. By locating the soul and God's presence within the believing subject, Astell asks her readers to think about the spirit and the self as physically inward and separate from the body.

Clear examples of this type of language appear in Astell's exhortation to her fellow women who are distracted by the demands of fashion: "We wou'd never be so

⁶ Astell's image of the "sacred Mountain" refers to the biblical Mount Sinai where Moses receives the Ten Commandments directly from God or, perhaps, the metaphoric mountain of progressively attained knowledge in texts such as Dante's *Purgatorio*. John Norris uses a similar image in his contributions to *Letters Concerning the Love of God*, which I discuss below.

curious of the House, and so careless of the Inhabitant, whose beauty is capable of great improvement and will endure for ever without diminution or decay!” (SP I 66). Here, Astell contrasts “the House” of the material body, which is subject to “diminution or decay” with the immortal beauty of its “Inhabitant.” She values the eternal soul or self over the material body and describes it through the familiar spatial metaphor of the house and its inhabitant. This discourse tenuously links the soul to body through its imagined inwardness, but maintains that the soul is distinct from the body in nature.

Astell’s second theological approach to space—and the subject of this study—addresses the role of external spaces in the formation of religious and secular knowledge. In addition to her description of the thinking, rational self within the physical or metaphorical body, Astell addresses the mediating forces of customs and social institutions, such as university learning and marriage, that mediate the ways in which people interact with these dedicated spaces. In her most familiar tract, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700), Astell considers the effects of this social and religious institution on the female subject and the household. In the case of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Parts I and II, Astell focuses most directly on custom’s interference in the formation of religious knowledge. The broadly negative attitude towards matter that Achinstein identifies in Astell’s philosophy is a prominent characteristic of space’s role in Astell’s educational curriculum.

In order to challenge the idea that the material world is significant in and of itself, Astell’s model of religious learning requires a negative space capable of opposing custom’s destructive force by means of contrasting social or ritual practices. In Part I, Astell describes her institution as a space within the ordinary world devoted to

challenging that world's harmful intellectual habits. Her description draws upon the familiar biblical language of ritual purification: "did we rightly consider [God's] Nature, we shou'd neither dare to forget him, nor draw near to him with unclean hands and unholy hearts" (*SP I* 96-7). Astell links the practice of ceremonial cleansing with appropriate religious observance and, in doing so, implicitly argues for a limited connection between the material world of clean hands and the eternal reality of God's presence. Her comparison suggests that believing subjects can appropriately understand spiritual matters from within the material world with the aid of a rightly ordered material space. Her directions for this ordering, however, are almost wholly negative.

When Astell lists the advantages of retired living, she sets her imagined space in contrast with the rest of the ordinary world. Life "in the world" is full of dangers such as "[a] constant Scene of Temptations and the infection of ill company" that threaten women's virtue (*SP I* 93). Although she admits, "it is indeed more glorious to conquer than to fly," she counsels women to escape as far as possible from the ordinary world for the sake of their spiritual welfare (93). Here, Astell describes her retreat as an active process of fleeing the world rather than a fixed, material destination. She emphasizes the positive educational value of her retreat as the motivation for escape: "So much for the inconveniencies of the living in the World; if we enquire concerning Retirement, we shall find that it does not only remove all these, but brings considerable advantages of its own" (*SP I* 94). This material space of retreat offers positive benefits for women's true selves. It is conveniently "out of the road of temptations" and capable of "furnishing" its inhabitants "constantly with good employment" (*SP I* 95). Astell's interest in removing the most worldly aspects of the material world resembles the privation of Christian

ascetic practices, but the idea that “good employment” within the material world can be good spiritual employment reveals Astell’s interest in articulating a tenuous but critical relationship between the rational self and the material universe. In fleeing the world’s dangers, Astell’s monastic ladies come to understand the limitations of the material world more generally.

Astell develops this account of religious knowledge more fully in the complementary second part of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*. After considering why her contemporaries failed to build her monastic academy immediately, she sketches a model of knowledge and learning that more fully articulates space’s educational function. This concentrated examination of the foundations of human knowledge continues to rely on the space of religious retreat to remove the shackles of custom in intellectual matters. While Astell does not intend to provide a comprehensive model of reason’s operation, she consistently approaches the issue of human reason through the religious ideas and epistemological frameworks that she develops in her theological works. Because Astell maintains that religious belief is essential to the construction of human knowledge, I interpret her educational proposal through the theological claims that motivate and support this learning process.

As Astell describes it, this space facilitates a mental or spiritual state of nature that restores free choice and orients human desires towards their proper object, the divine. In her *Proposal*, Astell explains that her understanding of religion is the central motivating factor for establishing this retreat:

We have hitherto consider’d our Retirement only in relation to Religion, which is indeed its *main*, I may say its *only* design; nor can this be thought too contracting a word, since Religion is the adequate business of our lives, and largely consider’d, takes in all we have to do; nothing being a fit

employment for a rational Creature, which has not either a *direct* or *remote* tendency to this great and *only* end (76-77).

For Astell, religion constitutes “the adequate business of our lives,” and she argues that all “fit employment for a rational Creature” derives from this business. The meaning of human action, the nature of the material universe, and the effects of human custom are therefore religious issues before they are political or intellectual questions. Her explicitly broad interpretation of religion itself, in opposition to contemporaries who already consider it “too contracting a word,” suggests that the scope of the religious is a source of debate at the end of the seventeenth century.

This broad interpretation of religion as the sole motivator for meaningful human activity is how Astell proposes radical change on behalf of women throughout English society. What Astell’s focus on religious truth ultimately produces, however, is a discourse capable of supporting a division between religious and general knowledge and between private religious spaces and the public world. Astell’s proposal for a space dedicated to the religious instruction of women participates in the formation of modern boundaries that separate religious knowledge and practices from public life, but it does so in dialogue with contemporary intellectual and theological questions. While I recognize that Astell’s theological ideas have important social valences, I also seek to attend to the fact that her texts consistently treat religious concerns as the primary end towards which her program of social reform leads⁷.

⁷ Astell recognizes that her seemingly simple request to improve women’s theological education for the state of young ladies’ souls could also enhance their future marriage prospects as sound managers of households and estates. Because Astell describes her educational program as a corrective to the dangers and distractions that plague young, marriageable women, most of Astell’s earliest critics have directed their efforts towards understanding the social contexts and consequences of her work. This valuable work of rediscovery has offered many convincing reasons why women in the late seventeenth century might seek both a change in their sociopolitical status and, in the work of more recent critics, question the assumptions

As it situates Astell's proposal in this context, my project refocuses critical interest in Astell's work onto the religious and theological concerns that are foundational to her account of space and knowledge. In his study of Astell's polemical prose, Michel Michaelson finds that the social and political consequences of Astell's ideas have dominated the critical conversation about her work. Michaelson observes that "[t]he centrality of religion to [Astell's] construction of an autonomous subject position cannot be overemphasised. Synthesising languages of rationality, theology, and political philosophy in her appraisal of the social theories and ethics surrounding her, Astell defines an ideal public community that is virtuous and free, and which includes fully both the feminine and the spiritual" (133). Michaelson rightly identifies the importance of religious ideas throughout Astell's entire corpus—what many modern readers characterize as dispensable cultural assumptions. Astell's concern for the rights and status of contemporary women expresses only a part of her overarching interest in the rational foundations of an authoritative religious community that relies on the exercise of each individual's mind.

In recent years, Astell's critics have begun to attend to the religious ideas that inform Astell's account of reason and the mind. In their invaluable essay collection, *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith*, editors William Kolbrener and Michal Michelson document this growing appreciation of "the full range and details of Astell's learning and commitments" and of Astell's "engagement with all aspects of the intellectual world she inhabited" inaugurated by Ruth Perry's foundational biography ("Dreading" 5).

Kolbrener and Michelson observe that this more nuanced understanding of Astell's

inherent in narratives that posit the inevitable emergence of liberal accounts of individual rights and their gendered subtexts.

participation in debates about knowledge and women's value improves upon Astell's earlier, less consciously methodological criticism that focused more narrowly upon "the ways in which she anticipated more contemporary feminist educational and social agendas" or critiqued liberal accounts of individual rights (3). These accounts rightly emphasize the importance of the individual's intellectual choice to Astell's thinking but fail to recognize how Astell's religious epistemology relies on this framework as a model for the shared ends of the religious community.

After all, Astell's proposal is not merely an act of wish fulfillment based on women's economic and social marginalization⁸. Astell's concern for the condition and status of contemporary women extends from her concern that people throughout English society would have access to the knowledge required for all to possess intellectually sound religious convictions. She speculates, "The Ladies, I'm sure, have no reason to dislike this Proposal, but I know not how the Men will resent it, to have their enclosure broke down, and Women invited to tast of that Tree of Knowledge they have so long unjustly *monopoliz'd*" (SP I 83)⁹. As a retreat from the economy of ordinary life, this space certainly opposes the damaging intellectual habits of that life. Nevertheless, Astell's primary concern is with the spiritual and intellectual well being of all people and

⁸ Because Astell describes a program of educational reforms explicitly for women, much of the critical attention to her *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* has been directed towards understanding the social contexts of her work. This valuable work of rediscovery has offered many convincing reasons why women in the late seventeenth century might seek both a change in their sociopolitical status and question the ideas of liberal thinkers such as Locke. Since Astell's critical rediscovery, many critics have closely examined the specific institutions and beliefs that oppressed women in this period. For example, J. David Macey, Jr. broadly claims that Astell imagines "communities of women in order to fill a psychological and social void" (174). Understanding context's shaping role in the production of imaginative literature may be an important part of literary and cultural studies, but it is dangerously reductive to assume that the difficult conditions women faced in the late seventeenth century are the only factors motivating Astell's proposal.

⁹ The fact that Astell chooses a common proof-text from debates about women's supposed theologically subordinate status suggests her keen awareness of the gendered subtext of this biblical image.

her solidarity with women, while important, derives from this original commitment¹⁰.

Astell's proposed monastery is concerned with knowledge and its proper use in the world, but this focus necessarily raises doubts about the value of setting aside a dedicated religious space if its ultimate goal lies in the spiritual world¹¹. Her works takes aim at the spiritual ignorance that threatens to empty even the well-managed and well-educated life of meaning, and her solution is knowledge.

Astell's purpose is to wake the subject's sleeping intellectual faculties: "And by the Learning which will be here afforded, and that leisure we have, to enquire after it, and to know and reflect on our own minds, we shall rescue our selves out of that woful incogitancy we have slipt into, awaken our sleeping Powers and make use of that reason which GOD has given us" (*SP* I 95). Astell imagines an escape within an escape—from the ordinary world and from the unthinking, unreasoning state of "incogitancy" that metaphorically resembles it. She seeks to improve the eternal, reasoning self with a material space that embraces the true value of the self and rejects the everyday world's illusions and distortions.

Astell implies that a dedicated religious space can draw people's attention to the soul and the mind by dispelling the customs that blind humans to their true nature. She promises that her institution "shall not so cut you off from the world as to hinder you from bettering and improving it, but rather qualify you to do it the greatest Good, and be

¹⁰ In this respect, my argument diverges from that of Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, who asserts that Astell did not "[envisage] changing the whole of society" (271). Her focus on ladies as the beginning of a program does not necessarily imply that Astell is entirely unconcerned about people outside of her social class, as her Chelsea charity school illustrates (Perry *Celebrated* 2). Astell's focus on the role of noble ladies as the origin point for this transformation is certainly predicated on an outmoded perspective on social class, but her ultimate vision remains universal.

¹¹ For the complexities of the social role(s) Astell's works describe and propose for women in relation to the spiritual world, see Kamille Stone Stanton, "'Affliction, The Sincerest Friend,'" 106-8.

a Seminary to stock the Kingdom with pious and prudent Ladies” as examples for the rest (*SP I 76*). Astell argues that women can achieve this goal by establishing a space of religious retreat that frees its inhabitants from the “enchanted Circle” of custom: “one great end of this institution, shall be to expel that cloud of Ignorance, which Custom has involv’d us in, to furnish our minds with a stock of solid and useful Knowledge, that the Souls of Women may no longer be the only unadorn’d and neglected things” (*SP I 55, 77*). The link between spaces devoted to religious retreat and the transformation these spaces might effect in the minds of the people within that space is separate from the assumptions implied in ceremonial religious spaces instituted earlier in the century.

Rather than expecting the beauty of holiness to draw people towards the divine, Astell’s dedicated religious space banishes the “cloud of Ignorance” that lends inherent value to a single form of religious space (*77*). Like other seventeenth-century Arminians, Astell accepts the idea that human reason and nature are reliable guides when unfettered by sinful customs rather than imagining the fall as wholly corrupting the judgment and will of humankind¹². For Astell, the space of religious retreat challenges custom’s dominance by cultivating a rational, cosmopolitan attitude towards space in general that restores intellectual freedom.

The curriculum Astell proposes for her academy clarifies the role of immediate rational knowledge in shaking the shackles of custom. She describes received knowledge as misleading for uneducated ladies without the education necessary to judge between competing opinions:

Thus Ignorance and a narrow Education, lay the Foundation of Vice, and Imitation and Custom rear it up. Custom, that merciless torrent that carries

¹² The Arminian theological position contends that the human will is not in a state of total depravity and can be assisted—though not coerced—by the aid of ceremony, sacrament, and ritual.

all before. And which indeed can be stem'd by none but such as have a great deal of Prudence and a rooted Vertue. For 'tis but Decorous that she who is not capable of giving better Rules, shou'd follow those she sees before her, lest she only change the instance and retain the absurdity (*SP I* 67).

Only those who develop “Prudence and a rooted Vertue” can avoid being caught up in changing, unreliable customs. In the first part of her *Proposal*, Astell eschews extensive curricular planning and simply outlines the most general activities that young ladies would perform in her space of religious retreat. She imagines that her residents would perform “the Publick Offices after the Cathedral manner, in the most affecting and elevating way,” participate in “a course of solid instructive Preaching and Catechizing,” and freely choose to follow the traditional feast and fasting days “to set us an admirable pattern of Obedience” (*SP I* 84, 85). Astell only preserves the traditional church calendar and rites only because this “pattern of Obedience” conflicts with the seated habits of the fallen, material self. This logic of countering custom with another set of rites demonstrates Astell’s ascetic cosmopolitanism. The imagined monastery’s emphasis on ceremony unsettles custom’s hegemonic power, and Astell’s hypothetical votary gains intellectual virtue from this freedom rather than from the objective value of the liturgy.

Astell’s metaphor of labor further articulates how the present world influences the spiritual self: “But having long since laid the Ax to the root of sin, and destroy’d the whole body of it, they will look upon these holy times of recollection and extra-ordinary Devotion...as excellent means to keep it down” (85). While Christian justification eradicates sin, “extra-ordinary” acts of devotion resemble the disciplined maintenance of an artificial garden or lawn. This laborious, ascetic process is characteristic of her understanding of her religious retreat as both a physical space and an active process of

keeping down the weeds of custom. Astell's emphasis on devotion as the means of countering the insidious growth of sin involves the ongoing pursuit of religious knowledge that her retreat facilitates.

Astell's space of religious retreat eliminates the barriers to reason's operation by separating women from the customs associated with the spaces of their ordinary lives before providing them with a contrasting set of experiences. This space defamiliarizes the ordinary world for its residents in order to encourage them to make a principled rejection of the material world. In Part II, Astell writes, "We must therefore withdraw our Minds from the World, from adhering to the Senses, from the Love of Material Beings, of Poms and Gaieties" (*SP* II 161). Here, Astell appears to describe a goal at odds with her monastery's daily devotional offices, organized church calendar, and prescribed moderation in diet and living arrangements. Because of her fundamentally ascetic strategy, Astell echoes common nonconformist and iconoclastic complaints against ceremonial church spaces and practices in spite of their utility within her educational process. Women in Astell's space of religious retreat learn to abandon the love of "Poms and Gaieties" through a contrasting set of sensory experiences that unseats the hidden assumptions and prejudices that obscure reason itself.

In contrast with the rules and vows characteristic of Catholic institutions, Astell emphasizes that women enrolled in the school are free from binding obligations except for the £500 fee to enter the school, "since Inclination can't be forc'd...there shall be no Vows or irrevocable Obligations...[e]v'ry act of our Religious Votary shall be voluntary and free, and no other tye but the Pleasure, the Glory and Advantage of this blessed Retirement to confine her to it" (89). Serving in part to separate her religious retirement

from the familiar Catholic model, Astell has other philosophical reasons for rejecting the idea of binding vows and obligations. She contends that human “Inclination[s]” cannot be forcibly shaped or changed, but in doing so risks casting doubt on the efficacy of the school’s schedule of formal devotions, preaching, and good works. Because she believes that the true, spiritual self does not belong to the material world, she rejects the idea it can be coerced by the material world. This is not a contradiction but instead the basis of a two-step process in which a new, reformed space combines with changes of habit that free the faculty of reason from the distortions of custom. Then, human reason can operate freely and truly engage with the religious concerns Astell believes are central to humanity’s purpose and happiness.

In its ascetic cosmopolitanism, Astell’s school confronts its students with a radically different material space and radically different religious practices in order to encourage women to think beyond their immediate sensory environment. Like Montaigne’s educated youth who travels to dramatically different lands and cultures to challenge childhood biases and indulgences, Astell’s student thinks about materiality in general by living in a space consciously opposed to her ordinary experience of the world¹³. Astell frequently uses the language of freedom to describe the proper operation of reason and describes an attachment to preexisting knowledge as captivity. She claims, “[a]s Prejudice fetters the Understanding so does Custom manacle the Will,” and questions the masses’ allegiance to the names and authorities associated with knowledge

¹³ Montaigne characterizes travel in the world as a technological apparatus capable of giving the student a clearer glimpse of the individual’s place as a small part of a larger world full of divergent customs and ideas. He writes, “This great world of ours (which for some is only one species within a generic group) is the looking-glass in which we must gaze to come to know ourselves in the right slant” (177). Like Astell’s ascetic cosmopolitanism, the ultimate goal is disabusing the learning subject of a provincial form of knowledge.

without relying on reason's evidence (139). The ascetic privation in her space of religious retreat provides its students with the requisite physical and metaphorical distance from the distractions of their ordinary lives.

Astell's implicit argument that a dedicated space of religious retreat rejuvenates the powers of reason and frees the self from the distortions of custom develops out of René Descartes' account of reason in *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (1637). In his radically new methodological approach towards knowledge, Descartes describes the individual's immediate experience of knowledge as a reliable guide that can free people from scholastic and philosophical baggage more likely to obscure reality than explain it¹⁴. In Part Four of his *Discourse*, Descartes writes, "examining attentively what I was, I saw that I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world or place for me to be in" but finds that "it followed *incontrovertibly* and certainly that I myself existed...I thereby concluded that I was a *substance* whose whole *essence* or nature resides only in thinking, and which, in order to exist, has no need of place and is not dependent on any material thing" (29). For Descartes "reason or good sense" offers incontrovertible proof—external to the material world—which allows individuals to escape from custom's enchanted circle and to challenge received knowledge from a new epistemological ground (5). Descartes' model of reasoning operates like Astell's space of religious retreat because it strips away custom's distortions in order to free reason¹⁵. Both assume that the

¹⁴ It should not be surprising that Astell takes a fundamentally Cartesian approach to custom because, as Patricia Springborg argues, "Descartes is the single most important philosophical figure Astell encountered, and it is largely in Cartesian terms that she responded to Hobbes, Locke, and Malebranche" (*Theorist* 39-40).

¹⁵ For Descartes, this proof allows people to test their received knowledge against their immediate experience of knowing: "as far as all the opinions I had hitherto accepted were concerned, I could do no

universal reliability of the mind's immaterial reason can solve the problems of custom and received knowledge. By connecting the process of reasoning with an attitude of skepticism towards received knowledge, Astell imagines that women could attack the habits of custom with the aid of religious instruction and ceremony.

Like Descartes, Astell argues that reason's proofs are incontrovertible and universal by dissociating reason from the labor of interpreting the material world. Astell's reason acts directly and immediately upon the properly receptive mind:

Reason wills that we shou'd think again, and not form our Conclusions or fix our foot till we can honestly say, that we have with our Prejudice or Prepossession view'd the matter in Debate on all sides, seen it in every light, have no bias to encline us either way, but are only determined by Truth it self, shining brightly in our eyes, and not permitting us to resist the force and Evidence it carries (*SP II 135*).

Without the barriers that obscure it, Truth presents itself to reason without the need for human intervention. Astell's program of study rejects the deferential study of foreign languages and reputable authors because those seeking to learn must "[d]isengage our selves from all our former Prejudices, from our Opinion of Names, Authorities, Customs, and the like, not give credit to any thing any longer because we have once believ'd it, but because it carries clear and uncontested Evidence along with it" (*SP II 133*). Astell describes reason as willing that its admirers adequately prepare themselves to search for it directly. Only then does Truth appear, so persuasively and incontrovertibly that its "force and Evidence" are irresistible (*SP II 135*). This account of reason is inseparable from Astell's broader religious model of learning and knowing.

better than to set about ridding myself of them once and for all, with a view to replacing them afterwards either with better ones, or even the same ones, once I had testing them with my reason and ensured that they were set straight" (*Discourse 14*). This initial rejection of custom is essential to Astell's educational project.

Astell's proposed space of religious retreat, which helps to free women from custom's distortions, implicitly articulates her beliefs about the status of human knowledge and reason. Astell explains that the corruption of the fall disorders human faculties so that reason cannot "always maintain its ground against Passion and Appetite," and that human reason must fully depend on divine prompting in order to reach reason's irresistible proof of clear and distinct ideas (143). For this reason, Astell cautions her readers about reason's susceptibility to the distractions and distortions of sense, "But considering how weak our Reason is, how unable to maintain its Authority and oppose the incursions of sense, without the assistance of an inward and Spiritual Sensation to strengthen it, 'tis highly necessary that we use due endeavors to procure a lively relish of our true Good" (143-4). Like Descartes, Astell considers reason to be vulnerable to the distortions of human custom. The "Pleasures of our Animal Nature" are barriers to reason's right operation, but people struggle to turn their appetite to their true Good even in a place of religious retreat (144). The animal nature and its associated senses can be attuned to support reason as fully as possible, but without the "inward and Spiritual Sensation," the subject will be unaware of what God reveals to reason. Astell argues that people can only achieve this "by directing the Will in an elicit Act to GOD as its only Good, so that the sole End of all its movements may be to draw near, to acquiesce in and be united to him" (144). Having argued earlier against binding vows in her religious community because the operation of the will cannot be forced, the supports of material spaces reveal and help to remove the barriers of custom and prejudice in order to restore the will's freedom. The votary's free choice to redirect her will towards God is a necessary precondition for rousing the soul's latent senses.

Astell's belief in the efficacy of material spaces in facilitating a Cartesian resistance to custom and received knowledge falls within her Occasionalist account of religious knowledge. Astell attributes agency to reason in Part II of *A Serious Proposal* because of her belief that God operates as the mediating force between the material world (the "occasion") and the subject's immaterial mind. Astell's epistolary correspondence with the theologian John Norris in *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (1695) articulates their shared understanding of God's role in mediating the function of the senses and Astell's contention that the material world is a symbolic analogue to spiritual reality. In their letters, Astell and Norris seek to reconcile the world of the senses as a source of knowledge with a rigidly immaterial theory of mind. By affirming the material world's providential basis as a symbolic representation of divinely revealed truth, Astell justifies her proposal for a physical space of religious retirement and simultaneously maintains a clear distinction between the material body and immaterial world of the human soul and mind¹⁶.

Following the prefatory materials in which Norris claims to have convinced a reluctant Astell to publish their correspondence, Astell takes up a question sparked by the third volume of Norris' *Practical Discourses* (*Letters* 69). Her letter explains her interest in Norris' argument "*That GOD is the Efficient Cause of our Sensations, Pain as well as Pleasure*" (*Letters* 70). Much of the conversation in *Letters Concerning the Love of God* therefore addresses the relationship between the physical sensations of pain and pleasure.

¹⁶ Because of the role that material space plays in the facilitation of knowledge, Astell's position differs from reductive caricatures of Cartesian dualism, and Descartes notably spends considerable energy in Book Five of his *Discourse* differentiating rational human souls from the material, mechanistic operation of animals. He concludes that the soul, while immaterial, is closely intertwined with the motions of the material part of humanity (48-9). In *Milton Among the Philosophers*, Stephen Fallon discusses Descartes' interest in the relationship between the immaterial mind and the mechanistic body at length, including the philosopher's interest in the pineal gland as a possible interface between the two (26-7).

Their conclusions develop out of Nicholas Malebranche's contention that the efficient cause of human experience is God's modification of the soul rather than the direct effects of material reality. As Lefebvre succinctly describes it, "For Descartes and the Cartesians, God never rested" (*Production of Space* 283). In this theological system, God's intermediary role allows for the coexistence of a material world and an immaterial spirit without robbing the material world of its meaning. In Malebranche's philosophy in particular, God is both the creator of the material world and the effective cause of sensation in the necessarily immaterial soul. Although Astell's religious epistemology relies on divine revelation, she contends that other forms of knowledge are likewise divided from the body and its senses because the thinking self remains separate from the material world.

In the case of both God's revelation to the soul or the information available to ordinary human reason, Astell characterizes reason as the sensory organ of the immaterial soul. She makes a similar assertion in the "Appendix" of her 1717 second edition of *The Christian Religion*, in which Astell writes that Locke (or "the Great Mr. L.") and other proponents of 'thinking matter' theories "must excuse me from allowing it Possible for Body in general, or for any Parcels of Matters to Think" until she has been convinced of it (241). Thought and reason are, for Astell, qualities of the soul and are therefore distinct from "Body in general." For this reason, she concludes that "it is not Body that Thinks, but the Mind that is United to it, Body being still as incapable of Thought as ever it was" (241). Convinced that thinking matter is a contradiction in terms, Astell associates thought and reason with the mind rather than the body.

The writers' agreement on the fundamental distinction between the mind and body is intimately connected to the recurring idea of retirement that appears throughout *Letters*. Their discussion of the division between an ideal space and the ordinary world allows us to understand Astell and Norris' overarching conversation about causation and knowledge more fully. Imagining a space of religious retirement tests their theological and philosophical conclusions with the question of practical application. Astell's argument that the providential order of the material world is legible, meaningful, and not simply an occasion for divine causation begins to explain how she can valorize their shared desire for a quiet, retired space. At the end of Astell's introductory letter to Norris, she wishes him "a quiet convenient Retirement, which is indeed all the Happiness that can be had on this side Heaven" (*Letters* 70). In light of Astell and Norris' shared assertion that God mediates the human subject's full experience of the material world, the suggestion that one kind of space is superior to another is surprising. Understanding Astell's account of the significance of retired spaces and their opposition to the values of the world in general clarifies her account of the providential, symbolic relationship between the material and spiritual worlds.

Norris similarly praises the solitude of the state of nature as "such an one as that of *Moses* upon the holy Mount, when he withdrew from the People to enjoy the Converse of *GOD*: As that of our Saviour, when he tells his Disciples that they should desert and leave him alone, and yet that he was not alone because his Father was with him" (122). There is a profound resonance between Norris' rejection of Hobbesian pessimism about the state of nature and Astell's argument for a retreat that equips its students with the

knowledge necessary to reevaluate the ordinary world¹⁷. For Norris, God makes Moses from the people in order to provide the guiding social and religious teachings that formed the basis for the shared life of a community. Norris' description suggests that the isolation imagined by those who imagine life wholly outside of human society would, in reality, allow the believing subject to see the world aright.

In the appendix to *Letters*, Astell seeks to address objections that their theology “renders a great Part of *GOD*'s Workmanship vain and useless” (131). Astell entertains the objection that placing the whole of human experience outside of the material world necessarily empties the present world of any meaning: “[I]f the Objects of our Senses have no natural Efficiency towards the producing of those Sensations which we feel a their Presence, if they serve no further than positive and arbitrary Conditions to determine the Action of the true and proper Cause...to what end do they serve?” (*Letters* 131-2). If the material world is indeed an utterly “arbitrary” occasion for the action of God on the soul, it might therefore fail to dislodge the mind's reliance on settled custom. Astell posits that there must necessarily be a correspondence between the material world and the

¹⁷ When John Norris rejects the idea that the life dedicated solely to the love of God is inherently miserable—“a state of horrible Privation, as a dismal Solitude—he describes its benefits through biblical examples of retirement (122). He maintains that humans are naturally drawn towards God and their ultimate good when they reject the “Love of the Creature that is the general Temptation to Sin” and the distracting temptation of “all created Loves” (123). Norris draws upon the Augustinian idea that misplaced love rather than willful evil is the basis of sin in order to suggest that the kind of solitude offered by the retired life can properly order human loves. Norris makes this debt clear in his reference to Augustine at the end of Letter X: “I shall therefore conclude all with a very pertinent Passage out of one of the Prayers of St. *Austin*, in his *Meditations* (chap. 35)...*For two Loves, one good and another bad, one sweet and another bitter, cannot dwell together in the same Breast, and therefore if any one love any thing besides thee, thy Love, O GOD, is not in him*” (*Letters* 124). The spatial metaphor of love dwelling within the subject's body within Augustine's text is also characteristic of Norris' description of the solitary religious life: “[T]hrice happy he that enjoys this divine Retreat, that can force the Creatures to withdraw, command their Absence, and wholly empty his Heart of their Love that it may be the more free for the Reception and Enjoyment of him who is able to fill the largest Room he can prepare for him there” (122). On the subject of willful evil, Paul Hoffman notes that Descartes argues in *Replies to the Sixth Objections* that the human “will can only tend toward what is perceived as true or good” and that “we cannot aim at evil as evil, even when our ideas are not clear and distinct” (212).

human senses in what she describes as a “sensible congruity” between the mind and the material world, based upon an idea proposed by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (132)¹⁸. In his longitudinal study of English Christianity, Kenneth Hylson-Smith remarks that the Cambridge Platonists are the “most influential” participants in an emphatically rational turn in “academic philosophy...in the last half of the seventeenth century” (295). Astell’s appropriation of this approach to mind and matter plays a central role in her rational approach to religious space.

Astell speculates that the material world operates as a mechanical rather than voluntary instrument of God’s causation and that this relationship invests the world with a providential resemblance to its external source of meaning (132-3). Norris qualifies this idea by suggesting that an “antecedent Aptness or Reason” invests the material world with meaning despite the fact that the action of God directly on the soul remains the effective cause of all sensation (137). Norris’ language of aptness and Astell’s of congruity share the simultaneous valuation and devaluation of the material world characteristic of Astell’s vision of religious retreat. Having severed attachments to the world that can distort one’s awareness of the divine order, Astell’s believing subject glimpses immaterial realities through the symbolic meaning that God’s providence invests in the world. E. Derek Taylor has argued that Astell ultimately conflates matter and spirit at the end of *Letters* in a temporary philosophical “flirtation with Lockean materialism” in spite of her later rejection of the same position (522). While Astell’s

¹⁸ Astell’s interest in reason as the guarantee behind religious teaching and authority also connects her with the theological commitments of the Cambridge Platonists. Graham Parry describes the Cambridge Platonists’ understanding of reason: “the exercise of reason at its highest level will seek the utmost knowledge of what is good and true, aspiring to know its own source in the Creator” (201). This belief functioned in part as an effort to bridge the religious differences of the period by focusing on reason, which was “[t]he faculty that discovered the presence of God within the creation” and “the spark of the divine mind that every human mind contained” (201). Reason still depends on its Creator because of its limitations, however much it reflects the free will of the human subject.

critics have contrasted her discussion of this sensible congruity with her later account of the mind in *The Christian Religion*, my project focuses on the methodological affinity between Astell's appropriation of More's approach to mind and matter and her rational approach to religious space¹⁹. The discourse of religious retreat in Astell's *Serious Proposal* and the epistemological model that Norris and Astell share in *Letters* reflect Astell's continuous stance towards the material world as a symbolic representation of eternal truth.

Astell's educational program in *A Serious Proposal*, Part II draws upon this account of the world as a providentially ordered sign of immaterial reality. She argues that the material world's design instructs those who study it: "There is no Object, no Accident of Life but affords us matter of Instruction. GOD has so dispos'd all the Works of his Hands, all the Actings of his Providence, that every one of 'em ministers to our Improvement, if we will but Observe and Apply them" (*SP* II 175). Astell argues that material objects and ordinary events reflect God's providential design and that studying the world allows the subject to discover the immaterial world of the spirit. God's providence guarantees the congruity between the sign and truth, while the sign has no meaning outside of that guarantee. Understanding how Astell's model of human knowledge develops out of her theological conversation with Norris more fully explains how her commitment to the valuation of the mind coexists with her interest in the knowledge available to the senses. What initially appears to be a contradictory dependence on and dismissal of material spaces reflects assumptions not immediately apparent to Astell's modern readers. The religious retreat's symbolic function reaches

¹⁹ See Patricia Springborg's description of the contrasting approaches of E. Derek Taylor and Sarah Ellenzeig to the issue of Astell's sensible congruity (*Theorist* 61-3).

reason's faculties through the mediation of the divine. As a result, its inhabitants learn to recognize that the space of religious retreat is reliably aligned with but not ultimately derived from the material world. God's active role in providentially ordering the world and mediating between matter and spirit and the reasoning participation of the human stand in stark contrast with the static, symbolic nature of the material world through which this communion occurs.

In order to establish the material world of ordinary human experience as both opposed to the space of retreat and the site of the retreat's ultimate goals, Astell must reconcile indifference to the world with the idea that the material world and human action are nonetheless meaningful. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that the kind of abstract conception of space characteristic of Cartesian extent forces homogeneity upon the whole of the material world. He describes the characteristics of abstract space, a consequence of "abstract social labour," as "[f]ormal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity)" (49). Astell's epistemology shares an affinity with Lefebvre's account of abstract space insofar as she recognizes that the mind's separation from the material world's social distinctions implies that its intellectual freedom would theoretically belong to all people. She refines this account of the mind's immateriality by arguing that abstracting the material world into an occasion for God to produce sensation does not erase nature's particularities or its significance.

To apprehend religious ideas properly, human reason must reply upon divine revelation because these ideas do not emerge directly from the bodily senses. In the unique case of theological truths, Astell argues that reason cannot function as the master

within, but God instead provides reason with adequate evidence and proof based on the limits of its capabilities. She draws an analogy between this inner prompting and a sensory organ in the body: “as Light is always visible to us if we have an Organ to receive it, if we turn our Eyes towards it, and that nothing interpose between it and us; so is Truth, we are surrounded with it, and GOD has given us Faculties to receive it” (*SP II* 174). Because Astell understands truth to be a concept separate from the body and materiality, she argues that humans must have a matching faculty in order to perceive truth. In order to demonstrate her method, Astell takes on a contemporary theological debate about the doctrine of the Trinity, which she describes as a methodological problem²⁰. She concludes, “we take a wrong method, and wou’d make that the Object of Science which is properly the Object of Faith, the Doctrin of the Trinity” (*SP II* 147). This “Spiritual Sensation” is the means by which people are able to perceive the truth, and this means is separate from the sensory means necessary for “the Object of Science.”

Echoing Descartes’ methodological criteria of clear and distinct ideas, Astell maintains that God provides reason with a clear idea of the Trinity: “Revelation which is but an exaltation and improvement of Reason has told us That the Father is GOD, the Son is GOD, and the Holy Ghost is GOD, and our Idea of the Godhead of any one of these Persons, is as clear as our Idea of any of the other” (147). To extend the logic of Astell’s assertion, God reveals the traditional theological concept of the Trinity by heightening the abilities of reason, while more mundane concepts require that God interact with reason’s ordinary powers. Astell supports traditional religious authority and most

²⁰ In her edition of Astell’s text, Springborg observes that Astell is likely referring to the theological controversy between Locke and Stillingfleet about the Trinity in 1696-7 in which Locke argues for a “clearly Unitarian” position “because the Trinity is not accessible to sensation or reflection” (147n2).

traditional theological concepts because she believes they are supported by revelation, which she understands as a heightened form of reason²¹.

Perhaps anticipating objections that her methodology would be contradictory if it fails to question the authority of the established church, Astell counsels caution over skepticism in religious matters²². Although she criticizes those who lean on an idea's reputation, she is equally critical of those who dismiss all preexisting knowledge without contradictory evidence. In doing so, Astell dismisses skeptical attitudes towards religious authority that treat religious knowledge as the product of ordinary reason.

If Astell seeks to accord a special status to religious knowledge, she must defend its reliability in light of the fact that religion remained a source of considerable contemporary debate and contributed to serious conflicts throughout the seventeenth century. In Part II of *A Serious Proposal*, Astell first divides religious knowledge from other kinds of truth based upon its universality. While philosophical knowledge and other

²¹Astell's distinction between theological knowledge and other forms of knowledge differs from a Baconian rejection of metaphysics because Astell is convinced that people have access to reliable religious teachings guaranteed by the highest form of rationality.

²² Although Astell frames her intervention into the status and methods of women's education in early Enlightenment England, she explicitly resists questioning the bases of ecclesiastical authority, and the intertwined political and religious consequences of this position have been the source of considerable confusion for her modern critics. Hilda Smith summarizes her account of Astell's position within what she frames as seventeenth-century proto-feminist thought: "[t]he conflict within Astell's feminism revolved around the axis of church, state, and women's subordinate status" (*Reason's Disciples* 114). Smith observes with some disappointment that Astell "professed an unquestioning acceptance of both godly and episcopal authority and saw no conflict between such faith and her unhappiness with women's status in seventeenth-century England" (117). Smith rightly notes that Astell has a respect for church authority that appears to directly conflict with her counsel for women to disregard traditional humanist educational authority.

A significant part of Astell's twentieth century criticism sought to explain the relationship between her concern for women and her presumably opposed conservative political allegiances²². Catherine Gallagher famously identifies Astell as a Tory feminist polemicist who links the "reasoning power of the subject" with the equivalent absolute political power of the monarch (35). Astell's explicitly theological account of the mind and reason, however, requires that the believing subject rely wholly upon God's mediating intervention. Astell's firm belief in the authoritative reason of the church is intelligible through her belief that the reliability of revelation and reason's heightened powers could serve as the basis of communally shared beliefs immediately accessible to each individual member of that community.

kinds of learning may not be essential for human life, she believes that religious knowledge is necessary for all people:

[T]he Articles of our Faith and the great Principles of Christian Morality are of another Nature, GOD *wou'd have all Men to be sav'd and to come the Knowledge of these Truths*, tho he did not design 'em all for Philosophers, and therefore they carry a Proof and Evidence to the very Vulgar, which he who runs may read, which every one ought to acquiesce in, though according to their leisure and capacity 'tis fit they inquire why (*SP II 139*).

Because the knowledge of salvation is necessary for all people, Astell separates it from more arcane forms of philosophical knowledge. To make this knowledge available to people of all social strata, Astell relies upon the tradition of the English church. In disputable points of religion, for example, Astell counsels “a quiet submission to the Voice of the Guides, whom Modesty will incline us to think have greater Abilities and Assistances, as well as more Time and Opportunity to find out the Truth than we” (139). While people in highly privileged positions might be able to consider difficult theological questions in their leisure time, basic theological necessities are matters in which the “very Vulgar” might reasonably “acquiesce in the Authority of the Church” (139). This “quiet submission” to ecclesial teachings and authority is a strategic concession to the demands of ordinary callings (139). It is important, however, that these teachings are supported by the reason of those with religious vocations and those who are able to dedicate the time and space necessary to investigate religious ideas.

Because she divides the kind of knowledge offered by the church from her Cartesian skepticism towards received knowledge, Astell is able to justify her firm allegiance to her national church: “when I speak of the little deference that is to be given to Names, Authorities, and receiv'd Opinions, I extend it no farther than to matters purely

Philosophical to mere Humane Truths, and do not design any Prejudice to the Authority of the Church which is of different consideration” (*SP II* 138). While willing to permit a certain degree of individualized experimentation and exploration in matters “purely Philosophical,” Astell leans on tradition for guidance in theological matters because religious truth derives from revelation rather than more fallible sources.

In this way, Astell seems to make humane, philosophical truth subject to public debate and religious truth the domain of the individual’s revelatory reason. Because Astell believes that religious truth reaches reason through God’s intervention, a properly ordered space of religious retreat should unseat any distortions of custom and thereby facilitate immediate and incontrovertible religious guidance for the inquiring. Astell believes that each individual’s reason will guarantee these universal, eternal religious truths in a situation of ideal intellectual freedom. Astell explains that people learn God’s will “by *Reason* which is that Natural and Ordinary Revelation by which he speaks to every one; and by that which is call’d *Revelation* in a stricter Sense, which is nothing else but a more perfect and infallible way of Reasoning. Whereby we are Clearly and Fully instructed in so much of GOD’s Will as is fit for us to know” (*SP II* 208). The evidence of this revelatory reason might therefore legitimate a universal religious authority with evidence as unquestionable as mathematical proof.

I contend that Astell’s readers reinterpret the proposal for a radical expansion of religion’s institutional authority as an argument for religion’s individual, private character that merits consideration apart from humane, philosophical knowledge. Sarah Apetri observes, “[Astell’s] *Second Part* was kept alive...as part of the conduct literature targeted at polite female readers throughout the eighteenth century” rather than as an

educational program or theory of mind (273). This textual appropriation downplays the role of space in the formation of knowledge and limits the reach of the consensus Astell's model promised.

What caused this dramatic shift away from a theory of knowledge that promised verifiable, universal religious truth? One answer may be that in the period following the Revolution of 1688, English society simply failed to reach the religious consensus this model of knowledge promises. In light of the political turmoil and religious conflict of the seventeenth century, one might understand the appeal of a rationally founded universal religious truth that could definitively resolve lingering theological conflicts. The religious spaces and practices that Astell describes therefore become associated with the kind of private, individual belief that her educational project opposes. The universally accessible proof that Astell believes could bring the world under the wing of England's existing religious institutions begins to resemble an individualist faith when the seemingly universal, rational ground of faith fails to yield a universally shared, incontrovertibly proven religion.

A second and perhaps more satisfying answer may be that Astell's *Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, when appropriated as conduct literature, ultimately contributes to a discourse that characterizes an individual's religious faith as private and undermines its claims to universal religious truth. By focusing on the operation of reason and its ability to set aside the distorting nature of traditional learning and dangerous customs, Astell imagines that her proposed space could give women the opportunity to embrace a free use of the will and mind necessary to properly interpret the material world's symbolic character. When Astell's readers reinterpret her proposal as a guide to quiet, genteel

conduct outside of the public eye, they fail to distinguish her means—the ascetic practices and spaces of her religious retreat—from her intellectual program of ascetic cosmopolitanism that uses religious space to dispel the distortions of custom. As a result, Astell’s discourse of the individual’s unmediated encounter with truth then becomes part of an increasingly private account of humanity’s encounter with the divine rather than an epistemology that promised to unite the world under the mathematical proof of the English church.

In recent years, Astell’s critics have nuanced and reframed the critical consensus on Astell’s role as one of England’s anti-patriarchal “first feminists” based on her relationship to religious authority. In her reflection on recent approaches to Astell’s work, Patricia Springborg rejects her earlier classification of Astell as a proto-feminist because “no simple view of [Astell] as a proto-feminist does justice to the complexity of her thought, or the importance of the substantive issues with which she was preoccupied, through which feminism was mediated” (3-4). For Astell, there is a categorical difference between the kind of authority exerted by the church and the educational authority she challenges with such rigor. While the function of Astell’s religious retreat is to challenge the habits that inhere in worldly spaces and to challenge certain intellectual authorities, her project ultimately leads towards the individual’s free submission to legitimate, rational authority—particularly spiritual authority²³. Astell’s discourse of religious retreat articulates her complex engagement with Cartesian philosophy, her assessment of the status of women in England, and the foundations of her religious faith.

²³ Michel Michaelson observes about Astell’s later polemical writings, “[t]hrough a religious faith and eschatological perspective Astell defines freedom for women (and for men) as dependence upon a God who has set out the proper earthly political hierarchy in Scripture” (131).

One of the lingering questions remaining in Astell's account of knowledge and the material world in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* is the problem interpreting religious conflict based on sincere convictions with equal claims to rationality. Astell suggests that the power of reason could justify the practices and beliefs of official religious authority, a position that she articulates most fully in her lengthy defense of the English church in *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England* (1705). Mary Astell's vision of theological unity stands in contrast with the tumultuous political and religious changes of the 1680s. Some of Astell's contemporaries took a radically different approach to the problem of intellectual disagreement—particularly in religious matters. One key figure that approaches the problem of sincere disagreement about religious authority with a different strategy is William Penn. Penn's account of religion's boundaries relies on his representations of England's past and Pennsylvania's future in overlapping but distinct spaces of tolerant religious retreat and free political participation. Penn's early advertisements for his colonial project in Pennsylvania contribute to the period's more general reconsideration of religion's roles and boundaries in their implicit separation of the religious and political functions of these overlapping cultural spaces.

CHAPTER 6

WILLIAM PENN AND RELIGIOUS RETREAT IN EARLY PENNSYLVANIA: KNOWLEDGE, SPACE, AND RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

In his famous letter to James Harrison, William Penn remarks about Pennsylvania, “[t]here may be room there, though not here, for such a holy experiment” (77). Most critics and historians who have approached Penn’s writing and legacy have addressed this provocative spatial image. On one hand, historians of English expansion in the mid-Atlantic and of Quaker thought such as Edwin Bronner have considered Penn’s speculative statement by emphasizing its function as a holy experiment and, as a result, an expression of Penn’s theological and political ideals. More recently, James Merrell’s study of early Pennsylvania reinvigorated the conversation about Mid-Atlantic settlement by emphasizing the experimental nature of Penn’s venture and the ongoing negotiations between Penn’s vision and other significant actors in early Pennsylvania¹. In addition to considering how religious epistemologies and accounts of political life inform Penn’s “holy experiment,” I will examine how Penn’s theories of religious toleration and political participation both rely upon this seemingly unprecedented “room” available across the Atlantic.

In this chapter, I argue that Penn’s choice to compare his colony to the life of the biblical patriarchs in his advertisements illuminates the function of dedicated religious space within his religious epistemology. His discussion of religious toleration in England and early America relies upon convergent discourses of religious retreat—a term I use as a noun to describe culturally constructed spaces dedicated to religious practice and as a

¹ See James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 38.

verb to encompass the gestures and religious justifications that demarcate these spaces—and of political space. Penn's overlapping accounts of religious and political space are foundational to his vision of religious toleration and political participation in early Pennsylvania. Penn's discourse of religious retreat reveals the critical role of space in his religious epistemology and clarifies the implicit boundaries he places around the category of the religious in social life. His corresponding discourse of political space argues that the spatial boundaries of property ownership are the basis of free political participation. By examining William Penn's imagined colonial space in light of its theological and philosophical context, I will demonstrate how Penn's writings begin to redefine the boundaries of religion and religious knowledge in the early modern English-speaking world.

In order to situate Penn's work in the context of the shaping religious and political ideas with which he engages, I examine his series of advertisements for Pennsylvania in light of Penn's writings on his ideals of religious practice, toleration, and political theory. Rather than assuming a necessary continuity in Penn's thought in texts that range across two decades of political activism and a troubled proprietorship, this study explores the provocative similarities in these texts in order to frame Penn's advertisements as imperfect solutions to concerns about the individual's religious epistemology and the imagined colony's coherence as a social unit directed towards the shared ends of communal life. When I discuss the category of the political in Penn's writings, I describe politics in the broadly Aristotelian sense that David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice define as the pursuit of "the good of others, the common good" that depends on upon the use of virtues such as "wisdom, courage, justice and temperance" in

observance of public duty (3). This chapter's focus on justice in particular serves as a synecdoche for these public virtues². In conversation with recent scholarship on the wide range of political roles available in early modern England, I focus on Penn's account of property—the political bounding of a socially constructed space through purchase, deed, and conventions of ownership—and the role of property as the gateway to free political participation in Penn's England and early Pennsylvania³.

While some commentators have described critics' renewed interest in the cultural construction of space and its changing historical character as a specific “spatial turn” with its own theoretical frameworks, my study has the equally important goal of accounting for Penn's account of space in light of the shaping assumptions and contexts through which he interprets the world. Although writers such as Henri Lefebvre call explicit attention to the economic and political consequences of space and spatial representation, Doreen Massey's recent theoretical work in geography in *for space* offers a model of inquiry that attends to the historicity of the philosophical assumptions that shape the category of space. Her account of space as both representational and historically contingent serves as a foundational assumption for my inquiry into Penn's construction and representation of religious space in early Pennsylvania (28).

Many of William Penn's modern readers position him as a forerunner to post-Enlightenment ideas about the relationship between the religious and the secular. Mary Maples Dunn, for example, concludes her study of Penn's political writings and courtly

² As Armitage, Condren, and Fitzmaurice rightly observe, many accounts of political life in early modern England involve both the Aristotelian goals of the communal good life and a Ciceronian emphasis on public duty as the prudent exercise of virtue (3).

³ For Mark Goldie's influential account of the highly participatory, ‘unacknowledged republic’ in early modern England, see Goldie, “The Unacknowledged Republic: Officeholding in Early Modern England.”

activism by asserting that “[f]or all his mistakes, and in large part from religious motives, he helped to create a secular world and a new empire enjoying a new freedom” (193). By articulating these “religious motives” more fully, I seek to explain how Penn’s account of the difference between categories of the religious and the political resists any simple narrative of inevitable secularization⁴. As imaginative representations of space, Penn’s advertisements for Pennsylvania are significant not only for their role in contributing to the structure of English settlement in the mid-Atlantic, but also because they reveal how Penn uses competing spatial discourses to distinguish between individuated religious knowledge and the virtuous application of that knowledge in the social and political world.

In his printed tracts advertising his new proprietorship, Penn characterizes his colonial venture as a space of dedicated religious retreat. For Penn, the ideal of retirement from the pressures of social life—an ideal he articulates most clearly in his later, aphoristic *Fruits of Solitude*—is a significant part of his religious epistemology. The assumptions that shape this ideal of religious retirement illuminate the inverse relationship between Penn’s understanding of religious toleration and the foundations of the citizen’s freedom to act within a tolerant political state. In his 1682 tract, *A Brief Account of the Province of Pennsylvania* Penn uses the example of the biblical patriarchs as precedent for his own colonial project. This bold comparison provides Penn with an example that connects religious knowledge, toleration, and political participation with overlapping discourses of religious and political space. By separating the role of space in

⁴ My work on Penn continues the work of historians and literary critics such as J. William Frost, who contends that “Christianity dominated intellectual life” in early Pennsylvania and observes that evidence of Quaker control in the colony resists the idealized portrait of the colony as a proto-secular society (“Secularization” 116, 122).

the production of religious knowledge from what he understands to be space's pivotal function as the gateway to political action, Penn's advertised colonial spaces provide religious toleration for the individual and entry into a categorically distinct form of shared life within the political community.

This document frames Penn's colonial vision in its idealistic description of its promise for new settlers and the colony's role within the larger history of God's work on behalf of humanity. *A Brief Account* strategically emphasizes the role of divine providence in establishing Penn's colony, the newly available land's status as a space of religious retreat, and the importance of the settler's free choice to cross the Atlantic in search of new opportunities. As I will demonstrate, this advertisement implicitly connects providence, space, and the potential settler's exercise of freedom in their choice to leave their homes and families. By drawing readers' attention to the parallel histories and parallel inheritances that place Pennsylvania in Penn's hands, this text takes advantage of twin discourses of space that establish the colony as a privileged site of political freedom and religious retreat.

As a printed text, *A Brief Account* begins by emphasizing the king's role in giving Penn the colony in recognition for the elder Penn's service. Printer Benjamin Clark's title page places the "KING" at the center of the page and uses the tract's largest typeface to emphasize King Charles' role in granting Penn the legal right to his proprietorship⁵. For William Penn, the legal approval of Charles II serves as the occasion for his pamphlet, but it also connects his legal right to the American lands with the achievements and value

⁵ The tract's visual emphasis on the king's approval also appears on page 1, where "KING" again appears in capital letters, and again on page 2, where the word again appears in the page's largest typeface. When citing Penn's printed tracts, I have modernized Penn's orthography for clarity but have otherwise preserved Penn's original spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

of his own family. He later summarizes the reason for his receiving the colony in these familial terms in order to situate his service to the king in the context of a larger history of his family's loyalty and service to the crown. Penn writes that his "Petition to the King" reminded the king of "*His Fathers Services, his own Sufferings and Losses, in relation to his Fathers Estates*" (9)⁶. The king's distribution of colonial lands functions as an emblem of the Penn family's service to the crown.

Historian Mary K. Geiter observes that this royal grant "is almost invariably given a religious explanation" by modern readers in spite of the fact that Penn's petition to the crown was based on "the repayment of debts owed by the Crown to himself and his father" (300)⁷. In her account of the "complex politics of the period," Geiter contends, "Pennsylvania...did not owe its origins to the desire for a religious utopia" but resulted from the Restoration Crisis and its "challenge to the hereditary succession" (300, 318). While Geiter rightly asserts that Penn's request for a charter is not exclusively the result of his interest in creating an ideal religious society and tolerant religious environment, it does not therefore follow that Penn's religious concerns are wholly separate from the economic and political pressures from which his colony emerges. As I demonstrate below, Penn's emphasis on the king's right to establish the charter allows him to frame the newly available land in Pennsylvania as property under English inheritance law. In contrast with Penn's discussion of the colony as a religious space that fosters the

⁶ In *Errands into the Metropolis*, Jonathan Beecher Field traces a Quaker textual strategy in which "texts are essentially offered by the suffering of the subject in the text" (91). Penn's focus on the pains of his father not only authorize his intervention in English politics in pursuit of his charter, but may also participate in a specifically Quaker discourse of suffering narratives. Field notes that these suffering narratives and martyrologies provide Quaker writers with textual authority and an "opportunity for mythmaking" (96).

⁷ For a focused account of the political context of Penn's proprietorship, consult Joseph E. Illick, *William Penn the Politician*, 66-7.

production of the individual's religious knowledge, his discourse of property and political space celebrates the hereditary connections that justify his proprietorship and provide colonists with an entry into political participation.

In *A Brief Account*, Penn describes King Charles II's claim to the land of Pennsylvania by affirming his king's possession of an inherited, familial right. Penn writes that the newly granted colony falls within "that part of *America*, which the King of *Englands* Ancestors have been at the Charge of Discovering, and which they and he have taken great care to preserve and Improve" (1). Penn takes great pains to connect the king's right to the colony with a familial and political history of royal involvement with colonial projects in spite of the fact that early Pennsylvania already housed a complex variety of American Indians and European settlers and disputes about the colony's boundaries would continue throughout much of Penn's proprietorship. Only after an exhaustive and idealistic discussion of the colony's agriculture and wild animals does Penn acknowledge that the colony is already home to Swedish, Dutch, and English settlers (10). In the case of his own family history and the king's title to the province, Penn reminds his readers that his colony is an expression of family history and ancestral rights⁸. The result of Penn's focus on the connection between family history and the establishment of Pennsylvania is a discourse that links the formation of his colonial space with the exercise of rights. Penn's other tracts and advertisements frequently return to this discourse in order to connect colony's promises of political participation and rights with the purchase and ownership of land.

⁸ Not all of Penn's interests in his pursuit of a colonial charter were based upon heredity and inheritance. For the political machinations that surround Penn's acquisition of Pennsylvania and the influence of commercial concerns in Penn's political philosophy, see Mary K. Geiter, "The Restoration Crisis and the Launching of Pennsylvania, 1679-81," 306.

In Penn's tracts, this discourse of political space exists in parallel with a discourse of religious retreat that links the availability of a dedicated space for religious practice with the free exercise of the individual conscience. Penn's discourse of religious space often overlaps with his account of space's role in political participation. This ambiguity is apparent in *A Brief Account* in the moments when Penn's text conflates or abruptly shifts between discourses of political and religious space in what appear to be contradictory stances to modern readers. As he introduces the king's legal grant, Penn attributes the fact that "a Country in *America* is fallen to [his] Lot" to "the good Providence of *God*, and the Favour of the *King*" (1). In his description, Penn attributes his colony to the generosity of the divine king as well as his English king. The tract's overwhelming typographical emphasis on the word "king" temporarily robs it of context and allows Penn's readers to conflate the colony's providential and royal source. As Penn overlays King Charles' legal grant with the idea of divine providence, he affirms that his newly established space participates in both religious and political discourses.

Later in the pamphlet, Penn's description of the colonists best suited to the colonial project at first appears to be exclusively political in focus. In addition to younger brothers and others denied advancement in their current state, "[t]here are another sort of Persons, not only fit for, but necessary in *Plantations* ; and that is, Men of Universal Spirits, that have an Eye to the good of Posterity ; and that both understand, and delight to promote good *Discipline*, and *Just Government* among a Plain and Well intending People" (12). This final entry in Penn's list of those who would benefit from the economic and political opportunities available in the colony focuses on the ideal of

establishing right governance that would allow future generations to enjoy the benefits of justice and discipline.

These virtues—and justice in particular—are characteristic of Penn’s discourse of political space, and Penn emphasizes that the virtues of good government are shared and universal across religious boundaries. In language that echoes his famous letter to Harrison, Penn writes, “Such Persons may find room in *Colonies*...who are shut out from being of much use or service to great *Nations*, under settled Customs” (12). For these ambitious and politically minded colonists, the availability of metaphoric “room” in the colony is the basis of their entry into political activity. By using the metaphor of an architectural space that comes to include these formerly marginal actors, Penn implicitly articulates a link between the availability of space produced through the economic and political customs of land ownership and the individual subject’s entry into political life.

The 1682 advertisement introduces tension into this account of space’s role as the prerequisite for political participation, however, when it places this political opportunity in the context of religious belief and practice. Immediately following his description of the universally minded colonist, Penn counsels, “But they that go, must wisely count the Cost” (*Brief Account* 12). This statement echoes the gospel of Luke, in which Jesus draws upon an architectural image in his account of the sacrifices required to become his disciple. Hugh Barbour has noted that some of Penn’s earliest writings focus on and articulate the importance of the Bible as an authoritative source of knowledge for early Quakers, and Penn’s close familiarity with the biblical text is apparent throughout his corpus (“Young Controversialist” 22).

In the Authorized Version, Penn's biblical allusion reads, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?" (*King James Bible*, Luke 14:28). This planned architectural project allows the builder to contemplate the formation of an architectural space, its purposes, and the means necessary to construct and to maintain its boundaries as a structure. As in *A Brief Account*, this architectural project appears to articulate spatial boundaries for purposes related directly to the function of the tower—whether its purposes are economic or political. Considered in its immediate context, this account of the builder's forethought reimagines the structure as a metaphor for the potential disciple's religious commitment. The parable of the tower's construction articulates a critical connection in Penn's thought between the space produced by architectural boundaries and the pursuit of religious ends.

This choice to pursue religious ends at great cost requires that potential disciples consider rejecting the rights and privileges afforded by one's family. In framing this parable, Jesus explains in the Authorized Version, "If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Penn's biblical reference to the costs of establishing room for religious practice exists in tension with his earlier account of space as the expression of his own family history. This tension demonstrates the existence of two parallel accounts of space in Penn's early advertisements for Pennsylvania. On one hand, Penn emphasizes the importance of dedicated, culturally defined spaces as the site of religious belief and practice. On the other, he identifies the individual's command of land as the basis of political life and political participation. Penn's account of the

formation and use of space in Pennsylvania continues to rely upon these overlapping attitudes towards history and heredity.

Penn's final caution sets his promise of opportunities for trade and political activity adequate for the most ambitious colonists. He warns, "But all are most seriously cautioned, how they proceed in the disposal of themselves ; 'Tis true, *The Earth is the Lords, and the Fullness thereof* ; and it seems to many, to be the time wherein those desolate *Western* parts of the World are to be Planted, and have their Day" (13). In the first pages of his advertisement, Penn emphasizes the role of the English king as the possessor of land and its rightful distributor. Here, however, Penn emphasizes the primacy of the divine king's right to the land over any existing or conflicting claims. The ambition that motivates their journey now becomes less important than the colonists' role within a larger, progressive account of religious history. Like Penn's famous pronouncement to Harrison, his final account of God's providential role in the formation of Pennsylvania provides a particularly clear insight into his attitude towards this newly chartered and explicitly religious space. The final inseparability of Penn's religious space from his parallel religious and political versions of history challenges the assumption that setting aside a space dedicated to religious practice necessarily implies a quietist approach to political or economic issues⁹. Penn instead situates his space of religious retreat in tandem with an overlapping account of space's role in political life.

⁹ James Emmett Ryan traces Quakers' influence on English society as "influential religious outsiders" in his *Imaginary Friends: Representing Quakers in American Culture, 1650-1960*. Ryan's monograph asserts that Quaker ideas were of significant influence in English and early American culture "even as [Quakerism's] stated principles of egalitarian worship, pacifism, sobriety, plain living, and engagement with Inner Light stood beyond the reach of many" (26). More succinctly, Hugh Barbour suggests that "Friends did not withdraw from the world except to attack and transform it" (*Quakers* 154).

At the end of the tract, Penn advises his readers to approach this momentous decision in an explicitly theological manner. He writes, “let all have a Reverend regard to *God’s Providence* in their Removal, and be serious in it, rather seeking the Comforts of retirement, and sufficiency for Life (like the Blessed *Patriarchs* of old) than Ease, Fulness, and Wealth” (*Brief Account* 13). Rather than appealing to those who seek an easier and wealthier life, Penn describes his colony as a place that offers the more austere “Comforts of retirement.” He invites readers to contrast his newly formed retreat from the world’s economic and political jostling with the divine calling of the biblical patriarchs. Penn chooses to frame the life that colonists should expect to enjoy as an action based upon explicitly religious criteria. Unlike earlier seventeenth-century descriptions of retirement that praise the fullness and conviviality of a life away from the pressures of a corrupt or misguided royal court, Penn describes the ideal colonists’ active decision to reject the concerns of ordinary life in favor of a religious life¹⁰. While Penn does not propose a religious life in the sense that colonists would enter a monastery or follow a monastic rule, Penn makes it clear that his readers cannot reduce the purpose of the colonist’s retreat to economic or political motives alone. Their anticipated choice to pursue a religious life sets the specifically religious space of Pennsylvania in contrast with the ordinary space of everyday human activity and concerns that they leave behind.

Penn aligns his space of religious retreat in early Pennsylvania with Abraham’s divine call. In Abram’s biblical origin story, this call serves as the foundation of a political and religious community under his role as patriarch and an invitation to enter

¹⁰ In *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classic Ideal, Vol. 1 1600-1700*, Maren-Sofie Røstvig examines the seventeenth-century reappropriation of the classical retirement tradition at length. Røstvig identifies the tradition’s focus on “*internal peace*... in the obscure life of the husbandman” and the “mental serenity” available “among scenes of happy rural innocence” (42).

into a new configuration of space: “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Genesis 12:1). God’s calling requires Abram—who will soon receive his more familiar name—to reject his family ties and seek a new home based on religious obedience alone. The biblical patriarch approaches this land of promise as a specifically religious space because all other characteristics of this new land remain entirely hidden from Abram. God’s providential distribution of land in this divine call is the sole end that motivates Abram’s choice to move. In the Genesis narrative, Abraham’s new political community, which develops out of the bonds of kinship, also extends from an event with explicitly religious ends—the miraculous birth of Isaac in Sarah’s old age. Penn’s biblical reference calls attention to the subordination of political community to the religious context of that community life. As a religious space, Abram’s yet-to-be-revealed land is a space of religious choice that subordinates political participation to its end of preserving religious community.

The differences between Penn’s colony and his biblical sources, however, are striking. Rather than allow for the possibility of a divine call that deviates from or dissolves the existing organization of family history, Penn asks colonists to “get the Permission, if not the good Liking of their near Relations, for that is both Natural, and a Duty incumbent upon all” (13). For the biblical patriarchs, the divine call leads to the organization of new religious and political community. For Penn, however, this advertisement’s providential call to religious retirement preserves the colonist’s family bonds. Penn’s promised land therefore includes both a religious end in the providential context of the colonists’ potential journey and the more mundane end of sustaining the

colonists' connection to established networks of inheritance and status. In the most practical terms, Penn must preserve the familial bonds that rely on the valor and loyalty of his father to justify his role as the colony's proprietor. By requiring that members of his community receive the permission of their families, Penn imagines a religious and political community that depends on the individual's free choice in their distinct but overlapping spaces.

In *A Brief Account*, Penn characterizes his public advertisement of his colony as one option among many for those discontented with their current way of life "that those of our own and other Nations, that are inclin'd to Transport themselves or Families beyond the Seas, may find another Country added to their Choice" (1). This emphasis on choice frequently appears as Penn articulates the boundaries between political and religious life. In a wide variety of his late seventeenth-century writings, Penn argues that the voluntary association of political life and the voluntary retirement that produces religious knowledge both rely upon the individual's choice.

Penn's emphasis on the colonists' need to respect existing social bonds in their decision to move to Pennsylvania represents a significant departure from the biblical context that serves as his ideal of religious retirement or retreat. Penn implicitly contends that religious choice, precipitated by the prospective colonist's recognition of God's providence, cannot override or dramatically reshape the organization of political life. Instead of an Abrahamic reformulation of political life towards explicitly religious ends, the space that requires religious contemplation and choice also requires a parallel choice of affiliation from those who would seek to participate in it. Although Penn's recommendation that the individual respect the wishes of his or her family seems to limit

the possibility of choice, this requirement encodes his understanding of free political choice as the product of the property system that these relationships sustain.

The complex tensions and similarities between his proposed space of religious retreat and his biblical sources reveal William Penn's attempt to articulate the boundaries of religion as he imagines life in his new colony. While Penn characterizes political life as the realm of social choice, his texts tend to associate religious knowledge with a form of voluntary solitude within the space of religious retreat that rejects the pressures of social life. The idea of religious space as a space of voluntary solitude plays an integral role in Penn's understanding of religion as a category separate from governance in his early advertisements for Pennsylvania. As I will demonstrate below, Penn's account of political life contends that choice in political matters emerges from the individual's relationship to space through property ownership. Penn's emphasis on a society based on two overlapping arenas of free choice points to a dramatically different account of religion's place in social life from his biblical sources.

Penn's series of advertisements for Pennsylvania in the early 1680s offer new insight into the role of space in Penn's account of religious toleration and political participation. While comparatively few historians have examined these advertisements at length, those who have considered these texts provide the context necessary to comprehend their significance among other similar publications. Hope Frances Kane's early twentieth-century description of Penn's advertisements in the 1680s refers to contemporary Quaker texts with similar emphases and to the broad distribution and translation of Penn's texts (Kane 166). Henry J. Cadbury's examination of Pennsylvania's appearances in London newspapers demonstrates that other contemporary

writers draw on the biblical language of the promised land that appears in Penn's work (Cadbury 152). These historical accounts place Penn's advertisements in the context of a broader discourse of religious space that appears in other contemporary English descriptions of North America¹¹. Penn's approach to religious space is therefore part of a broader, ongoing conversation about the significance of the North American colonies for religious knowledge and political life.

In order to explain how Penn's tracts reconcile divergent accounts of the individual's choice in religious and political spaces, I will first examine the role of space in Penn's religious epistemology. Fredrick B. Tolles begins his foundational *Meeting House and Counting House* with George Fox's provocative account of the Quakers' inward and outward plantations, and Penn's religious epistemology focuses on this task of cultivating "the delicate plants of the inner life" (3). In his discussion of religious knowledge, William Penn contends that religious spaces, which retreat from social bonds and pressures, are sites that provide the individual with privileged access to specifically religious forms of knowledge.

Penn's most sustained account of the idea of retirement appears in his familiar 1693 book of aphorisms, *Some Fruits of Solitude*. Besides its importance as a precursor to more emphatic accounts of the individual in early American literature, this text provides an account of religious knowledge and its relation to space. Here, Penn contends that religious knowledge develops from this principled rejection of the pressures of social and political life. Early in the text, Penn states that he "*blesseth God for his retirement,*" which allows him time for reflection that refines his self-knowledge and his knowledge

¹¹ For the role of Quaker purchasers in early Pennsylvania in particular, see John E. Pomfret, "The First Purchasers," 152-3. For the visual rhetoric and economic trends that shape these texts, consult Cathleen Miller, "Cash or Credit: Selling the Settlement of Pennsylvania," 6-11.

of “*the omissions and excesses of others, as well societies and governments, as private families and persons*” (*Fruits* 23). Penn imagines a retirement so extreme that it divides him from his familial bonds and his social relations as a private person. More than the nonparticipation in political life associated with a courtly “*retirement*,” Penn’s solitude is an active process of rejecting the social bonds of everyday life and seeking a corresponding space for distinctly religious reflection.

This retreat, however, does not provide Penn with a convenient vantage point to reflect upon the follies of political life in the pastoral pattern. Instead, Penn characterizes this practice of social retreat and the space that retreat establishes as sources of authoritative religious knowledge. When he rejects the world of human ambition and conflict, Penn chooses the world of nature and the specifically religious knowledge that it yields. He writes, “The country life is to be preferred; for there we see the works of God; but in cities little else but the works of men: and the one makes a better subject for our contemplation than the other” because “[t]he country is both the philosopher’s garden and library, in which he reads and contemplates the power, wisdom and goodness of God” (*Fruits* 42). Penn’s retreat to the country allows him to interpret the theological and philosophical knowledge available in the natural world but obscured by human activity. His metaphor of the library in particular attests to his interest in the knowledge that the natural world can provide to the observant and reflective subject. This knowledge reaches philosophy’s heights in its revelatory exploration of God’s activity and nature.

Penn goes on to observe that this country life is “[a] sweet and natural retreat from noise and talk; and allows opportunity for reflection, and gives the best subjects for it” (*Fruits* 42). His use of the language of retreat or retirement emphasizes the

individual's separation from the "noise" of public opinion and rumor and the "talk" of persons in community. Penn's retired philosopher encounters nature's library in strict solitude, and Penn makes it clear that this solitude provides superior material for reflection—and thus, makes superior forms of religious knowledge available to the inquiring subject. Instead of an idealized account of rural life that valorizes its simpler values, Penn's discussion of religious space in *Some Fruits of Solitude* provides him with a religious epistemology that connects the Quaker insistence on the efficacy of the inner light as a definitive source of religious knowledge with a dedicated space of solitude that alerts the subject to that inner voice.

In *William Penn and Early Quakerism*, Melvin B. Endy, Jr. devotes considerable attention to Penn's complex account of nature and reason in his religious epistemology. He turns to Penn's 1696 *Primitive Christianity Revived* in order to describe the role of the *imago dei* or divine image in the formation of the individual's religious knowledge. As in *Some Fruits of Solitude*, this epistemology relies upon the individual's reflection in solitude as a catalyst for religious insight. Endy summarizes Penn's position: "Man has within his soul the ideas of those eternal principles that define God's character and outline man's duty. As he turns within to them, contemplates them, and moves towards incorporating them into his life, he becomes more luminously aware of their truth and better acquainted with God" (254). Endy notes that Penn's religious epistemology occasionally reveals contradictory impulses towards either natural religion or "mystical rationalism" and that Penn provides humanity "with what amounted to a natural knowledge of the essential divine truths" that may even include "the essential characteristics of the divine Being" (255). This account is consistent with Penn's

assertion that the individual's entry into solitary reflection provides the best material for reflection and yields knowledge of God specifically.

This focus on the individual's use of solitary spaces in order to construct or discover religious knowledge is not limited to Penn's books of political advice or Quaker history. In a letter to Thomas Janney dated August 21, 1681, Penn again suggests that the newly available space in Pennsylvania will allow colonists better access to religious knowledge (Bronner 271n12). Penn describes his hope that "people may live well & have more time to give ye L[or]d then in this Crowded land. God will plant Americka & it shall have its day in ye Kingdom" (qtd. in Bronner 27)¹². Here, Penn cites England's "Crowded" state as a problem that hampers the religious life of its subjects. The American colonies provide an implied state of spatial openness that Penn believes will support and improve the religious life of its colonists to such a degree that it would participate in the kingdom of God in a significant way. As Penn represents it, Pennsylvania promises the availability of space that can free the individual from harmful social demands and pressure much as Mary Astell's religious retreat frees her female subjects from the distortions of custom in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Parts I and II. For Penn, solitary space functions as religious space because that it equips the individual to contribute to the religious life of the colony and the church as a whole.

At other times, Penn compares the practice of retreating from human company with the practice of the Quaker meeting. In his 1699 commemorative description of his deceased wife and son, *An Account of the Blessed End of Guielma Maria Penn, and of Springet Penn*, Penn observes that his son "grew more *Retired*, and much disengaged

¹² Because Edwin B. Bronner transcribes this selection from Penn's letter, I have preserved his edited transcription, which includes Bronner's bracketed expansion of "Lord" from the original manuscript's abbreviation.

from Youthful Delights; shewing a remarkable Tenderness in Meetings even when they were silent” even before signs of his illness appeared (*An Account* 3)¹³. In Penn’s idealized account, young Springet’s tendency towards retirement includes his rejection of “Youthful Delights” but extends beyond disinterest in worldly vanities to include a heightened interest in and unique access to religious knowledge.

This pattern of resistance to “the Things of this World” becomes so complete so that young Springet Penn meets with the divine in a mystical version of the Quaker meeting (4). William Penn records his son’s account of these experiences: “*the Lord comes in upon my Spirit, I have Heavenly Meetings with him by my self*” (4-5). Springet’s retreat from the world towards what he describes as his home gives him unique access to the divine presence and does not merely free him from attachments to the present world. On his deathbed, Penn’s son affirms that he experiences the metaphorical space of home everywhere, and the text asserts that this sense of being at home “*in the Lord*” is intertwined with his apparent foreknowledge of his death (15). Considered in the context of Penn’s earlier account of the retired life as productive of religious knowledge, these examples indicate that Penn tends to characterize voluntary solitude as the foundation of his religious epistemology¹⁴. While Springet Penn experiences a metaphorical space of retreat that produces religious knowledge, William Penn imagines a geographic version of religious space as he advertises his colony as a voluntary religious space. The crucial

¹³ Penn’s idealized biographical account of his wife and son are printed together but paginated separately.

¹⁴ I describe these solitary spaces under the shared category of the religious retreat because both the philosopher’s solitary garden and Springet Penn’s solitary Quaker meetings address the individual’s belief and religious practice in addition to the theological and philosophical ideas of religious thought.

foundation of this voluntary religious organization is Penn's interest in establishing religious toleration in early Pennsylvania.

Recognizing the importance of religious toleration in Penn's advertisements requires that readers attend to his distinction between spaces of voluntary solitude or religious retirement and the distinct but overlapping spaces that form the basis of political life's voluntary associations. On one hand, Penn's account of religious solitude contends that religious knowledge emerges from private encounters with the divine in a process of voluntary religious retreat, and on the other, Penn sees space—and its political expression in property—as the entrance to political participation. William Penn therefore makes Pennsylvania a space of religious retreat and, in a seeming contradiction, a tolerant space with strict boundaries around the newly formed category of the religious¹⁵. Kenneth Morris notes that Penn's arguments for toleration explicitly distinguish between the concerns of religion and those of the state yet also seek to establish a fundamental connection between the religious toleration and the welfare of the state. Morris observes, “[Penn] argued that matters of conscience can never be used as a reason for withholding an Englishman's liberty or property” (106). In the case of both the individual religious encounter and newly reified boundaries between political and religious life, the key is choice: Penn connects space with the exercise of the individual conscience in religious matters and the freedom to act in the social and political world¹⁶.

¹⁵ Melvin B. Endy, Jr. sees Penn's account of the limits between the concerns of religion and those of the state and the pluralism it permits as an important precursor to modern theological thought (“Theology” 467-8).

¹⁶ In articulating Penn's distinction between the concerns of religion and those of politics, I remain mindful of J. William Frost's important historical claim that Penn “advocated toleration, not separation of church and state or complete religious liberty, and undergirding his argument was the assumption—a commonplace in Reformed theology—that government was instituted by God and that fostering of piety and virtue were essential elements for both the church and government” (“Religious Liberty” 424). By

As a whole, Penn's colonial advertisements associate religious belief with spaces of religious retreat and link the enjoyment of these same spaces in matters of political choice with the colonists' free enjoyment of property—a political expression of space¹⁷. In these overlapping and mutually sustaining spaces, Penn suggests that the individual's ability to exercise his or her choice freely will allow religious freedom to coexist with the political freedom that the purchase of land ensures. Penn's advertisements for early Pennsylvania and arguments for religious toleration insist on space's function as the guarantee of the individual's right to the exercise of conscience in a tolerant environment and of the individual's ability to act freely in pursuit of the communal good in political matters.

In William Penn's account of toleration and political action, the individual's free choice is fundamental to Penn's account of space's role in religious and political freedom. Nevertheless, Penn explicitly bounds the scope of this choice within the hierarchical duty incumbent upon all members of English society. His argument for the irresistible priority of duty begins to explain his request that colonists ask their relatives' permission before moving to his colony in *A Brief Account*. When Penn defines “*some things left to our Freedom*” in *A Brief Examination and State of Liberty Spiritual* (1681), he carefully distinguishes issues of duty from those of choice. He begins by emphasizing the necessary connection between religious knowledge and the individual believer's freedom, “the Liberty of Gods People stands *in the Truth, and their Communion in it*”

focusing on Penn's distinction between the concerns of religion and politics, this study seeks to articulate the divergent roles that space plays for each of these categories without eliding the alterity of Penn's position for post-Enlightenment readers.

¹⁷ When Penn discusses the Magna Carta as the basis of English political rule, he directly links property with free political action, and this example of precedent from English history appears to play a central role in Penn's understanding of the link between property and political participation.

(*Brief Examination 1*). Penn's assertion that spaces dedicated to religious retreat produce religious knowledge in the individual extends from this link between knowledge and freedom in religious matters.

In his argument for religious toleration, Penn distinguishes the unyielding requirements of hierarchical duty from religious belief, which he insists must be based upon direct knowledge—that is, free and informed choice—rather than ignorance (*Brief Examination 3*)¹⁸. He asserts “thou art not to conform to a thing ignorantly” and that the fault lies in the doubtful believer's apprehension of “a Sense for or against the Matter” rather than in God (3). Penn's religious epistemology relies upon spaces of individual, solitary reflection that provide the believer with the knowledge that Penn identifies within religious truth. This epistemology of religious space allows the individual to “conform” from a position of knowledge rather than ignorance.

Penn locates humanity's remaining choices in matters indifferent as he borrows a Latitudinarian phrase: “There are things enjoyned, such as relate to our Duty to God, to our Superiours, to the Houshold of Faith, and to all Men and Creatures, these are *Indispensible*. There are also things that may be done or left undone, which may be called *Indifferent*” (2)¹⁹. Under this category, Penn places choices of food and “many such outward things of Life and Converse” that rely on “Temperance and Wisdom” in the absence of positive religious command (2). Later in the tract, Penn distinguishes issues related to “*Church-Order or Communion*” from the “*Private and Personal Freedoms*,

¹⁸ While Stephen Craig Harper has characterized Penn's “holy experiment” as an ideal tarnished by the colony's “economic tensions,” this study suggests that Penn's accounts of religious faith and acquisitive attitudes towards property are ultimately inseparable (36).

¹⁹ Mary Maples Dunn identifies what she describes as an “unmistakable Latitudinarian influence” in Penn's account of the relationship between government and virtue in Penn's *Great Case of Liberty of Conscience* and his other tolerationist arguments (69).

which each might do with respect to themselves; that is, they might make Laws to themselves, in things that only concern'd private Persons" (7). Just as Penn argues that the Magna Carta's freedoms extend from the individual's command of the self and over property, these freedoms rely upon the individual self and remain distinct from Penn's account of religion's concerns. Penn's descriptions of political life in his mid-Atlantic colonies rely upon this set of freedoms that the colonists could share with the American Indians without sharing an understanding of religious truth or specific theological claims.

In many of his books and tracts written in the 1680s, Penn contrasts the epistemological foundation of justice with that of religion. Penn focuses on justice in particular as a way to establish and clarify the boundaries between religious concerns and government's sphere of action. William Penn explicitly distinguishes between the purposes of religion and government in *Some Fruits of Solitude* in his aphoristic observation, "the first is too often made a means instead of an end; the other an end instead of a means" (*Fruits* 47). This distinction between the purpose and epistemology of religion and those of justice is foundational to Penn's vision for the organization of religious and political life in early Pennsylvania, and it contributes to the seventeenth-century's ongoing conversation about the role of religious knowledge in communal life.

Penn makes these boundaries explicit when he praises impartiality in judicial matters but rejects impartiality as an epistemological stance in religion. Penn writes, "Indifference is good in judgment, but bad in relation, and stark naught in religion" (*Fruits* 54)²⁰. In this context, Penn's advice characterizes religion as a type of knowledge

²⁰ In this passage, Penn distinguishes between the desirable indifference and impartiality of the judge who metes out judgment and the idea of the judge's neutrality. Penn considers neutrality to be impossible in a situation where the judge must necessarily determine fault, but he commends those who

that develops out of an invested, partial belief that would be inappropriate in a judicial context and by extension inappropriate in political matters more generally. By contrasting justice and religion as competing ways of knowing that the individual subject can apply as appropriate to the same source of knowledge, Penn is able to distinguish between religious and political uses of the same colonial space. This description of the individual's application of these divergent epistemologies allows Penn to frame Pennsylvania as both a space of religious retreat and a tolerant state with strict limits on religion's claims.

In Penn's colonial advertisements, he separates his colony's function as a space of religious retirement from the government's purview and judicial purpose. When Penn compares his colony's purposes to the biblical patriarchs, he transforms an example of theocentric political community into precedent for his division between the ends of religion and government in his implicit contention that religion and the social virtue of justice are categorically distinct in both scope and epistemology. Penn's category of religion relies upon necessarily partial convictions that emerge from the individual's encounter with the inner light in spaces of religious retreat while the work of justice takes place in the social spaces of governance and communal life. His glowing anthropological accounts of the American Indians in his advertisements offer a particularly clear image of this distinction—Penn appears to emphasize their shared concern for justice without anxiety about their religious differences.

In the fifth volume of *The Papers of William Penn*, editors Edwin B. Bronner and David Fraser describe Penn's 1683 *Letter to the Free Society of Traders* as Penn's "most

evaluate this fault from a nonpartisan position. Neutrality, as Penn describes it, is only appropriate for the "peace-maker," who cannot make a determination of blame in a given situation (54).

informative and valuable promotional tract” that includes “a full description of the aborigines living in the Delaware Valley, as well as the first map of Philadelphia” (Bronner and Fraser 298)²¹. Penn’s description of the American Indian population allows modern readers insight into his assessment of local religious practices and governance²². James O’Neil Spady finds that Penn’s “*Letter to the Society of Traders* accentuated the Lenape’s basic virtue but noted several areas in which they were yet uncivil” and that they sought to institute English political systems in spite of their rejection of any “serious missionary efforts among the Lenapes and Susquehannocks” (31, 32). The distinction between colonizing efforts to reshape the American Indian conscience and political system clearly demonstrates how Penn’s constructions of the religious and the political shaped life in early Pennsylvania.

After arguing that the American Indians were content with the amenities of a simpler life, Penn writes, “These poor people are u[n]der a dark Night in things relating to *Religion*, to be sure, the *Tradition* of it; yet they believe a *God* and *Immortality*, without the help of *Metaphysicks*” (*Free Society* 6)²³. In spite of Penn’s lack of concern for the distinctions between religious belief and systematic theological thought, his anthropological narrative clearly distinguishes religious knowledge—in the form of literacy in Christian theological ideas—from matters of public justice. Thomas J. Sugrue

²¹ For an examination of the nature and composition of the Free Society of Traders, consult Gary B. Nash, “The Free Society of Traders and the Early Politics of Pennsylvania,” 152-5.

²² For a comprehensive account of the cross-cultural exchanges, compromises, and conflicts among Quakers, European settlers, and American Indians, see John Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers: The Making of a Creole Culture in Colonial Pennsylvania*.

²³ As indicated in brackets, I gloss the apparently erroneous “uuder” as “under” to preserve the sense of the sentence. My copy-text for Penn’s “Letter to the Free Society of Traders” is the first printing of the second edition. Bronner and Fraser number this text as 67B and describe it in full in *The Papers of William Penn*, Vol. 5 (300-1).

argues that Penn's *Letter to the Free Society of Traders* demonstrates how Penn understands the Lenape to be "the moral equivalent of Europeans, no less worthy of just treatment than colonists" (19). Sugrue's implicit but insightful distinction between morality and justice reflects the tract's construction of tentative boundaries between the concerns of religion and justice.

Penn makes the distinction between religious knowledge and public justice clear in his summary account of the agreement between the colonists and the native peoples: "We have agreed, that in all *Differences* between us, *Six* of each side shall end the matter: Don't *abuse* them, but let them have *Justice*, and you win them: The worst is, that they are the *worse* for the *Christians*, who have propagated their *Vices*, and yielded them *Tradition* for *ill* and not for *good things*" (*Free Society* 7)²⁴. In this warning to colonists interested in opportunities for transatlantic commerce, Penn asserts that the Christian settlers have tended to possess an inferior sense of justice and risk falling "under the just *censure* of the poor *Indian Conscience*, while we make profession of things so far *transcending*" (7). Penn's idealized account of American Indian political organization demonstrates that he perceives their command of Christian metaphysics to be distinct from their keen judicial sense. Crucially, Penn's idealized narrative of American Indian governance includes their respect for property: "*Wealth* circulateth like the *Blood*, all parts partake; and though none shall want what another hath, yet exact Observers of *Property*" (6). As in Penn's other contemporary writings, he distinguishes issues of property and justice from his descriptions of religious belief and practice.

²⁴ Penn is careful to distinguish the American Indians from the earlier Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish settlers, or "*Old Planters*," already present in colonial Pennsylvania (*Free Society* 7).

This distinction begins to clarify William Penn's account of government and its purposes in cultivating and sustaining the good life. In *A Further Account of the Province of Pennsylvania and its Improvements*, published in 1685, Penn observes of the American Indian population, "Justice gains and awes them. They have some Great Men amongst them, I mean, for Wisdom, Truth, and Justice" (18). From Penn's perspective, the profound religious differences between the European settlers and the American Indians do not extend to the virtues of wisdom, truth, and justice²⁵. Instead, these public virtues fall under what Penn describes as the explicit purpose of government: "the suppression of *Vice*, and encouragement of *Vertue*, and *Arts*; with *Libert[y]* to all People to worship Almighty God, according to their *Faith* and *Perswasion*" (*Further* 18). In his optimistic description of Pennsylvania governance as a system dedicated to religious toleration, Penn makes the social exercise of virtue or vice fully distinct from the individual conscience's solitary pursuits.

In his discussion of the origins of the Lenape people, Penn's advertisements again distinguish between the boundaries of religion and governance by emphasizing the potential continuity of religious practice within a document arguing for the establishment of a new form of governance. As in *A Brief Account* a year earlier, Penn appeals to the biblical patriarchs in his *Letter to the Free Society of Traders* in his assertion that the Lenape may be the lost tribe of Israel. He openly speculates, "for their *Original*, I am ready to believe them of the *Jewish Race*, I mean, of the stock of the *Ten Tribes*" (*Free Society* 7). This image is particularly apt to Penn's proposed colony because his implicit comparison with the promised land of Canaan allows him to frame Pennsylvania as a

²⁵ For the purposes of this study, I emphasize the concept of justice because Penn describes it as a virtue that must occur within a social situation in *Some Fruits of Solitude*.

dedicated religious space. In Penn's advertisements, Pennsylvania promises a new fullness of religious practice and preserves an unbroken continuity with the earliest parts of Judeo-Christian tradition. As in *A Brief Account*, Penn valorizes Pennsylvania as a religious space while simultaneously establishing clear limits to religion's scope. By separating his proposed government from the colony's religious continuity, Penn's imagined colonial space operates in two overlapping ways. As a space of religious retreat, it permits the flourishing of individual religious belief, and as a space that buyers can access through property ownership, it promises its investors free participation in political matters.

If Penn's accounts of religious space in *A Brief Account* and his *Letter to the Free Society of Traders* rely upon the language of the biblical patriarchs, his account of space as the source of political participation relies upon the historical precedent of English history, and the Magna Carta in particular. Because Penn's account of religious knowledge and his account of political participation both emerge from land—a fact which should be no surprise given his tendency to take pride in his status as a landed gentleman—Penn's vision for mid-Atlantic colonial settlement implicitly links the issues of property and religious toleration. Penn's interest in the Magna Carta as a source of specifically English liberties and a preserver of the sanctity of conscience begins long before his colonial charter. Kenneth Morris argues that Penn's published response to “his famous 1670 trial” was significant because “Penn interpreted his trial as having broad implications for the fundamental laws of England” (Morris 105, 105-6). For Penn, the

liberties guaranteed in the Magna Carta are essential to the preservation of English society and serve as a precondition for religious toleration²⁶.

In his 1687 *Excellent Priviledge of Liberty and Property*, Penn relies on the Magna Carta as precedent for his vision of English liberty that is finally inseparable from the right to property. This tract explicitly places Penn's charter and governance within context of the Magna Carta. Penn's account of English history situates his own charter within a legal tradition that links free political participation with property ownership. Penn communicates the Magna Carta's centrality to his account of government in his preface, which describes the document as an "*antient Garland...bedeckt with many precious Priviledges of Liberty and Property*" that grants each of his readers these fundamentally interrelated rights ([A2]). Penn's historical account turns to "*the good Example of our Ancestors*" to argue that property functions as the precondition for choice in the political sphere—much as spaces of religious retirement function as the precondition for religious knowledge in Penn's colonial advertisements ([A3v]).

In his introduction to the text of the Magna Carta, Penn explains that the male English subject has "a fixed Fundamental-Right born with him, as to *Freedom of his Person and Property in his Estate*, which he cannot be depriv'd of, but either by his *Consent*, or some *Crime*" ([A3]). For Penn, this fundamental right to individual self-possession and command over space through the concept of property provides the basis for the English subject's other rights, which include participation in the law through parliamentary representation and trial by a jury of his peers. These peers are the subject's

²⁶ In contrast with my argument for Penn's focus on the Magna Carta as the basis for an understanding of politics that emerges from the individual's right to space through property, J. William Frost has recently argued that Penn's texts on religious toleration are markedly inconsistent and shift based upon the concerns of his audience ("William Penn: Quaker Humanist" 183).

“Neighbors” and people “of his own Condition” ([A4]). Participation in Penn’s vision of English society therefore emerges from the individual’s membership in a community of landowners. By framing their relationship as that of neighbors, Penn situates his landowners in a network of bounded, socially constructed spaces divided by law through property ownership. Penn summarizes his position in his argument that the Magna Carta “makes and preserves the People free” (C2). Extended to his 1680s advertisements, Penn might say the same about property ownership in Pennsylvania. Just as Penn uses space as the foundation for the free exercise of conscience in religious solitude, he describes space as the necessary foundation for free participation in political life.

What makes Penn’s tracts effective as advertisements is the fact that Penn’s account of religious knowledge and political participation both originate in Pennsylvania’s colonial spaces²⁷. This alignment of religious and political space demonstrates how socially constructed spaces and their purposes exist in a complex network and, as in this case, can overlap but maintain categorically distinct purposes. The same land available for purchase as a solitary religious space also provides the land’s purchaser with the property that Penn argues is foundational to English political freedom. At other times, Penn takes this spatial convergence further in his assertion that this political freedom and the free exercise of religious belief are mutually constitutive. While his spaces of religious retreat encourage religious reflection, Penn’s tracts link property ownership with the conditions that allow religious freedom and political participation.

²⁷ While these tracts appear to be rhetorically effective, it is not wholly clear that the sale of land placed William Penn in a stronger economic position. For an account of Penn’s limited economic gains or potential losses throughout the 1680s, consult Richard S. Dunn, “William Penn and the Selling of Pennsylvania, 1681-1685,” 322-3.

When Penn recalls the provisions for freedom of conscience in East-Jersey—an early venture into colonial governance that Penn shared with Robert Barclay, the famous Quaker apologist—he writes, “such provision was made for Liberty in matters of *Religion and Property* in their *Estates*, that under the *Terms* thereof...they have not only for many years enjoyed their *Estates*, according to the *Concessions*, but also an *uninterrupted* Exercise of their *Particular persuasions* in matters of Religion” (*East-Jersey* 4-5)²⁸. While Penn’s famous reflections on life describe his interest in the role of solitary, rural spaces in the production of religious knowledge, his emphatic connection between religious liberty and the free exercise of personal property suggests that Penn sees a strong correlation between space and these emphatically different forms of liberty.

This chapter began by considering William Penn’s comparison between his imagined future colony and the life of the biblical patriarchs in his 1682 *A Brief Account*. Behind this evocative comparison stands Penn’s contention that the acquisition of land permits religious and political choice—even as his advertisements articulate new boundaries between religious and political life based on his distinction between solitary and social spaces. These texts reveal the role of dedicated religious spaces in Penn’s account of religious toleration and the inseparability of these spaces from the political spaces that permit free political action and sustain the availability of religious choice. Penn’s advertisements focus directly upon situations of free choice—distinguished from actions governed by duty—in part because they are advertisements that ask prospective colonists to exercise that choice in the purchase of land. In addition to these potential economic motives, Penn’s emphasis on the opportunities that this land represents for

²⁸ In addition to Penn’s contribution to the political organization of East-Jersey, John Clement argues that Penn was likely involved in legislative cases and disputes in West New Jersey (315-9).

religious and political activity extends from his fundamental connection of space with the individual's freedom to act.

In Penn's advertisements for early Pennsylvania, his account of individual religious knowledge returns to the biblical image of the land of Canaan as a dedicated space of religious retreat. As this chapter demonstrates, this dedicated space separates the believer from the social pressures of the world and provides the individual with direct insight into God's nature. As he constructs boundaries between the concerns of religion and politics, Penn is able to reconcile the individual's free exercise of conscience with the shared pursuit of the good life in public virtues such as justice. Penn's account of religious space participates in an ongoing conversation about the relationship between religious epistemologies that depend on the individual and the concerns of communal life. Earlier seventeenth-century thinkers such as the Ferrar family, Margaret Cavendish, and John Milton each wrestled with the sources of religious knowledge in the present world and sought to understand the full implications of individual ways of knowing. Penn's relative disinterest in articulating the role of gender in the production of religious knowledge may derive from the implicit equality implied in the Quakers' emphasis on the universal inner light. His distinction between the religious and the political presents modern, post-Enlightenment readers with a familiar solution, but it emerges out of the possibilities and intellectual frameworks that this ongoing conversation generated.

Most broadly, Penn's distinction between the role of space in the production of religious knowledge and the maintenance of political freedom contributes to the construction of religion as a separate category of knowledge and body of practices. Throughout the long eighteenth century, writers like John Bunyan, Mary Astell, and

William Penn seek to reconcile their understanding of the individual's role in the production of religious knowledge with the practical organization of community life. Penn's complex solution, which divides the function of his colony into a space of religious retreat and an overlapping political space, continues to explore this question without fully resolving its tensions. In contrast with Astell's pursuit of a universal, rational religion, Penn's attempt to distinguish the concerns of religion and those of politics presents a temporary solution to the tension between the individual's religious knowledge and communal life. The imminent arrival of religious schism in early Pennsylvania, however, will challenge the stability of these imagined boundaries and require that Penn continue to negotiate the boundaries between the religious and the political. This final chapter of my project reveals the importance of continuing to examine the religious and theological concerns in William Penn's work and the complex historical application of his ideas in the early American colonial world.

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