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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Department of English

Dissertation Examination Committee:

Sarah Rivett, Chair

Daniel Bornstein

Joseph Loewenstein, Co-chair

Robert Milder

Daniel Shea

Wolfram Schmidgen

THIS LOQUACIOUS SOIL: LANGUAGE AND RELIGIOUS

EXPERIENCE IN EARLY AMERICA

by

Natalie D. Spar

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in the darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word.

-T. S. Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*

Introduction

This Loquacious Soil: Language and Religious Experience in Early America

They one and all embarked for the wilderness of America, where they might enjoy, unmolested, the inestimable luxury of talking. No sooner did they land on this loquacious soil, than, as if they had caught the disease from the climate, they all lifted up their voices at once, and for the space of one whole year did keep up such a joyful clamour, that we are told they frightened every bird and beast out of the neighbourhood.

-Washington Irving, *The History of New York*

The first American colonists so demanded the luxury of talking, Irving imagined, that they crossed the ocean to find it: English religious dissenters desired freedom of conscience, which soon became liberty of speech because “they possessed that ingenuous habit of mind which always thinks aloud, and is for ever galloping into other people’s ears.”¹ I take seriously Irving’s joke that America has its roots, at least in part, in the desire to talk. But, as he quips, this inclination to loquacity also implies “the right of talking without ideas and without information,” which makes the tongue a weapon to tyrannize, silence, and indoctrinate the powerless or disagreeable members of society.² The powerful tongue always stands on the brink of manipulation.

In Irving’s narrative, the English dissenters’ talkative nature necessarily resulted in the clergy adopting “the usual methods” of reclaiming the people’s ears. Yet their “invincible spirit of independence” could not be subdued, and they embarked for a soil that seemed more naturally suited to their loquacity.³ The colonial clergy were no less interested in reclaiming ears, and they felt there were many obstinate ears. Preacher Solomon Stoddard’s (1643-1729) thunderous hell-fire sermons are one example echoing Irving’s depiction of the American colonists as unbounded speakers. His sermons,

preached almost a century after the first loquacious colonists arrived, were explicitly aimed at recapturing ears, and through them, souls, with loud, uncontrollable words. But like Irving's depiction of the tyrannous tongue, Stoddard's sermons always stood the risk of manipulating or drawing attention to their own loquacity rather than authentically transforming the soul. Stoddard, thus, poses the central problem of my dissertation: the text initiates but threatens the authenticity of religious experience.

The sermon and the Bible were meant to give the hearer or reader access to God, but the text could easily manipulate or disrupt an immediate experience of the divine. The theologies of Stoddard, his grandson Jonathan Edwards, their Puritan predecessors, and the Puritan's heretical contemporaries were all defined by this tension between religious experience and the sermonic and biblical texts. Thus, Stoddard strove to make the sermon a genre of experiential transference; the sermon conveyed an experience of God, rather than an argument aimed at persuasion, but it also rhetorically structured the laity's religious experience. The hearer was meant to sense his or her experience as authentic and individual, despite the sermon's work of making all religious experiences fit within pre-defined boundaries of a universal spiritual truth.

Stoddard's 1705 sermon, *The Danger of Speedy Degeneracy*, issues a warning we expect from hell-fire preaching: "God will surely judge you, if you corrupt your selves." In order to make his congregation realize the fear of this as yet abstract threat, Stoddard rhetorically personalizes God's judgment. He explains how God will judge the corrupt: you may never recover, the world will reproach you, and you will perish. Under this last head Stoddard reinforces his argument with repetition: "multitudes of you will perish.

Multitudes when they dye will go to Hell; when Parents dye, and Husbands dye, and Wives dye, and Children dye, they will generally go to Hell; after all miseries here they will have Eternal misery [...] and then the Children of the Kingdom are cast into outer darkness.”⁴ Though Stoddard shifts from the second person to the third, he catalogues types that particularize the abstraction of God’s judgment: God will judge parents, husbands, children. He ends his sermon with a repetition of “children” as a generalization that exposes the anxiety in every listener’s mind: even those who assume themselves to be children of the kingdom may be cast into darkness. As Stoddard walks away from the pulpit, his words echo in the darkness of the listener’s soul: “*I am cast into outer darkness.*”

This scene, typical of New English meetinghouses throughout the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century, highlights the experience of sermon-listening. The minister needed to make the listener feel the fear of being cast into the darkness of hell. Although Stoddard promoted the role of education and intellectual application in religion, his emphasis on experience made him skeptical of those who relied too heavily on texts in their faith. During the revivals in Northampton, Massachusetts in the 1710s, he warned young preachers that “Whatever Books men have read, there is [...] need of experimental knowledge in a Minister; many particular things will occur that he will not meet withal in Books; it is a great calamity to wounded Consciencs to be under the direction of an unexperienced Minister.”⁵ Ministers relying on texts alone would become blind guides, he argued. That Stoddard prefaces his sermon on “how to Guide souls through the work of conversion” with a warning against the elevation of the text suggests his awareness of

the always potential gap between text and experience. Texts act as messy mediators in an ostensibly unmediated religious experience, texts elevate reason over experience, and texts can never fully convey the full experience of grace. Stoddard argued that every minister had a responsibility to attend to these gaps and miscarriages, always appealing to experience as the true guide to Christ.

Stoddard's concern that the text would disrupt experience characterized much of Reformed religion in early America. The sermon risked functioning like the books that created blind guides—as textual obstacles to experienced religion. Because experience was the guide to Christ, as Stoddard argued, the sermon had to become a conduit for the lay person's experience, not simply another text mediating between God and listener. But for Stoddard the sermon had urgent work: “Many Men are in a fast Sleep, and whispering will not awaken them; the threatening of God had need ring in their Ears; they are so atheistical and devoted to the World, that it is well if Thunder & Lightning will scare them; they are so hardened, that talking moderately to them, as Eli did to his Sons, makes no impression on them, than on the Seats of the Meeting house.”⁶ Sitting in the meeting house, the best listeners urgently scribbled notes, hung on Stoddard's every ringing word, and experienced the dark fear of being cast into hell. But how did Stoddard's thunderous words not become one more mediating obstacle between God and the hearer's experience of God? The answer lies in Stoddard's theory of sermonic rhetoric; speech was the site in which the tension could be reconciled, or at least addressed; language registered the gap between text and experience.

This fissure was essentially epistemological. For Stoddard, the minister's first-hand experience of grace meant that "Christ will be so present with the Gospel-Ministry, that His visible Kingdom shall be upheld."⁷ Stoddard's conception of the visible kingdom relies on the distinction between the visible and invisible church, which also guided his Puritan forerunners. While only God knows who is truly among the elect, they all argued, the church must have some way, however uncertain, of determining who is a member of the church. Earlier Puritan theologians argued that there was always a discrepancy between the visible and invisible church, and Stoddard angered his contemporaries by arguing that, because regeneracy was not certainly visible, it was lawful for the unregenerate to participate in acts of worship like communion. It did not follow, he argued, that each individual was truly regenerate. Stoddard and the seventeenth-century Puritans believed that there was always a fissure between the seen, material world and the invisible, spiritual world. They did not mean that the visible was at variance with the invisible, but rather that the visible world was constituted by signs of the immaterial that were always potentially illegible. Sermons were such signs. A successful "Gospel-Ministry" would make visible what was otherwise inaccessible: religious experience became sensory—heard, seen, felt.

The language of the sermon managed the gap between visible and invisible, making legible the material signs of the divine. A rhetorical register was necessary for connecting and testing the relationship between experience, its outward or material manifestations, and the religious texts that initiated the experience. But the sermon was not the only form of speech to address this epistemological problem. There were various

models of the register at work within early American religion. Within New English Puritanism, the plain style sermon became the means for camouflaging the distance between experience and text. Within heterodox religious groups in New England, language was not the means for closing a gap but instead registered the narrowing gap between God and human listeners. Spontaneous, prophetic language was the manifestation of immediate revelation for the Quakers and Antinomians. For the translators working among Native Americans, the act of translating the Bible or of creating a written language exposed the discontinuity between text and experience. And Jonathan Edwards, during the Great Awakening, redefined the nature of language as a material manifestation of divine realities in order to suture text and experience. The act of writing, for example, became a spiritual and experiential act for Edwards.

These varied responses to the same gap between text and experience constitute an epistemological crisis in early American religion. As Lisa Gordis has argued, seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay colony “faced a crisis in literary theory.”⁸ In an effort to guide the laity’s response to the sermon but also to give them ownership over their own religious experiences, Puritan preachers made themselves theoretically transparent in the pulpit. Teresa Toulouse identified this phenomenon in 1987, but Gordis extends it to argue that as such, ministers were “treating preaching as a fuller form of reading,” and a crisis in interpretive strategies emerged from the hermeneutic work in the pulpit.⁹ I share Gordis’s insistence that early American texts spoke not only to the issues at hand—an explication of a biblical passage, a jeremiadic warning against church declension, or a pamphlet war over toleration—but theorized the interpretive strategies

that transcended individual debates or sermons. But I also see the interpretive crisis she identifies extending beyond the pulpit, beyond the biblical text, beyond Puritanism, and into theories of language.

While originating in an immaterial experience of the invisible world, early American religious experience had a material life in visible signs, in biblical types, and in material texts, which imagined language as rooted in the material world. With this central similarity, early Americans generated various epistemologies of language that addressed the relationship between the visible and invisible: Jonathan Edwards saw language as human construct, derived from Lockean empirical knowledge of the natural world; seventeenth-century Quaker language theories advocated, not a transcendence of language, but a redemption of natural language; and Native American language was thought to grow out of the unique American landscape. My dissertation describes the ways that religious language was believed to have material agency and uncovers a range of epistemologies of religious experience that erased easy boundaries between the visible and invisible worlds. Some scholars have demonstrated that early American uses of speech and interpretive strategies were profoundly theological and sophisticatedly theoretical, yet here I explore the relationship between textuality and spiritual experience as generating innovative uses of rhetoric and theories of language.¹⁰

The tension between text and experience I identify in early American religion builds on and diverges from a long history of early American scholarship that has focused on two things essential to New England Puritanism. The first, the doctrine of sola scriptura, “scripture alone,” was a reaction to Catholicism’s mediator priests and its

laity's lack of access to the biblical text. In my reading of early American texts, however, experience is emphasized alongside sola scriptura, and experience is often imagined as the evidence of biblical truths. I turn most often to theories of spoken language because the ontological instability of oral language made it a more promising and problematic site for attempting to express divine things. Ann Kibbey has argued that "the crucial importance of speaking in conversion shows that Puritans believed written texts were in some way fundamentally dependent for their intelligibility on their incorporation into speech, that sound—however transitory and precarious—was essential."¹¹ Kibbey's argument overturns assumptions about the primacy of the written text, and it implies a challenge to sola scriptura. I do not mean to suggest that the Puritans did not, in fact, believe in the doctrine of sola scriptura, but the practice of living doctrine surmounted belief.¹² And spoken language was always part of the practice of grace.

The second critical focus that underlies my argument is the relationship between doctrine and experience. Perry Miller first characterized seventeenth-century Puritanism as struggling between experience and ideology, and Sacvan Bercovitch revised Miller to argue that ideology functioned as the explanation for experience.¹³ By "ideology," Miller and Bercovitch mean something akin to doctrine, but their definitions extend to include basic beliefs about identity, epistemology, politics, etc., all of which, they argue, are captured in doctrine. I, however, see a distinction between doctrine and some ideological assumptions within early American Puritanism. While Bercovitch points to a gap between text and experience, he elides the distinction between text and ideology by arguing that texts *were* ideology.¹⁴ I argue, instead, that the content of a text was not the

only thing that seemed disconnected from experience; the way a text was thought to function in faith was itself cut off from experience and doctrine. Text inculcated faith, spurred on conversion—but that was in stark contrast to the doctrine that held that the Spirit, not the text, enacted the work of conversion. A convert was brought to grace partially through texts, but he or she felt, and was meant to feel, that experience as the work of God, not the minister or text. Doctrine and ideology were in conflict about the role of the text.

By expanding critical attention beyond New England Puritanism, scholars of the last two decades have challenged the historiographic trend that dichotomizes experience and ideology, but for these scholars the opacity of experience as a category necessitates its rhetorical validation.¹⁵ This more recent work suggests that there is still a critical tendency to separate experience and ideology in a way early Americans never imagined. I argue that an emphasis on experience in religion was explicit in early American doctrine and ideology. The rhetorical forms and linguistic theories emerging in early America were less about validating experience and were instead addressing a fundamentally epistemological problem. Rhetoric was not a means of justifying experience; it simultaneously acknowledged and worked to narrow the distance between experience and language, which was always just slightly incapable of describing experience.

In revising the role of *sola scriptura* in religious experience I turn to the oral, but in thinking through the relationship between ideology and experience I consider both the oral and the written. Of course, all of the sources at my disposal are written, though some are written translations of oral texts. Most recent early Americanists working with oral

genres address the problem of access to oral historical events. Sandra Gustafson, in *Eloquence is Power*, writes that “Even at the moment of the performance, the gap between what the orator intended and what different members of the audience heard, saw, and understood produced an unavoidable indeterminacy.”¹⁶ Gustafson argues that this is one of the “problems with sources” in any study of what she calls “radically context-oriented art,” but I see this as a problem of which early Americans were profoundly aware.¹⁷ Therefore, I address theories of both spoken and written language, working to understand how different kinds of early Americans—Puritan ministers, heretical laypeople, religious minorities, translators, diarists, and religious philosophers—responded to the disparity between text (what is spoken *or* read) and experience (how that thing is read *or* heard and the resulting religious feelings and beliefs).

In some sense, I follow Gustafson’s lead when she argues that “Recognizing the flexible boundaries and considerable overlap between oral and textual forms, as well as the persistence of oral genres, we must attend to the symbolic and performative meanings attached to speech and writing.”¹⁸ Like Gordis, Gustafson has urged us to revise our assumptions about what early American texts did in the world and what broader theories of interpretation, material textuality, and performance they suggested.¹⁹ I ask how the symbolic meanings attached to speech and text structure broader linguistic philosophies that attempt to account or compensate for the perceived gap between language (written *and* spoken) and religious experience.

In all of the theories of language I trace here, one commonality stands out. Each theory sought to close the distance between words and things, which implies that

contemporary thinkers considered religious experience to be more materially grounded than we might assume. Rather than imagining spiritual experience as the strictly transcendent, early Americans defined it as sensory. In this, they were infusing the discourse of natural philosophy into their theology. The work of bringing word and thing into a one-to-one correspondence was not limited to the theologies I examine here; it was fundamental to seventeenth-century natural philosophy. It was so pervasive a concern that when Jonathan Swift's Gulliver toured the "grand Academy of Lagado" he encountered the Laputian scientists' scheme for "abolishing all Words whatsoever." Swift mocks the natural philosopher's efforts to suture words to things:

For, it is plain, that every Word we speak is in some Degree the Diminution of our Lungs by Corrosion; and consequently contributes to the shortening of our Lives. An Expedient was therefore offered, that since Words are only Names for *Things*, it would be more convenient for all Men to carry about them, such *Things* as were necessary to express the particular Business they are to discourse on. [...] Another great Advantage proposed by this Invention, was, that it would serve as an universal Language to be understood in all civilized Nations, whose Goods and Utensils are generally of the same Kind, or nearly resembling, so that their Uses might easily be comprehended.²⁰

Swift's description of Laputian sages wandering the streets, bent in half by their sacks of things is entertaining to be sure, but his parody echoes the actual arguments for a universal language, or real character, put forth by some natural philosophers in the mid

and late seventeenth-century.²¹ The theories of language I treat here imagine the problems of language in fundamentally theological terms, but early Americans, like natural philosophers, proposed linguistic theories that assumed universal similarities in how language works and the necessity of grounding words in things. The theories of language I discover in early American religious texts work to give language the ability to materially capture spiritual truths and experience and give it the agency to affect change in souls.

Though British philosophy has long been the preferred object of study for those interested in the rhetorical and linguistic theory of natural philosophy, the distinct theology of New England generated sophisticated and influential rhetorical responses to the epistemological problems British philosophers and language reform projects addressed. New English clergy and lay people alike strove to accommodate their theology to an empirical epistemology in which sensory experience was the source of knowledge. Thus, they rooted their epistemology of the soul in experience; one's senses perceiving and feeling God work on the soul replaced doctrinal knowledge as evidence of sanctification. I argue that this experience was fundamentally experimental. By this, I mean that first generation Puritan ministers advocated a reproducible and testable experience. Though this is certainly distinct from scientific experiment, they did not imagine it as such. For someone like Thomas Shepard, grace was something that worked in essentially the same manner on every soul.

While natural philosophers like John Locke and Thomas Sprat thought empiricism would combat the kind of religious enthusiasm they saw in religious

dissenters, early Americans adapted the empiricism of natural philosophy to their own religious ends. Michael Hunter touches on this in *Science and Society in Restoration England* when he argues that people reacted to sectarian conflict by “seeking a fresh basis for faith in consensus rather than illuminism, in rationalism rather than dogma [...] science could play a part through the humble pursuit of knowledge in God’s works.”²² But in my assessment, the New England Puritans did not see science just as a means of overcoming sectarian conflict; their brand of empiricism was also a tool for overcoming fallible human knowledge and accessing universal, divine truth. The Puritans were not alone in this practice; heretics, sectarians, and eighteenth-century Congregationalist heirs of Puritanism also saw empiricism as offering a new way of accessing God.

Thus, when Stoddard’s advocates “experimental knowledge” over book knowledge he implies something more sensory than spiritual transcendence; he means to import the discourse of empiricism into religion. A note on terminology is useful here. Religious texts throughout the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries, often use “experimental” interchangeably with “experience” or “experiential,” but all imply something sensory, not just emotional.²³ For example, William Penn calls all people to a “*Sensible and Experimental knowledge of God*,” which he defines in *Quakerism, A New Nick-Name for Old Christianity* (1672): “Experience is Demonstration; and the World without, and the Redemption I know within [...] *make up that Demonstration; which is that Experience.*”²⁴ Penn defines experience as demonstration derived from the natural world and from his own internal, spiritual senses. His “experimental,” then, is sensory and empirical in the sense that it is formulated through observation of the natural world,

but experimental knowledge of faith always includes an internal, spiritual sensation. For John Cotton “experimental” naturally carries with it a definition of scientific certainty. In *A Practicall Commentary* (1656) he writes that God’s spirit, educating through experience, offers the faithful a “scientificall Instruction about certain experimentall things.”²⁵ This is an obvious turn from the kind of experimental knowledge advocated by natural philosophy: the unseen Spirit, not just natural observation, guides the senses. Yet Cotton intends to borrow the discourse of empiricism.

Cotton and Penn are representative of the range of responses to the shifting paradigms of knowledge and the epistemological gap between text and experience. Beginning with the first generation of Puritan preachers who addressed these gaps and shifts by infusing their sermons and sermonic philosophy with the discourse of empiricism, and ending with Jonathan Edwards’s philosophy of language’s relationship to the material world, I ask how the particularly loquacious early Americans dealt with the epistemological questions circling around the Atlantic world.

Opening with the most important genre of religious experience in mid-seventeenth-century New England, the first chapter, “Mediating Words,” argues that the plain style sermon worked metaphorically, mediating between two elements (audience and God) while camouflaging that mediation. I read the sermons and sermonic theories of three of seventeenth-century New England’s most influential ministers, John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, and Thomas Shepard, to demonstrate how each compensated for his own anxiety that language failed to participate in the core epistemological assumptions of Puritanism. To close the distance between a minister’s hermeneutical practice and a lay

experience of immediacy, the plain style sermon relied on metaphor, which spoke particularly to individual lay listeners by arousing their senses. Reading the metaphor of the plain style against Robert Boyle's *Occasional Reflections*, I argue that early American ministers attempted to apply the language of empiricism to religion rhetorically in order to facilitate and structure the laity's experience of grace.

"Monstrous Words," the second chapter, offers a counterpoint to the first chapter's exploration of the orthodox view of the sermon by arguing that the so-called heretical speech of Anne Hutchinson and the Quakers was experienced as prophetic speech emerging from an immediate encounter with the divine. Here I read Anne Hutchinson's trial and several influential British and colonial Quaker texts on the "pure language" and the silent meeting to argue that immediate revelation, the central theological claim of each, generated religious experience that removed (or at least compensated for) the third terms of the sermon and the minister. Anne Hutchinson's prophetic speech in her civil trial was a critique of her ministers' anxious rhetorical performance and an adherence to an epistemology in which a mediating system of visible signs was unnecessary for immediate religious experience. The Quaker silent meeting also asserted the immediacy of individual religious experience. The silent meeting was not a place of silence, despite its name, and I argue that it organically generated an ordered hermeneutic for reading silence that resulted in the transformation of daily speech. Rather than rhetorically imposing order on experience, like the plain style, Hutchinson and the Quakers imagined language arising from religious experience.

The third chapter, “Metamorphizing Words,” demonstrates how linguistic encounters with Native Americans transformed or challenged colonial assumptions about language. John Eliot and Roger Williams recognized the limits of language to fully capture experience or describe the divine, and they imagined Hebrew—their version of a heavenly or universal language—as an ideal to which their own English could never ascend. Native languages, though, seemed to mirror, or even be linguistically related to, Hebrew; Eliot and Williams hoped native languages would be a bridge over the divide between language and experience. But for Eliot, translation revealed the failure of language to capture experience, and it multiplied the possibilities of misreading. Williams, like Eliot, recognized the opacity of translation, but he saw this opacity as productive of new mixtures that generated new knowledge. Most critics assume that Eliot and Williams imagined translation as transparent, but I argue these translators worried about what translation would efface—the original Hebrew Bible, for one, experience, for another—ultimately revealing a gap between text and experience that was the landmark anxiety of early American Puritanism.

The fourth and last chapter, “The Material Word,” argues that Jonathan Edwards generated a linguistic theory in which words were images of the divine. His linguistic revision was a response to the disjunction between theology and experience he witnessed in the Great Awakening and to the seeming inability of language to describe or affect experience. Edwards’s interpretation of John Locke led him to view language as a human construct meant to communicate ideas within the speaker’s mind. Merging this with his own philosophy, Edwards created a distinct philosophy of language wherein

words were both a part of the natural world and a link between the material and the divine. Through his sermons, case histories, and typology, Edwards generated an empirical philosophy of language in which words operated as images of the divine, thus bridging the divide between the material and the immaterial.

I argue that Edwards marks a turning point in early American theories of the relationship between language and experience. Edwards's philosophy of language ameliorated anxiety about the mediating influence of the text and the distance between language and experience, but George Whitefield initiated the practice of preaching without attending to these gaps and fissures. By way of conclusion, I examine Whitefield's performative sermonic philosophy of the Great Awakening, developed in the same moment Edwards was working out his linguistic philosophy of religious experience. Edwards established the philosophy that made Whitefield's sermonic practice possible, but Edwards's sermons lacked the performative spectacle of Whitefield's preaching. Whitefield's conspicuously affective performances in the pulpit register the emergence of a distinctly modern conception of the relationship between language and experience. His emphasis on performance over the words themselves expressed a belief that language unproblematically modeled, reflected, and generated experience in what would become a lasting feature of American evangelicalism.

Notes

¹ Washington Irving, *A History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* by Diedrich Knickerbocker (New York: Dodd Mead, 1915), 207.

² Ibid, 207.

³ Ibid, 208.

⁴ Solomon Stoddard, *The Danger of a Speedy Degeneracy* (Boston, 1705), 28.

⁵ Stoddard, *The Presence of Christ with the Ministers of the Gospel* (Boston, 1718), 9.

⁶ Ibid, 27.

⁷ Ibid, 10.

⁸ Ibid, 3.

⁹ Ibid, 10. See also Theresa Toulouse, *The Art of Prophesying: New England Sermons and the Shaping of Belief* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

¹⁰ For the best examples of work that has tackled speech and interpretation see Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983); Lisa Gordis, *Opening Scripture: Bible Reading and Interpretive Authority in Puritan New England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Ann Kibbey, *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism: A Study of Rhetoric, Prejudice, and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹¹ Kibbey, *The Interpretation of Material Shape in Puritanism*, 8. Kibbey explores the relationship between linguistic and social values, focusing much of her book on the violent, sometimes iconoclastic, results of the way figura functioned in early American Puritanism. In making her case for the primacy of speech in New England Puritanism, Kibbey overturns the Foucauldian assumption of the “absolute privilege” of writing. Kibbey is the best early example of what has become a sustained interest in orality, spoken rhetoric, and hearing over the course of the last two decades of early American literary scholarship. See also Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Nancy Rutenburg, *Democratic Personality: Popular Voice and the Trial of American Authorship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003); Peter Charles Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); and Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹² The relationship between orality and written text is often imagined as hierarchical, and modernization narratives usually assume that modernity reverses that hierarchy. By quoting Kibbey’s argument for the dependence of text on speech, I do not mean to suggest a hierarchy. The technologies of speech and writing overlapped and swapped priority frequently in early America. See Schmidt’s introduction in *Hearing Things* for more on the importance of moving beyond this tired hierarchy.

¹³ See Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953) and Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 146-7.

¹⁴ For one important response to Miller and Bercovitch see Ralph Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Although Bauer attempts to correct some of the errors he sees in narratives like Bercovitch's, he still insists that experience was a rhetorical category in need of validation. Seventeenth-century New England writing, Bauer argues, had to endow experience with rhetorical authority. This is precisely the kind of argument I seek to overturn. Although Bauer is interested in how writers used the category of experience to reimagine the possibilities for social authority, not religion, his argument wrongly assumes that experience required the stability of textualization.

¹⁵ See, in particular, Anne Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) and Jim Egan, *Authorizing Experience: Reconfigurations of the Body Politic in Seventeenth-Century New England Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). These studies challenged Miller's thesis by focusing on practices and beliefs outside of the New English Puritan orthodoxy that seemed to privilege the experiential more than Puritanism. Moving beyond New England and Puritanism has also fruitfully revised understandings of consensus and dissent within Puritanism. See, for example, Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies of Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Knight directly challenges narratives like Miller's that saw unwavering consensus within Puritanism, though she does not directly address the question of experience. Works like Taves' and Egan's have helped me return to the Puritans with the category of experience in mind. The Puritans, like the sectarians, heretics, and enthusiasts Taves and Egan study, also privileged experience.

¹⁶ Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power*, xxiv.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹⁹ The symbolic work of material texts has been a focus of early American studies since Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) and Kathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For the best and most recent example of how book history has influenced early American scholarship see Matt Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

²⁰ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels: an Annotated Text with Critical Essays* ed. Robert A. Greenberg (New York: Norton, 1961), 176.

²¹ For examples of such theories of language see Francis Lodowick, *A Common Writing* (London, 1647); Cave Beck, *The Universal Character by which all the Nations in the World may Understand one Another's Conceptions* (London, 1657); and John Wilkins, *Essay Towards a Real Character and Philosophical Language* (London, 1668).

²² Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 27.

²³ The Oxford English Dictionary records the first use of "experimental" in 1526 in William Bonde's *Pylgrimage of Perfection*: "Experimentall knowledge of the heuently lyfe to come." In an Early English Books Online search, "experimental religion" appears in texts as early as 1614.

²⁴ William Penn, *Quakerism, a New Nick-name for Old Christianity* (London, 1672), 78-9. Throughout his writings Penn makes this call for “sensible and experimental religion.” See, for example, *A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers* (London, 1694); *The True Christian Quaker* (London, 1674); and *Reason Against Railing* (London, 1673).

²⁵ John Cotton, *A Practicall Commentary or Exposition with Observations, Reasons, and Uses upon the First Epistle Generall of John* (London, 1658), 96. Throughout the dissertation, I will retain the original spelling of all primary texts.

Chapter 1

Mediating Words: The Plain Style Sermon

I. Occasional Reflections

In a 1779 letter to the Abbe Morellet, Benjamin Franklin included his meditation on wine:

To confirm still more your piety and gratitude to Divine Providence, reflect upon the situation which it has given to the elbow. You see in animals, who are intended to drink the waters that flow upon the earth, that if they have long legs, they also have a long neck, so that they can get at their drink without kneeling down. But man, who was destined to drink wine, must be able to raise the glass to his mouth. [...] Let us, then, with glass in hand, adore this benevolent wisdom;—let us adore and drink!¹

Franklin caricatures the epistemology of the seventeenth-century occasional reflection or meditation and demonstrates the illogical lengths to which meditations on the natural world can be taken if they presuppose the lesson of the observation. The genre of occasional meditations assumes that piety requires reflection upon the natural world, and then it observes the world as it reasons toward a moral truth.² In Franklin's meditation, he follows this logic: his observations on the elbow lead to the moral truth "adore and drink." But Franklin's meditation, unlike the seventeenth-century religious and moral practice, explicitly presumes that wine holds forth truth before observing the animals drinking. "In wine," Franklin writes as an introduction to his meditation, "there is truth." While Franklin satirizes argument from design, the occasional meditation observes the natural world leading to new knowledge rather than confirming previous assumptions, yet

Franklin's parody does turn on the occasional meditation's central epistemological belief that the material world provides access to knowledge of the unseen.

Robert Boyle, whose *Occasional Reflections* (1665) catalogues meditations on various "objects" and "accidents," or occurrences, is clear about the epistemological value of reflecting on the material world. For Boyle, the soil sermonized. Meditation on natural phenomena will "make the World vocal," he wrote, and will make "the very Flowers of [a man's] Garden, read him Lectures of Ethicks or Divinity."³ While Boyle admits that the image of the immaterial in the material is hazy, his meditations demonstrate an epistemology in which empirical access to the natural world generates knowledge of what cannot be seen. In Boyle's meditation "upon the sight of ones Shadow cast upon the face of a River" he considers that the "World may without much extravagance be tearmed the Shadow" of its divine author, but he adds that this shadow is "very superficial and obscure."⁴ *Occasional Reflections* posits the material world as full of signs of moral truths, but those signs are always shadowy; objects and occasions are not literal manifestations of immaterial realities. Thus, this way of reading the world presents an epistemological dilemma. Moral or spiritual truths are not immediately accessible or perfectly legible. One could, for example, easily read the elbow as evidence for divine endorsement of inebriation. By reading the material world for empirical evidence of an a priori assumption, Franklin demonstrates how easily such an epistemology can go awry. Boyle exempts himself from the kind of faulty epistemology Franklin satirizes, but New English ministers, preaching in the same moment as Boyle was writing *Occasional Reflections*, were anxious that their sermons were too shadowy

as reflections of spiritual truths and thus liable to the kind of misreading Franklin parodies. Boyle and New English Puritan ministers attended to the natural world as a site of moral truths, but I argue that while Boyle explicitly marked the epistemological connection between the material and spiritual worlds as one of shadowy likeness, the epistemology reflected in the sermon held the material world to be a more direct manifestation of spiritual truths.

For Boyle, the soil sermonized, and sermons, too, were material reflections of spiritual lessons, but their stakes were much higher. Often, in *Occasional Reflections*, Boyle meditates on some object or occasion that emblemizes the problem of the sermon. These meditations consider how to merge style and content so that language does not distract from piety. That form could upstage content was a constant concern for ministers, and Boyle captures this debate, common in seventeenth-century sermonic theory. In reflection VI, “upon the sight of a Looking-glass, with a rich Frame,” three men dialogue upon the mirror as an image of eloquence in sermons. One of the speakers, Eugenius, reflects that eloquence in sermons draws listeners just as the gilt frame draws lookers, but his companions find fault in his sermonic philosophy. They argue that eloquence has “no Power, like a good Looking-glass, to acquaint the beholder with the true Image or Representation of his own Complexion,” and they condemn the preacher who works to make “his Expressions, than to make his Hearers, good.”⁵ Boyle’s meditation presents both sides of the debate: should the minister use all available sources from art and nature to draw listeners, or would that art distract from or even undermine the sermon’s true goal? Should the sermon present itself as a man-made, material object

that is only similar to the spiritual meaning it carries, or should the sermon, instead, present itself as an immediate manifestation of divine things? The sermon form worked like the objects and occasions on which Boyle reflected, but it also needed to mediate the potential misreading that Franklin highlights.

Boyle's empiricism assumed an epistemological connection between the observable and larger moral principles, and Puritan sermons incorporated the language of empiricism while also obscuring the processes of mediation occurring between the visible and the invisible. The sermon, like the meditation, needed to transmit the interpretive work behind the lesson to readers or hearers who would experience it as if they had discovered it themselves. But the sermon, unlike the meditation, camouflaged the initial interpretive work. The epistemological framework of early science, as Boyle's *Occasional Reflections* shows, relied on empirical data to generate new knowledge. The Puritan ministers in New England recognized this shifting paradigm, and it unmoored their usual frames of reference for spiritual knowledge. If Boyle, as scientist, used empirical data to uncover natural laws, Puritan ministers began to rely on empirical data to confirm their assumptions about God's laws. In order to assure themselves that their knowledge of God was empirical—testable, reproducible, and sensible—ministers crafted their sermons using the rhetoric of the plain style. I argue that the New England plain style sermon was a means of overcoming ministerial anxiety, of holding on to the revealed Word of God while acknowledging shifting epistemological paradigms.

The plain style, ministers believed, presented an answer. Its rhetoric would ideally reproduce experimental results, assuring that different readers and hearers, at

different times, would have the same experience of God's Word and would arrive at the same conclusions about it. Early American Puritan ministers used the language and tools of early empiricism in order to assure themselves, even more than their audiences, that God's Word was still God's Word. But audiences were always a concern. As Boyle was writing the *Occasional Reflections*, across the sea New England minister Thomas Shepard was worrying that the Word of God never "stirs the soules" of some men who find it to be only a "strange thing [...] a *voice of words*, a sound of words, so they hear men spake, but understand no more then if they speak in a strange language, or if they do, it concernes not them; or if it stirs, 'tis but as the blowing of the winde upon a rock, which blusters for a time; but when the winde is down they are still. Truly they hear the word spoken, but they do not hear God speaking."⁶ If Boyle's soil speaks, Shepard worries that language is as meaningless as rocks.

Shepard's concern was spiritual, but it points to the dilemma on which Boyle's meditation on the gilded looking glass turns. Eloquence, or art, in a sermon or occasional reflection ran the risk of underscoring the materiality of language, and with it, the possibility of mishearing and misreading. To keep their listeners from hearing only the wind on the rock, or from mistaking the soil for the sermon, the New England Puritan clergy relied on the plain style. Along with a ministerial desire for empirical confirmation of spiritual laws or religious truths, ministers worried that they, as interpreters of God's Word for the people, would disrupt the empirical process. Their voices, and the sermon's style, needed to be transparent conduits for God's Word.

I argue in what follows that the plain style sermon relied on the primacy of experience (in juxtaposition to the Text) as the empirical site of saving grace. Such an emphasis on experience necessitated the minister's (and the Bible's) transparency in the pulpit. The long history of the plain style had always emphasized the experiential, but the rise of the new science shifted the plain style's definition of experiential. New England Puritan ministers used the plain style to create a testable and reproducible religious experience, and they did so through metaphor. Metaphor in the plain style sermon functioned as the link between the universal and the particular: metaphor gave the lay listener the sense of being spoken to directly and personally (fostering a sense of immediate experience) while facilitating universal experiences that were reproducible and testable in what the ministers imagined to be an empirical sense.⁷

Thus, the plain style sermon camouflaged the minister's mediating presence, and it did so rhetorically. The obvious conflict, that the medium of language compensated for mediation, was not lost on Puritan ministers. Here I look at the sermonic philosophy of three of seventeenth-century New England's most prolific and influential ministers—Thomas Shepard, Thomas Hooker, and John Cotton—demonstrating how they merged empiricism and metaphor to forge linguistic philosophies that mirrored the central image of their faith: the incarnation of Christ. In the end, Cotton argued that Christ was trope, but he did not mean Christ was immaterial or a mere image. The incarnation was a movement from the universal to the particular, a turn to the visible. It made material what had been unseen, and Hooker, Shepard, and Cotton imagined the work of the sermon in

just the same way. The metaphor of the plain style made the immaterial material and the particular visible.

II. A Study in Mediation: The Plain Style and its History

The sermonic plain style has often been misunderstood as a rejection of ornamentation in speech, part of a broader puritanical rejection of all kinds of ornamentation, although a better definition recognizes the plain stylists' deliberate—if careful—use of ornamentation.⁸ With this concession, the plain style is better understood as a rhetorical effort to subordinate human learning to the Word, to elevate the literal sense of the Scriptures, and to make the sermon accessible to a variety of listeners. Such a redefinition of the plain style has been occurring in scholarship on New English sermons over the past decades, but its connections to shifting epistemological frameworks has yet to be explored.⁹

Although this revision has recognized the frequent use of metaphors in plain style sermons, I argue that the epistemological framework of the sermon itself relied on metaphor. This is where the sermon diverges sharply from the rhetorical framing of Boyle's *Occasional Reflections*. Boyle imagined the relationship between an object and its moral lesson, such as a fire and lust, as similitive rather than metaphorical. Boyle's meditation "Upon the making of a Fire with Charcoal" demonstrates the simile at work:

For as Wood that is once thorowly set on Fire, may afterwards have that
Fire quite choak'd, and extinguish'd, and yet by those changes be turn'd
into Charcoal, whereby it is not only made Black, but dispos'd to be far

more easily Kindled, and Consum'd than before; so those, who have once had their Hearts thorowly possess'd by the pernicious Flames of Lust, [...] ev'n when they have stifled these criminal Flames, and feel no more of their Heat, may not only have their Reputation irrevocably blemish'd [...] but commonly carry about with them an unhappy Disposition to be re-inflam'd.¹⁰

Boyle explicitly employs the language of simile: x is “as” to y. And his admission of the shadowy nature of occasional reflection further suggests he did not assume, as Jonathan Edwards would a century later in his similar meditations, that the objects upon which he meditated had some inherent spiritual meaning. The rhetoric of Boyle’s meditations makes the simile explicit; he does not attempt to hide the mediation occurring. But the contemporaneous plain style sermon sought to do just that. Ministers, though, were anxious about this hidden mediation, and they sought linguistic ways to remedy it.

The occasional reflection demonstrates an epistemology rooted in empirical, sensory experience. New England ministers believed that this epistemology, manifested in the plain style, would guard against the dangers of mishearing, mediation, and enthusiasm.¹¹ An overly artful sermon style could produce any one of these miscarriages, the ministers believed, but the plain style allowed the laypeople to observe and experience God just as the occasional meditator observed and experienced natural phenomena. Enthusiasm was a great concern for all ministers; it disrupted the hermeneutics in place for reading one’s soul by severing signs from that which they represented. The enthusiast would, for example, read his or her tears as evidence, not just

of sorrow over sin, but as evidence of true repentance, true transformation of the soul. As a merely affective response to stimuli, enthusiasm overreached the empirical methods of deciphering grace in one's soul or evil in the world by advancing the experiential sign over its spiritual referent, and it was too individualistic ever to be reproducible. The plain style made religious experience reproducible: each listener should receive the same knowledge and have similarly legible responses. Enthusiasm was an error of sign-reading, and the plain style meant to ensure that the laity read signs as God intended them to be read. Like Boyle's famous air pump experiment, the plain style facilitated empirical observation. Just as one could observe a vacuum at work in the air pump, so one would observe God in the Bible and, via the plain style, in the sermon.

Steve Shapin and Simon Schaeffer have written about Boyle's interest in the recreation of the experimental moment in *Leviathan and the Air Pump* (1985), and they argue that Boyle wrote and circulated descriptions of his experiments in order to gather what they call "virtual witnesses." By either replicating the experiments for themselves or by visualizing the experiment Boyle describes, readers could re-experience the experiment and then validate the results. Without these witnesses, Shapin and Schaeffer argue, the knowledge-claims gained from the experiment could not become "matters of fact." Shapin and Schaeffer discuss the literary technologies that Boyle used to communicate these experiments and their resulting knowledge-claims to his audience: the experimental text "is a narration of some prior visual experience [that] points to sensory experiences that lie behind the text."¹² I argue that the sermonic moment works similarly. It, too, points to some sensory experience that led to the text's construction. The minister,

like the scientist, communicated through language an earlier, personal experience, and he attempted to convey to his audience the sense of immediate observation that Boyle implemented in his experimental texts.

The interpretation of a particular biblical passage, it was believed, was not imposed or made by the minister; it was inherent in the Bible itself and simply observed there. Because the minister had a set of observational tools (knowledge of biblical languages, hermeneutical training etc.), he was more likely than the lay reader to arrive at the interpretation that actually inhered in the text. The role of the sermon, then, was to give the reader the experience of observing the “matter of fact” in the Bible despite not having the minister’s tools. The sermon opted for a bare style that presented the interpretation in language that was accessible to anyone and that erased the presence of the human agent. The lay listener did not “take the minister’s word for it,” but assented to his interpretation, because the plain style presented knowledge as evidence, not argument.¹³ The act of listening to a sermon or of reading the Bible was experimental; the layperson seemed to engage in the work of interpretation alongside the minister, reading the signs before her. Thus, the plain style ostensibly provided empirical evidence and ensured reproducible results.

Reformed preaching manuals of the 1590s and early years of the seventeenth-century first defined the sermonic rhetoric of the plain style. The New England Puritans relied heavily on these manuals for their own sermonic form and rhetoric, though each adapted the initial preaching philosophies to the new environment of colonial New England. In his 1596 treatise *A Declaration of the True Manner of Knowing Christ*

Crucified William Perkins, the non-separating Puritan minister most influential for the New England Puritans, writes: “Now the knowledge of this [Christ’s resurrection] must not be onely speculative, that is, barely conceived in the braine, but it must be experimental: because we ought to have experience of it in our hearts and lives.”¹⁴ Throughout this treatise, Perkins contrasts “experimental” knowledge with intellectual awareness, or the ability to “handle the whole mysterie of God incarnate soundly and learnedly” without an “inward and lively feeling.”¹⁵ Perkins’s experimental knowledge relies on the metaphors of sensory experience to claim that religious knowledge is seen, tasted, felt, but in the late sixteenth-century he did not make the claim his New England heirs would: that religious experience is real because empirical. Perkins’s emphasis on the emotional transformation of conversion and the minister’s camouflage of mediation, however, were also central to the New England plain style.

Perkins first published his preaching manual, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, in 1592, and it is one of the earliest, and the most formational, articulations of a Reformed plain style.¹⁶ Perkins, and other ministers, devised the plain style as a way of compensating for the tension between two central Reformation teachings.¹⁷ With the rise of Protestantism, the sermon took on a more central role in the inculcation of faith in the individual soul: as Martin Luther argued, faith comes through hearing (God’s Word) alone. If Luther emphasized the centrality of the sermon, Desiderius Erasmus added that Christ alone is Priest. His treatise on preaching and the priesthood, *Ecclesiastes*, was first published in 1535 and was an important source for the Puritan preaching manuals that appeared in the

last decade of the century and into the next.¹⁸ *Ecclesiastes* emphasizes Christ as the sole mediator and the priest's or minister's role as one of mere interpreter.¹⁹

However, these Reformation fundamentals—that the sermon was central to faith and that Christ alone was mediator—were in conflict. Although Christ was the sole mediator between God and humanity, the minister did hold a mediating role as interpreter of Scripture for the people. Therefore he had to be cautious to make his sermon a catalyst of faith without making himself the agent. A rhetorical plain style was the result of this very contradiction because it deemphasized the physical presence of the minister and his voice and gave, or was thought to give, the layperson an unmediated experience of God. At the same time, though, the plain style was a way of regulating the potential heresy of this unmediated experience. The plain style as a regulatory mechanism became a way of assuaging anxieties about individual interpretive agency and ministerial meditation.

Perkins's *The Arte of Prophecyng* created the sermon format used by Puritan ministers throughout the seventeenth-century: the four-part sermon that included text, doctrine, reasons, and uses. Aside from this format, Perkins provided the minister with tools for disguising the *art* of preaching. The title of the manual points to the contradiction between “prophecyng” (preaching), which should be a divinely guided surrender of human wisdom, and “arte,” which highlights the human agency behind the sermon. Throughout the manual, Perkins offers advice for both the preparation and the delivery of the sermon that would bring art and prophecy into proper balance.²⁰ He argues that the minister's speech must be “spiritual” and simple, “fit both for the peoples understanding and to express the maiestie of the spirit.”²¹ This dual-role of sermonic

speech, to reach the simplest minds yet to match the glory of the subject, requires that the minister essentially make himself invisible in the pulpit. Perkins is explicit on this point: “Humane wisdome must bee concealed, whether it be in the matter of the sermon, or in the setting forth of the words: because the preaching of the word is the Testimonie of God [...] and not of human skill.”²² The primary goal here is simple enough: to ensure that the hearers do not ascribe their faith to any man, or human knowledge, but to the grace of God alone. But how is the minister to enact such transparency in the pulpit, especially as he is allowed to use the “arte” of human wisdom in his private preparations?

Perkins answers this potential counter-argument by claiming that the minister partially erases his presence in the pulpit through small verbal and physical gestures. He recommends abandoning the use of Greek or Latin phrases, uncommon words, or the “telling of tales” in order to make the minister appear artless. More importantly, Perkins advises ministers to be grave in their gestures: “It is fit therefore, that the trunk or stalke of the bodie being erect and quiet, all the other parts, as the arme, the hand, the face and eyes have such motions, as may express and (as it were) utter the godly affections of the heart.”²³ For Perkins, the body performs ministerial transparency by making itself as invisible as possible.

Although these small strategies were calculated for their effect, the Perkinsonian sermon form had the greatest role in rendering the minister transparent in the pulpit and creating a sensed immediacy between God and congregant. Teresa Toulouse, in *The Art of Prophesying: New England Sermons and the Shaping of Belief* (1987) has most fully and influentially treated the problem of ministerial mediation in Puritan New England.

She argues that the sermon form, as Perkins describes it, encapsulates the minister's interpretative process: "Once the true 'literall' meaning has been established, the process of how the preacher arrived at it can then be shaped within the public text-doctrine-reasons-uses model."²⁴ Toulouse does not directly discuss the minister's struggle for transparency in the pulpit, but her argument here suggests that the Perkinsonian sermon form acts as a kind of scrim; the form conceals the minister's previous interpretation because it recreates the interpretive process in the pulpit. Or, as Toulouse puts it, Perkins's model "involves preacher and listener in a nascent narrative that unfolds in the logical movement from the sacred text to its applications in the present moment."²⁵ The shape of the sermon, in Toulouse's description, persuades the listener because it seems to develop immediately and spontaneously; the Perkinsonian model controls the interpretation for the audience. Toulouse emphasizes what she sees, and what others have seen, as the rationality of Perkins's model. She argues that Perkins desired to view "God's ways as ultimately rational," but I would add that her description of Perkins also emphasizes the transparent nature of the preaching minister. The form of the sermon erases the minister's previous interpretive work by creating that work anew in the pulpit and by allowing the Bible to "open" immediately before the listeners.²⁶

Although the plain style sermon sought to create immediacy between Word and listener in the moment of delivery, Perkins dedicated a significant portion of his treatise to the minister's preparation before the sermon. This suggests that, one, some of the work of transparency occurred before the sermon was performed, and two, that the minister's private experience of the Word was essential for the delivery of an effectively transparent

sermon. The majority of Perkins's *The Arte of Prophecyng* offers instructions along these lines. The minister's work of interpretation in his private study requires opening the text so that the "one entire and natural sense may appeare." Perkins is clear that the "supreme and absolute means of interpretation is the Scripture it self."²⁷ Lisa Gordis has most thoroughly theorized this in *Opening Scripture: Bible Reading and Interpretive Authority in Puritan New England* (2003). Here she describes the Puritan belief in a self-interpreting Bible: "Puritan theorists saw the Bible not as a closed book, but as an open text, a locus for ongoing interaction between God and his chosen saints. Clergy and laity often described that interaction as 'opening.'" She adds, "[p]rivileging God as author and interpreter, Puritan interpretive strategies minimized the role of the human interpreter, relying on methods that in theory allowed the text to interpret itself."²⁸ Gordis observes an "interpretive fluidity" in Puritan practice that, because of a complex relationship between text, minister, hearer/reader, and God, permits a more disruptive, exciting, contentious, and lively biblical interpretation than we once allowed the Puritans.²⁹

However, Gordis is careful to note, the biblical text was only theoretically interpreting itself. While the Puritans believed the Bible was a fully transparent, self-opening text, the minister's work of interpretation was far from passive. Rather than having the text magically opened to him (or, as the minister believed, *alongside* having the text spiritually opened to him), the minister applied a variety of hermeneutical tools to the Bible. *The Arte of Prophecyng* was largely an instruction manual establishing the interpretive strategies the minister could use without imposing his own will on the Bible. Referencing the original language, collating related passages, and deciphering tropes and

figures in the Bible, to name a few, were all hermeneutical activities that allowed the minister to more actively open the text. These “helps,” as they were called, were tools that allowed the minister to observe divine knowledge in the text. But they, unlike the tools of empirical observation, confirmed the minister’s a priori assumptions. Perkins warned that the audience must not discern the workings of human art in the minister’s interpretation: “the Minister may, yea, and must privately use at his libertie the artes, philosophie, and varietie of reading, whilst he is framing his sermon: but he ought in publike to conceale all these from the people, and not to make the least ostentation.”³⁰ The minister had to conceal these tools so that the people would, as Gordis observes, sense the text opening before them. Thus, the laity was able to observe truth in the text.

Perkins used art to disguise art in order to make the sermon’s argument immediately accessible to all audiences. In this sense, the sermonic plain style was simply a rhetoric of accessibility; all types of listeners could understand the theological logic of the sermon when presented through the clear and structured logic of the plain style. But there were certain forces at work in the colonial communities that made the plain style’s regulation of religious experience more important than Perkins could have anticipated. Threats of hypocrisy and heresy loomed large in New England because the communities were geographically isolated and because their success, both religious and otherwise, depended on a cohesive community free from internal subversion. The New England Congregationalist churches strove for consensus, and those individuals who threatened this theological consensus were forced from the region.³¹ The plain style made consensus more likely because it controlled biblical interpretation. But the plain style was

not only a means of regulation; it was most interested in fostering unmediated relationships between the laypeople and their God. These two contrasting purposes of the sermonic plain style highlight an anxiety over the minister's role as mediator, and this is the distinguishing characteristic of the New English sermonic plain style. Varying degrees and types of ministerial anxiety concerning mediation structured each minister's use of the plain style. And each minister I read here—Shepard, Cotton, and Hooker—addressed these anxieties through language itself; style, hardly “plain,” became the means for appeasing anxieties about mediation.

Although Perkins advocated the use of “art” in preaching, ministers worried that their words were always potential sites of distraction. God spoke nothing but truth, but that was always in danger of being misheard. The Bible could not be wrong, but it could be misread. And the material world could provide insight into spiritual truths, but miscarriages between spiritual truth, natural world, and human interpreter would occur. The New England ministers were all too aware of these potential miscarriages, and thus they relied on the sermonic plain style as the safeguard against mishearings and misreadings. In the plain style, language mediates all potential problems of mediation.

Boyle's *Occasional Reflections*, addressing the use of art in sermon writing, clarifies why ministers rely on art and natural knowledge. In the meditation “upon being presented with a rare Nosegay by a Gardener,” Eugenius and his companions once again turn to the sermon, and reflecting on the labor involved in producing the beautiful arrangement, Eusebius makes the object an image of the sermon, and of writing in general: “to be able to write one good book on some Subjects, a man must have been at

the trouble to read an hundered.”³² Eloquence in sermons, he argues, is the result of much learning and labor, and both nature and art play a role: “For though an Author’s Natural parts may make his Book abound with Wit, yet without the help of Art he will scarce make it free from faults. And to be well stock’d with Comparisons, which when skillfully manag’d make the most taking passages of fine Pieces, one must sometimes survey and range through the works of Nature and Art.”³³ For Boyle, careful observation of the natural world made the writer clearer and more effective. And the plain style sermons relied on comparisons from the natural world and on the knowledge derived from many “good books.” Yet, as Perkins cautioned, ministers should always hide the work of art in their sermons. Both Perkins and Boyle warned that style could hinder meaning if not managed with skill.

The style of an occasional reflection could, Boyle admitted, become an obstacle to true understanding of the object’s figurative significance. Though his reflections employ figurative language—and Franklin’s caricature is stylistically sophisticated—Boyle argued that the observer need not have “much wit or eloquence” to engage in reflections. He or she needed only “cherish piety,” because the reflection’s purpose was to “make the *man* good, whether or no they make his *style* be thought so.”³⁴ But style mattered for Boyle. A poor style could keep the written reflection from communicating its intent, and an overly ornamented style would distract from the lesson itself. This stylistic tension is part of the epistemology of both the occasional reflection and the sermon. The sermon’s spiritual truths and the reflection’s moral lessons are mediated by a speaker and by

language itself: the material world is full of shadowy signs of moral truth, but it is always mediated.

Boyle's reflections prioritize the figurative significance of the observed object; there is surprisingly little consideration of the naturalness of the things observed in *Occasional Reflections*. Michael Hunter argues, in *Robert Boyle Reconsidered* (1994), that the natural philosophy Boyle espouses in *Occasional Reflections* "pushed literal details into figurative significance."³⁵ The figures in the material world are best captured in figurative language. Though Thomas Shepard argued that "it is a rule, never to flie to metaphors, where there can be a plain sense given," the plain style relied on a similar conception of the relationship between figurative language and truth. Plain style sermons often began with the work of unpacking biblical metaphors, and they used figurative language borrowed from the natural world to illuminate spiritual truths.

In making the medium of language a remedy for the problems of mediation, ministers anxiously realized they had to rely on the tools and helps Perkins described. But fifty years after Perkins, New England ministers seized opportunistically on the language and methods of the new science. Beyond emphasizing the sensory experience that Perkins argued should guide the sermon listener, the New England plain style sermon extended the meaning of Perkins's "experimental knowledge" and incorporated the discourse of empiricism. By deferring to this authoritative discourse, ministers imagined the work of the sermon as experimental. Where this manifests itself most importantly, I argue, is in metaphor. Plain style sermons employed metaphors taken from the natural world, which became one means of making an argument more efficacious and

experiential. Natural metaphors seemed to ground language to the material world, ideally closing the gap between word and thing. And New England ministers characterized the work of the sermon itself as metaphorical: it made visible and particular the invisible and universal.

III. The Empiricism of Metaphors: The New England Sermonic Plain Style

In 1653, the British Fifth Monarchist John Rogers published *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh. A Tabernacle for the Sun*, partially a collection of forty conversion narratives that he gathered from his congregants in Dublin and that all roughly follow the same rhetorical structure.³⁶ In discussing the requisites for church membership, he argued that “Everyone to be ADMITTED, gives out some EXPERIMENTAL Evidences of the work of GRACE upon his SOUL.”³⁷ The experimental evidences to which Rogers points were also those of the New England plain style. In Roger’s conversion narratives, and in the plain style sermon, experience included external experiences, internal sensations, and a third category that occupied a space between the external and internal: spiritual or internal sensations of physical experience, or metaphor.

The first, outward experiences, included both the supernatural—such as visions—and the natural—like illnesses, hearing sermons and more general outward actions (as both pre-conversion evidence of a sinful state and as evidence of conversion). Internal sensations included dreams and various emotional states like longing, awareness, temptation, or, as one narrator reported, the “sweet enjoyments of Jesus.”³⁸ The third category of more metaphorical sensory experience involved seeing, hearing, or perhaps

even touching the divine. Although I label these as metaphorical experience, the congregants often described them quite literally. Rogers's conception of experimental knowledge does seem metaphorical in relation to the material sensory experience of Boyle's experiments, but Rogers speaks of this knowledge in sensory terms: "If so be ye have tasted how gracious the Lord is," he writes citing William Ames' commentary on 1 Peter, "not onely taken grace (for many do) but tasted grace [...] and found experimentally feelingly [...] O then, will you say, O it is good!"³⁹ Tasting grace is the empirical work of reading the signs of grace in one's soul. And it is both a metaphorical and sensory tasting.

Hooker, Shepard, and Cotton all relied on this conception of metaphor in experience: metaphors in sermons allowed the audience to taste grace. Metaphor was both a means of incorporating empirical evidence into the sermons, and it was the epistemological mechanism of the plain style sermon. Whereas Boyle's reflections functioned by simile, the plain style sermon itself worked metaphorically, eliding the actual analogy and representing the sermon as the audience's own experience rather than the minister's educated argument. The sermon as metaphor works like the incarnation, which collapses tenor and vehicle into the one God.

Thomas Shepard, Thomas Hooker, and John Cotton wrote most directly about the plain style in the 1640s through the 1660s, and while the sermon styles of all three fit Perkins's general definition of the plain style, they each had different, and at times oppositional, stances on the role of the sermon and on the minister's relationship between audience and Scripture. Each minister built on Perkins's sermonic theory, generating

individual theories of the sermon that attempted to soften anxiety about the process of conveying biblical interpretations to listeners through the means of the sermon.

Encouraging true hearing was every plain stylist's aim, and the rhetoric of the plain style accommodated this. Cotton, Hooker, and Shepard each wrote sermons or pamphlets designed to instruct the layperson's hearing, but in order to provide the key to true hearing, experience, the sermon also needed to engage a full sensory knowledge. True hearing was the plain style's goal, but true hearing meant more than just hearing. In *The Soules Preparation* (1632), Hooker wrote that antagonists of the plain style opposed it "because thereby the eye of the soule comes to be opened."⁴⁰ The plain style, he argued, was more than mere sermon form. More than sounds. More than words. True hearing reached the heart and opened the eye of the soul. Despite the plain style's ostensible rejection of metaphor, Hooker's metaphor of the soul's eye represents the basic theory of the New England Puritan plain style. Metaphor, not plainness, became the sermon's means for opening the eyes of the soul.

Hooker, Shepard, and Cotton were not unaware of the ironies of their rhetorical solution to the problem of mediation. How can language, a medium by definition, become the remedy for mediation? The anxiety each minister experienced in realizing this contradiction led to different forms of compensation, explanation, and performance, all of which combined to form the sermonic and linguistic theories of each minister. Hooker demanded from godly ministers a deliberate use of every word so that meaning did not miscarry in the midst of communication, and figurative language was often his preferred tool for knitting meaning and form. Shepard articulated a sermonic theory in

which the act of listening for God's voice in the sermon became a full sensory experience, thus placing more emphasis on the layperson's testing of that experience than on language itself. And Cotton, the most prolific of the three, formed a middle ground, worrying about his own mediating presence but anxious that language would always be too imprecise, too much a part of mediation, to remedy mediation. Cotton addressed these anxieties, though, by equating language itself with Christ's incarnation.

Thomas Hooker worried that language was the obscuring agent in the pulpit. He advocated a plainness of speech in which word corresponded as closely as possible to the thing it represented. His *Application of Redemption* (1656) offers the clearest articulation of his ideal pulpit style. He writes:

The plainness of the Ministry appears, When the Language and Words are such as those of the meanest Capacity have some acquaintance with, and may be able to conceive; when the Preacher accommodates his Speech to the shallow understanding of the Simplest Hearer, so far as in him lies, always avoiding the frothy tinkling of quaint and far fetched Phrases, which take off, and blunt as it were the edge of the blessed Truth and Word of God.⁴¹

Hooker's assertion that the sermon's language should be directed towards the lowest common denominator suggests that language is always potentially unruly, spinning out into inaccessible and unintended meanings. But the real force of Hooker's argument is his worry that a "frothy tinkling" will impede Scripture's power. Hooker argues that a

minister who fills his sermons with sweetness tries too hard to “please the pallat” of the listener, overlooking the true health of the patient.

If the minister is a doctor for the soul, Hooker’s *Application* suggests that the minister is an instrumental and persuasive, not transparent, figure in the pulpit. Hooker claims this outright, writing that “the Minister must hew and square your hearts before they can be prepared for the Lord Jesus.”⁴² Therefore, Hooker stresses using the precisely right word so that the sermon will have particular and ultimate efficacy. In Puritan theology, although an individual could not actively choose salvation, he or she could prepare his or her heart to be worked upon by God, and the hearing of sermons was both an essential part of this preparation and a means through which God could act on the prepared heart. For Hooker, though, the minister’s words seem to be a prerequisite for preparation. If this is true, there is little room left in the pulpit for the Word of God to speak directly to the people.

But Hooker shifts the responsibility to the listener. In exhorting his audience to cultivate itself in preparation for the preached word, he writes: “when you hear the Word plainly and powerfully preached to you, labor that the Word may be so unto you as it is in it self.”⁴³ Hooker addresses his anxiety that he, like the Catholic priests, might be acting as mediator between God and man by removing himself from the equation. The individual works to hear the Word not as it is *preached*, but as it *is*. Regularly in his sermons, as he begins to interpret a biblical passage, Hooker uses the language of “opening the text.” This (theoretical) transparency is what Hooker references when he asks his audience to hear the Word “as it is in itself.” His sermonic philosophy intended

to render the minister transparent in the pulpit, yet he gave the preacher an essential and active role in the process of conversion.

Hooker's anxiety about his role as mediator was connected to his worry over the tendency of words to become unmoored from the things they represented and to his worry over a minister's tendency to manipulate words to serve his own base purpose. The "far fetched" phrase, that which does not adequately convey the minister's meaning, corrupts the listener's understanding not just because it sounds too pretty but because the word or phrase is too distant from the minister's meaning. Too close an attention to the "sugar" ruins the "potion" of the sermon's intended effect.⁴⁴ Yet this argument itself relies on metaphor. How does the clear metaphorical imagery of this passage not fall under the condemnation of frothy sugariness? Hooker would argue that the metaphor here, the Word of God as sword, "make[s] way for the efficacy of the Gospel" by clarifying rather than hindering meaning. In this passage, Hooker's primary concern is that biblical truths are not corrupted with sugary language, the very pleasure of which can undermine the medicinal work of the Spirit.

The Spirit's medicinal work, though, is knit to—and partially dependent on—the minister's words. Frothy tinklings impede the Spirit's work, but careful and plain words, Hooker argues, sharpen the edge of the Word. Hooker's plain style is an expression of the relationship between words and things, not a rejection of figurative language. In *Application*, after Hooker describes his plain style, he offers a definition of an anti-plain style, an unfaithful and deceptive use of words:

Plainness of Preaching, appears also in the matter that is spoken: when sin and sinners are set out in their native and natural colours, and carry their proper names, whereby they may be owned suitable to the loathsomeness that is in them [...]; A Spade is a Spade, and a Drunkard is a Drunkard, &c. and if he will have his Sins, he must and shall have Hell with them. Its Satans Policy (who painter or tyre-maker like, cozens all the world with colors) to smut and disfigure the beautiful ways of Godliness, and the glorious Graces of the Spirit, with the soot and dirt of reproaches, and base nick-names: Sincerity, he terms Singularity; Exactness, Puritanism and Hypocrisie; and so ignorant men (who judge the person by the picture) are brought out of love and liking with those blessed wayes.⁴⁵

Hooker defines plain preaching as using a thing's "proper name;" his plain style is a rhetorical commitment to ensuring that words honestly represent "natural colours" rather than paint a false picture. Painting a false picture is Satan's policy. In the passage above, Hooker lists words that Satan uses to paint God's good things as undesirable, and he goes on to list words Satan uses to represent sinful things (drunkenness, cowardliness) as desirable (fellowship, discretion). Satan's project is to obscure language's relationship to experience and to make the clergy his middlemen, so that the layperson has no access to divine truth.

Hooker is most troubled by ministers who become "the Divels Brokers" and refuse to call a spade a spade, instead making sin the punch line for sugary jokes: "Those secret wipes, and witty jerks, and nips at sin, at which the most prophane are pleased, but

not reformed; are utterly unsavory and unseeming in the Place, the Person, the Office, and the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts. What! A Minister a Jester! O fearful! to make the Pulpit a Stage, to play with sin.”⁴⁶ The Jester, for Hooker, speaks only in riddles, spinning the truth through language. The minister’s most important role is to speak truth, but to do so he must call a spade a spade. The devil’s broker might use figurative language to obscure truth, making language itself a joke, but the plain style, if nothing else, took language very seriously. If Satan’s goal is to unmoor language from experience, the minister’s is to connect the two—to offer his message in language that reflects and generates experience. Hooker does this, often, by recourse to figurative language, which posits the material world as a sign or shadow of the immaterial. His preaching was renowned for its liveliness, and his use of figurative language contributed to that reputation.⁴⁷ When used carefully, metaphor fosters immediacy and conveys empirical knowledge.

In *The Soules Preparation*, Hooker writes that “a speciall application of particular sinnes, is a cheife means to bring people to [...] a true sorrow for them.”⁴⁸ The sermon that strikes out generally will not hit any target, Hooker says. To make this argument Hooker employs a series of figurative comparisons:

A Master commands a servant to doe such a thing, and because he names him not; one thinks it is not hee, and another it is not hee [...] So when a Minister saith, *In many things we sinne all*, he hits no man, and so none are affected with it. But now particular application brings every mans part and portion, and not onely sets the dish afore him, but cuts his meate, and

carves for him. [...] The words of a faithfull Minister are like arrows, which if they be shot a cock height, they fall downe againe and doe nothing; but when a man levels at a mark, then, if ever, hee will hit it.⁴⁹

Masters and servants, meat and arrows. Hooker uses each of these figures to achieve the particularity he demands from the sermon—a particularity that gives each layperson the sense that the minister speaks directly to him or her—and metaphor is the vehicle of this particularity. The compounding of figure upon figure reinforces this particularity, each figure revealing a different element of Hooker’s argument. The master shouts an order, but no one responds: the minister’s responsibility is to particular application. The steward buys the meat, serves it, cuts it: particular application gives the listener not just an argument about sin, but a taste of his own sinfulness. The marksman aims, shoots, hits. And Hooker’s arrow pierces a listener’s heart.

Particular application alone, Hooker argues again and again, makes way for true hearing. Only when the minister says “This is thy drunkness, and thy adultery and prophaneness” can application touch the heart.⁵⁰ Hooker does not mean that a minister calls out individual names from the pulpit, but the general “thy” achieves particularity through metaphor; the particularity of language, and not just argument, pierces the heart. Hooker demonstrates this, again, through metaphor:

For the fashion that God useth in framing the heart is different; two men are *pricked*, the one with a pinne, the other with a speare: two men are cut, the one with a pen knife, the other with a sword: So the Lord deals kindly and gently with one soule, & roughly with another, and handles it

marvelous sharply, and breakes it all to pieces. There is the melting of a thing and the breaking of it with hammers.⁵¹

Through this particular application, Hooker argues, the word “sincks deepest into the heart,” and “the eye of the soule comes to be opened.”⁵²

For Hooker, metaphor was also a means of compensating for the mediation of the minister and sermon. If language itself could be made to place before a man his meat so near he could taste it, then the minister was simply a server and the sermon a serving platter. The hearer saw and tasted the meat for him or herself, hardly aware of the mediating influence of speaker and form. The many metaphors for the work of the sermon that Hooker marshals in *The Soules Preparation* highlight the agency of language over the agency of the minister. The Word, a sword, will wound a man when struck with a “full blow,” Hooker writes. But then: “I confesse it is beyond our power to awaken the heart, but ordinarily this way doth good.”⁵³ Ministers do not have power over their listeners’ hearts, but “this way”—the way of language—does have some agency.

Ultimately, Hooker answers his anxieties about mediation by conflating his interpretive voice with the voice of God. The metaphor, or particular application composed of language itself, effaces the minister’s mediating presence. He describes this in his sermon, *Wisdomes Attendants: or, the Voice of Christ to be obeyed* (1651). The sermon opens the text of Proverbs 8:32, “Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways.”⁵⁴ Hooker explains, in several steps, what it means to “harken,” the first of which is hearing with the ear, and this naturally leads Hooker into a discussion of preaching. He writes: “It is not onely the voice of man that

persuades you, and enjoyns you to give audience to the Lord Jesus, but God himself, and that from heaven, and that immediately from his own mouth.”⁵⁵ The sentence moves from minister and God joining voice together (“not onely”) to God’s voice speaking directly (“with his own mouth”) to gradually erase the minister’s presence and voice. In the end, this is where Hooker lands: although he claims for the minister a persuasive agency, he is only able to make the claim because God, and not the minister, is the actual speaker in the pulpit. And because the words themselves have power, like nails set fast upon the heart, Hooker need only prepare his own heart to be pierced by God.

If, for Hooker, metaphor achieved particularity, Thomas Shepard added to this the power of metaphor to awaken the mind to a full sensory experience of God. His 1652 sermon, *Of Ineffectual Hearing*, begins where we left Hooker: with an explication of what it means to hear God speak. Shepard opens his sermon with a reading of John 5:37, “Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.”⁵⁶ These two sensory experiences—hearing and seeing—form the foundations of religious knowledge.⁵⁷ True hearing, for Shepard, means true experiencing.

Shepard did not explicitly argue for the particular force of metaphor, though his sermons relied on the same need for and use of particularity that Hooker’s did. Shepard’s sermons worked like Hooker’s, effacing his own presence in the pulpit through language itself, despite his clear anxieties about language. And he, like Hooker, believed that God spoke with particularity. Reading John 5, Shepard argues that God speaks literally: “Some think they are metaphorical speeches, to express their ignorance of God,” Shepard writes of the seeing and hearing John describes. Yet he continues: “Now though this be

the scope, and the general truth, yet I conceive, the Lord speaking particularly, and knowing what he spake, intends something particularly: and it is a rule, never to flie to metaphors, where there can be a plain sense given.”⁵⁸ The hearing John references, Shepard argues, is quite literal. Shepard sees the Word of God as two-fold: one part is “Gods external or outward word, containing letters and syllables” and the other is “Gods internal word and voice, which secretly speaks to the heart.”⁵⁹ The plain sense, then, is that God’s voice is literal, real, material: words spoken, letters read. Never fly to metaphors.

But, of course, Shepard does. In distinguishing between effectual and ineffectual hearing, Shepard references the Gospel of Luke’s parable of the sower.⁶⁰ Because this is a scriptural, and not invented, metaphor, it avoids charges of flying away from the plain sense. But Shepard goes on to invent his own metaphor for the same situation: “When the Sun is down the Moon may arise, but yet a man is cold and dark; but then the Sun ariseth, oh it warmes [...] so it is here, when the Lord speaks inwardly and effectually to the heart.”⁶¹ This metaphor, compared to the abstraction of the preceding lines, “they may hear it inwardly, but never effectually,” attempts what Christ’s parables accomplish. After relating the parable of the sower, Christ’s disciples ask what he means by it, and he replies: “hearing they may not understand.”⁶² The work of understanding a metaphor in a sermon engages the heart, Shepard would argue, in a way that reason in the sermon cannot. The addition of Shepard’s sun metaphor reinforces this. In case the biblical metaphor, spoken from the mouth of the Word himself, does not generate effectual hearing, Shepard piles metaphor on top of metaphor.

The metaphor, the sermon suggests, is part of God's internal voice. It speaks to the heart. And it encourages the second experience that John 5 references: seeing God's shape. This, like hearing God's voice, works empirically to generate faith. The visual experience of God, Shepard says, refers to the mind "com[ing] to have a true Idea of God, as he reveals himself in the Word and Means by the Spirit."⁶³ Shepard compares gracious experience with sensory experience, and metaphor makes this comparison more than mere figure; Shepard argues, as Rogers did, that the experience of grace is sensory. Shepard's sun metaphor is full of the language of sensory experience—cold, dark, warm—and this, like Christ's parables, is meant to provide an understanding that mere hearing cannot.

Shepard's concern that his listeners might not "hear God speaking," is resolved by particular application that comes through a particularity of language itself—often in metaphors that provide a fuller sensory experience. Yet Shepard's anxiety rears itself again: though *Of Ineffectual Hearing* is directed towards the listener, it is not lost on Shepard that he, as a giver of sermons, is largely responsible for how the audience will receive his sermon. Shepard resolves this problem, a nagging sense that even his particular language is still just "a voice of words," by arguing for what he calls the "eternal efficacy" of the Word. Though Shepard may not see the immediate effects of his sermon's particular application, he has faith that the Word will transcend his words. He places responsibility on the hearer for using all available means to ensure that the Word "may come with efficacy."⁶⁴ Much of *Of Ineffectual Hearing* is given to expounding the tools for trying one's experience of hearing the sermon. "There is great need of trial,"

Shepard writes, “for a man may reade, hear and understand externally, whatever another may; and yet the whole Scripture a sealed book.”⁶⁵ External hearing does not necessarily actualize experience, and Shepard uses language to transmit sensory experience of the sermon’s content.

Shepard’s attempts to remove his anxieties about his role as mediator, though, end with a grave sense of his own responsibility: “something is to be done by Ministers; that is, to preach truth, and Gospel-truth, fetch’d from heaven with many prayers, and soaked with many tears.”⁶⁶ The minister must first have his own immediate, sensory experience of spiritual truth in order to provide his audience with the means to hear God’s voice and see his shape in the sermon. Shepard acknowledges the minister’s responsibility, but he places all hope of immediacy between God and congregation in the Word—Christ, the Bible, and language itself. The medium of language remedies the problems of mediation. Metaphor makes abstract spiritual truths accessible and material. Shepard, like Hooker, relieved his worry over his own role as mediator.

John Cotton understood himself as a medium. If Hooker and Shepard used the plain style to efface their own mediating presence, Cotton used it to ensure that his was guided by the Spirit. He writes of this in *A Practicall Commentary* (1656), a collection of sermons on 1 John, arguing that God “clears the Medium.” Divine testimony instills true knowledge in the heart, and as a result, God clears “the Word and Sacraments, Prayer & Christian Communion, so that whereas before we lookt at them, but as beggarly rudiments, of little power or worth, after God hath once enlightened us, we see the power and virtue of God therein, so plainly, as if we had been touched by the Sun beams.”⁶⁷ The

sermon, a medium like those Cotton lists here, is not erased, but in it the audience is able to see God clearly and plainly.

Cotton believed that assurance of faith was possible, while Hooker and Shepard always worried over the implications of such confidence. The core of Cotton's sermonic theory was his belief that he preached to two distinct audiences, the regenerate and the unregenerate, and those two audiences would hear and experience a sermon differently. While the sermon could provide for the elect an experimental knowledge of faith leading to assurance, the non-elect audience would not hear the sermon as it was. Hooker, Shepard, and many of their fellow clergymen believed that the sermon had an essential role in the preparation of hearts for justification and sanctification, but Cotton was not such a preparationist.⁶⁸ Teresa Toulouse argues that Cotton believed the elect could "conceivably read and hear the Word of God preached without 'vaile' or 'shadows,'" because their hearing had already been transformed.⁶⁹ Cotton's trust in his elect audience's hearing relieved some of the anxiety over mediation that Hooker and Shepard worked so hard to overcome.

But Cotton also addressed the problem of mediation through language, and the audience's experience of listening was structured as much by the words themselves as by the listener's election. As Ann Kibbey argues in *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism* (1986), "The more of a rhetorician Cotton becomes, the more invisible he becomes as an orator, for the more it all seems to come from the words themselves and from a deity who uses ministers the way he uses words, as a material vessel in the fallen world through which the order of things, words, and people is redeemed and given

expression.”⁷⁰ Language and Cotton as minister act as conduits for the Spirit, and while they become, in Kibbey’s assessment, invisible mediums, both are material. For Cotton, she argues, “[b]ecause the figures of acoustic design are inextricable from the material fact of speech, all language use is figurative in some way,” and Puritan preachers believed that “[e]ven literal meaning was dependent on the interplay of signifiers and the use of tropes.”⁷¹ Cotton sees all language as working figuratively in some sense.

Cotton writes in *A Practicall Commentary* that “Christ spake in parables, but after his ascension, the Spirit revealed things clearly.”⁷² Yet Cotton himself admitted the occasional obscurity of even post-ascension revelations in the Bible. Parables are sometimes still necessary, and Cotton’s sermons do make use of them. “Three things go to clear discerning,” Cotton writes, “the object must bee clear, the medium clear, and the eye clear, and then wee may discern; now the Holy Ghost plainly reveals the Counsell of God, and then opens our judgements to discern it, and then clears all the mediums, so that a Christian may plainly discern; so that the Spirit is a clear Instructor, no men need bee taught more clearly.”⁷³ Because he still needed to fulfill his ministerial duties, Cotton made the language of his sermons the conduit for Spirit’s instruction.

In *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Cotton Mather records a listener’s response to Cotton’s preaching: when he “preaches out of any Prophet or Apostle, I hear not him; I hear that very Prophet or Apostle; yea, I hear the Lord Jesus Christ himself speaking in my heart.”⁷⁴ No doubt Cotton Mather was attempting to paint a flattering picture of his grandfather, but John Cotton represented his own preaching in the same way. A sermon should be judged, he wrote, “not in excellency of words, but in evidence of the Spirit.”⁷⁵

But Cotton's words were excellent—famously so. Mather describes John Cotton's preaching: "When a Golden Key of Oratory should not so well open a Mystery of Christianity, he made not stick to take an Iron One, that should be less Rhetorical. [...] Nevertheless his more Judicious and Observing Hearers, could by his most Untrim'd Sermons perceive that he was a man of more than Ordinary Abilities."⁷⁶ Even his plainest, least rhetorical sermons were judged as great. By a "golden key," Mather means eloquence and ornamentation, and it is partially due to descriptions like this that the plain style has been misjudged as a rejection of figurative language. Cotton's Iron Key of Oratory, though Mather calls it "less Rhetorical," made use of metaphor just as Hooker and Shepard did. It seems "less Rhetorical" because, as Mather describes it, Cotton "had the *Art of concealing his art*" when preaching.⁷⁷

Cotton's act of concealing art leads to preaching that is a "scientificall Instruction about certain experimentall things"—clearing the medium for the Spirit's enlightenment.⁷⁸ Cotton discourses on sermonic language at length in *A Modest and Cleer Answer to Mr. Ball's Discourse of Set Forms of Prayer* (1642). Though Cotton's central argument is against set forms of prayer, or the reading of sermons, *A Modest and Cleer Answer* is also an articulation of his sermonic theory. Reading another man's sermon from the pulpit is sinful, Cotton argues, because it suggests the speaker values the words of men more than the things of God. Reading a sermon is not preaching, because God will not "blesse the heart with gracious affections, when the eyes go a whoring after the imaginations and inventions of men."⁷⁹ The "inventions of men" refers to linguistic and rhetorical inventions. Preaching and scriptural interpretation are, Cotton argues,

commanded by God, “but the phrase and method of Interpretation is of men.”⁸⁰ The words of a prayer or sermon are manmade, but Cotton is explicit that though invented, these words are inspired. They are not “such words as mans wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.”⁸¹

Cotton privileges the minister’s inspiration over the mere words of the sermon: in *A Modest and Cleer Answer* Cotton distinguishes preaching and the public reading of sermons. He objects to Mr. Ball’s argument that a minister may rightfully read a sermon before the congregation:

Though reading and pronouncing of a thing, be both of them adjuncts, and common adjuncts too, to that which is propounded and read, yet according to the ends and subjects, to which they may be applied, the one may be lawfull, the other not indifferent but sinfull, the reading of a Sermon for preaching, is a sinfull manner in preaching: The difference will ever hold between the word read, and preached.⁸²

Cotton is addressing the controversy over reading sermons; whether the minister reads another man’s sermon or reads his own carefully written sermon, he precludes the inspiration of the Spirit in the sermonic moment.⁸³ Although Cotton’s argument was not uncommon, his seriousness here (“not indifferent but sinfull”) reveals his own commitment to the indispensability of the minister’s private inspiration. The minister’s experimental knowledge was, for Cotton, essential to the construction of a sermon that communicated anything to the congregation. Cotton’s belief that the sermon did not actively, immediately convert its listeners and his belief that the layperson had individual

authority in biblical interpretation were part of this larger valuing of experimental knowledge and part of his acknowledgement that language—at times, even biblical language—was slippery.

Teresa Toulouse argues that, for Cotton, language could never quite “reach” the “mystery of a Deus Absconditus—the true Logos.”⁸⁴ Hooker and Shepard anxiously acknowledged that this was true of the sermon—God is indescribable—but Cotton extended this to describe the biblical text as well. For Cotton, Toulouse argues, the Bible is not reducible to its “mechanically extractable uses,” but is instead something to be searched for keys to the mystery that is God. Cotton relied on a host of hermeneutical tools in order to access these mysteries, but he was also willing to acknowledge that the Bible was at times dark and obscure. And unlike many of his fellow Puritans, Cotton located this darkness, not in the reader’s sinfulness, but in the text itself. Cotton’s sermonic ideal, whatever the degree of his use of various rhetorical or hermeneutical “helps,” was that the minister relied not on his own intellectual strength but on the Spirit.⁸⁵ The helps, or tools, provided a safeguard against misinterpretation, and true immediacy with God occurred through divine inspiration and the Spirit’s strength. Ideally, the Spirit would transform faith into experimental knowledge. The Spirit cleared the medium, making the sermon itself a space where experimental knowledge could occur.

Hooker and Shepard both used metaphors as a means of achieving a particularity that generated experimental knowledge, and Cotton explicitly advocated experimental knowledge as the foundation of true piety. But he, better than either Hooker or Shepard,

articulated the fraught relationship between faith, knowledge, and language. *A Practicall Commentary* opens with a reading of 1 John 1:1, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.”⁸⁶ Cotton reads 1 John as a divine argument for experimental faith, which is more certain because it is not merely demonstrated, but experienced. Cotton’s definition of experimental knowledge is different than Perkins’s; for Cotton, experimental knowledge carries with it a sense of the empirical.⁸⁷

Cotton’s main claim in *A Practicall Commentary* is that faith comes through experimental knowledge. Referencing 1 John 1:1, Cotton argues that seeing, hearing, and touching are all ways of accessing and knowing the Word of Life. For John, faith comes through metaphorical sensory experience of the divine. Cotton, though, distinguishes faith and knowledge through different kinds of sensory experience:

Faith comes by hearing, when we assent to any thing upon Divine testimony, as if God hath given us some word, we believe it, but if we see a thing by sense, or by experience, or by some certain Arguments of Gods dealing with us, that we do not now only believe it from Gods Word, but we plainly see it by experience in our hearts from some love of God.⁸⁸

The faith that comes through hearing God’s word is transformed into certain knowledge by experience, Cotton suggests. Though faith and knowledge work similarly because they are “both acts of the judgement, for both are *Scientia axiomatic certi*, the knowledge of a certain truth,” there is a difference.⁸⁹

Cotton argues that “Faith is a perswasion or trust a man takes up upon the credit of Divine testimony” but “we know and believe, and we know that we know, which is an *Actu judeii*, and more than opinion, or faith; Knowledge is such an acknowledgement as ariseth *Ex principis scientificis*, such as proceeds from certain Principles.”⁹⁰ For Cotton, faith comes first: divine testimony initiates faith, a trust, and then experience breeds certain knowledge and assurance of faith. If faith and knowledge work economically, then knowledge, or scientific demonstration is the “gold standard,” and faith is “credit.” A man takes up faith, Cotton writes, “upon the credit” of God’s Word, but knowledge means a man sees and knows that he knows, and knowledge comes from empirical experience.

But at times Cotton defines faith in a more expected way: “Faith which is wrought in us by the work of the Holy Ghost [...] is greater, and more certain, than any science gotten by demonstration.”⁹¹ Here faith seems to be the gold standard. While this illuminates the central tension in Cotton’s work—faith versus knowledge—this passage also defines faith as certainty arrived at through empirical experience. And it defines “science gotten by demonstration,” like faith through hearing, as information taken upon the credit of someone (or thing) else; here faith is demonstrated, not experienced. True knowledge and true faith, Cotton argues, require experience, and that experience is formed on “sure grounds” of empirical reason, not just a rational assent to a reasonable argument.

The sermon is a space where seeing, hearing, and touching the Word of Life occur, where one can transform faith taken upon credit into experienced and certain

knowledge, or assurance of grace. This is one of the central doctrines of *A Practicall Commentary*, and referencing 1 John, Cotton asks why Christ is called the Word of God: “here is a metaphor, and every metaphor is a short similitude, and it must not be expected that any similitude should agree in all points.”⁹² The metaphor, as a medium, strives to represent something, but it will always be limited. Yet this is one medium Cotton does not attempt to clear: Christ as Word is metaphorical, Cotton, argues, but not simply so.

His further explication of Christ as Word sheds light on how he understands the metaphor of the logos and how he imagines the sermon to be efficacious though limited. Christ is the Word of God in four respects, Cotton says: “hee is the wisdome, image, and interpreter, and promise of the Father.” In describing the first, wisdom, Cotton writes that the Word is “not any accident to [the Father], but of the same nature.” Second, the word is the image of God, or of the same character. The Word is interpreter because it declares God’s will and meaning, and last, the Word is the promise because “hee it was of whom the Lord spake from the beginning.”⁹³ In each case, Cotton sutures vehicle to tenor; Christ is a metaphorical manifestation of God, but he is of the same nature as God. Metaphor, then, does not necessarily imply an invented figuration. Metaphor is the particular manifestation of the universal. Though Cotton writes that God is love “without a Trope,” because love itself and not just having the quality of love, his reading of 1 John suggests that God does, in some sense, need tropes.⁹⁴ Christ as Word is a metaphor, and Christ himself stands in relationship to God as a figurative image stands to the moral truth it represents. Christ is trope.

In the end, Cotton, Shepard, and Hooker allowed themselves some hope in language. Because they must: faith comes through hearing, they all remind us. But beyond this, the irony that the medium of language serves as a remedy for mediation is a divine irony. It is *the* paradox of the Christian faith: God becomes flesh, encasing himself in the material in order to redeem the material. Language, as medium, clears the medium. The gilt frame from Boyle's mirror-as-sermon would only serve to highlight the medium. The plain style, though, fully embraces the purpose of the mirror. It does not require ornamentation, because the process of reflection is itself full of images, figures, and meaning.

Notes

¹ Benjamin Franklin, "To the Abbe Morellet" *The Complete Works of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. John Bigelow (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1888), 276.

² The occasional meditation was a seventeenth-century commonplace in both England and the American colonies. See, for example, Joseph Hall, "Upon the Sight of a Man Yawning," *Occasional Meditations by Ios* (London, 1630): "It is a marvelous thing to see the real effects and strong operation of consent or sympathy, even where there is no bodily touch. So one man puts the whole company into dumps; so one man's yawning affects and stretches the jaws of many beholders; so the looking upon bleary eyes taints the eye with bleariness. From hence it is easy to see the ground of our Saviour's expostulation with his persecutor: 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' [Acts 26:14]. The Church is persecuted below; He feels it above and complains. So much as the person is more apprehensive must he needs be more affected. O Saviour, Thou canst not but be deeply sensible of all our miseries and necessities. If we do not feel Thy wrongs and the wants of our brethren, we have no part in Thee" (286-7). Hall's meditations are more biblical in nature than Boyle's, but the same epistemological mechanism is at work. Early American poets like Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor also practiced occasional meditations and adapted them to more strictly literary forms.

³ Robert Boyle, *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects* (London, 1665), 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37, 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 252, 254.

⁶ Thomas Shepard, *Subjection to Christ in all his Ordinances, and Appointments, the Best Means to Preserve our Liberty. Together with a Treatise of Ineffectual Hearing the Word* (London, 1652), 160-1. Hereafter referred to as *Of Ineffectual Hearing*.

⁷ It is worth saying that the empiricism fostered by plain style metaphor is not exactly like the experiment of the new science. Certainly, Bacon or Boyle would not have seen the experience produced by the plain style as reproducible in a purely scientific sense. My purpose here, though, is to suggest that the ministers using the plain style were incorporating the language of the new science to their own religious ends.

⁸ The phrase "plain style" is a misnomer. Scholars of the English plain stylists have long noted that plain style texts demonstrate a purposeful use of figurative language and rhetorical ornamentation that these same texts directly criticize. The standard response to this seeming incongruity is that the plain stylists did not actually reject rhetoric wholesale; instead they attacked the misuse or abuse of rhetoric. This seems to me a useful way of understanding the incongruity between the polemic and the practice of the plain style. See, for example, Brian Vickers and Nancy S. Struever, *Rhetoric and the Pursuit of Truth: Language Change in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1985).

⁹ For work on the New England plain style see Toulouse, *The Art of Preaching*; Babette May Levy, *Preaching in the First Half Century of New England History* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1945); Jesper Rosenmeir, "Clearing the Medium: A Reevaluation of the Puritan Plain Style in Light of John Cotton's A Practicall Commentary upon the First Epistle Generall of John," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37.4 (1980); Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Introduction; Tamara Harvey, *Figuring Modesty in Feminist Discourse across the Americas, 1633-1700: Women and*

Gender in the Early Modern World (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008); and Elisa New, "Variety as Religious Experience: The Poetics of the Plain Style," *Religion and Literature*, 38.1 (2006).

¹⁰ Boyle, *Occasional Reflections*, 260-1.

¹¹ In both old and New England, there was a clear demarcation between the plain stylists and the enthusiasts. Any too visibly or audibly excited minister or layperson would easily have been labeled an enthusiast. The Royal Society and the Church of England often identified anyone who shared the theological views of the New England Puritans as enthusiasts. The New England Puritans, in turn, labeled anyone an enthusiast who claimed a divine inspiration that was not located in the Bible and in orthodox ways of accessing the Bible's meaning. The Quakers were a particular target, and I will treat them extensively in the next chapter.

¹² Steven Shapin and Simon Schaeffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 61.

¹³ In this, the plain style sermon adhered to the Royal Society's motto: nullius in verba, or "take nobody's word for it."

¹⁴ William Perkins, *A Declaration of the True Manner of Knowing Christ Crucified* (London, 1596), 12-3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, i.

¹⁶ Perkins was also influential in the development of the conversion narrative. See Perkins, *A Golden Chaine* (London, 1592) for his important morphology of conversion and theory of soteriology. See Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (London, 1619) as an example of that theology applied in self-examination. For more on Puritan soteriology and casuistry, see D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially chap. 1 on the origins of the conversion narrative.

¹⁷ Though there were several influential preaching manuals, William Perkins's was the most referenced for at least a century after its publication, and it was the manual the New England Puritans relied on most heavily. For other important examples of early theorizations of Reformed preaching see William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (London, 1623) and Richard Bernard, *The Faithful Shepherd* (London, 1607). Ames was, in fact, a student of Perkins' at Cambridge, and, unlike Perkins, Bernard treats the minister's role beyond the pulpit. For a provocative discussion of Bernard's centrality to New England Puritanism see Gordis, *Opening Scripture*, 17-33.

¹⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, *Ecclesiastes: sive de ratione concionandi libri quatuor* (Basle: Forben, 1535).

¹⁹ In his Greek and Latin translation of the New Testament, Erasmus replaced the latin "verbum" with "sermo" in John 1:1, substituting the connotations of active speech for the sign of "word." Christ becomes the utterance, closer to the "logos" of the Greek, which highlights Christ's presence in the minister's spoken words. For more on Erasmus's translation of John 1:1 see Susan Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 74.

²⁰ For a sustained treatment of the Perkinsonian contradiction between art and prophecy see Toulouse, *The Art of Prophesying*.

²¹ William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecying, or, A treatise Concerning the Sacred and onely True Manner and Methode of Preaching* (London, 1592), 135.

²² Ibid, 132.

²³ Ibid, 143.

²⁴ Toulouse, *The Art of Propheying*, 281.

²⁵ Ibid, 282.

²⁶ Ibid, 292.

²⁷ Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 31.

²⁸ Gordis, *Opening Scripture*, 2-3.

²⁹ Ibid, 3.

³⁰ Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 133. Perkins never resolves this contradiction, but some other preaching manual writers were less explicit about this incongruity and subtly tried to harmonize the minister's human agency in his private study with his erasure of agency in the pulpit. Richard Bernard's preaching manual uses the more passive "observe," in place of Perkins's active "handled," when describing particular rhetorical characteristics of the biblical text that require interpretation. For Bernard, the minister's interpretation is similar to the scientist's observation of an experiment. The interpretation is not something the minister makes, just as the scientist does not make the facts that arise from the experiment; both simply observe them. See *The Faithful Shepard* (London, 1607).

³¹ As the next chapter will demonstrate, those heretics proposed alternative models for the relationship between rhetoric and experience, but they were precisely the subjects the plain style meant to control and silence.

³² Boyle, *Occasional Reflections*, 168.

³³ Ibid, 170.

³⁴ Ibid, 26.

³⁵ Michael Hunter, *Robert Boyle Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51.

³⁶ The Fifth Monarchists were a nonconformist group in England during the Interregnum and believed that Christ would return to earth and establish his millennial reign as an earthly kingdom. They took their name from Daniel 2:44, in which King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of five historical kingdoms, the last of which will be Christ's reign. Despite this rather extreme view, the Fifth Monarchists, and John Rogers in particular, shared many of the New England Puritans' theological fundamentals, especially their view of conversion. There are important distinctions, though. The Fifth Monarchists, because of their millennial views, believed conversion to be final, unlike many Congregationalists who saw conversion as an important, but early step in a constant circle of assurance and anxiety. See more on this and on Roger's collection of conversion narratives in Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

³⁷ John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh. A Tabernacle for the Sun* (London, 1653), 354.

³⁸ Ibid, 5.

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- ³⁹ Ibid, 357.
- ⁴⁰ Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ being a Treatise of Contrition* (London, 1632), 64.
- ⁴¹ Thomas Hooker, *Application of Redemption by the Effectual Work of the Word, and Spirit of Christ* (London, 1656), 206.
- ⁴² Ibid, 221.
- ⁴³ Ibid, 220.
- ⁴⁴ Hooker, *Application of Redemption*, 206.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, 210-11.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, 211.
- ⁴⁷ Cotton Mather notes Hooker's popularity in *Magnalia Christi Americana*, I.345. See also Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power*, 63-65 for a different take on Hooker's career. She revises Mather's depiction by examining Hooker's early English career and his difficulty finding a pulpit.
- ⁴⁸ Hooker, *The Soules Preparation*, 61.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, 62-3.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, 63-4.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, 177.
- ⁵² Ibid, 68.
- ⁵³ Ibid, 64.
- ⁵⁴ The Bible. King James Version. Here after referred to as KJV.
- ⁵⁵ Hooker, *The Soules Preparation*, 127.
- ⁵⁶ KJV.
- ⁵⁷ KJV.
- ⁵⁸ Shepard, *Of Ineffectual Hearing*, 155.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid, 157.
- ⁶⁰ The parable of the sower is about various manners of receiving or rejecting the Word. Christ relates a story of a sower planting seed on several kinds of ground, stony, etc. See Luke 8:4-15.
- ⁶¹ Shepard, *Of Ineffectual Hearing*, 158-9.
- ⁶² Luke 8:15, KJV.

⁶³ Ibid, 155.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 188.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 166.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 187.

⁶⁷ Cotton, *A Practicall Commentary*, 371-2.

⁶⁸ In *Eloquence is Power*, Gustafson argues for a similar distinction between Hooker and Cotton concerning the role of the sermon: “Cotton’s more analytic, text-oriented sermons insisted on the preacher’s ultimate persuasive impotence. Hooker granted the pulpit orator greater authority with his congregation and greater control over Scripture” (23). Teresa Toulouse has noted that Cotton’s sermons did not make application of the doctrine—the Perkinsonian “uses”—as frequently or as strongly as did many New England divines, including Hooker. *The Art of Propheying*, 42.

⁶⁹ Toulouse, *The Art of Propheying*, 287.

⁷⁰ Kibbey, *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism*, 23.

⁷¹ Ibid, 9, 11.

⁷² Cotton, *A Practicall Commentary*, 196.

⁷³ Ibid, 196.

⁷⁴ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana, or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England, from its First Planting in the Year 1620. Unto the Year of our Lord, 1698*. (London, 1702), III. 25-6. Mather reports this as having been said by Mr. Wilson.

⁷⁵ Cotton, *A Practicall Commentary* 15.

⁷⁶ Mather, *Magnalia*, III. 25.

⁷⁷ Mather reports that a rhetorical shift occurred after Cotton’s conversion, which radically altered his preaching philosophy. Mather writes that, before his conversion, Cotton “relished the Wisdom of Words above the Words of Wisdom”; in his days at Emmanuel College, Cotton was considered a master of oratory, and his sermons were very well attended. After his conversion, however, Cotton “considered that it was his Duty to preach with such a Plainness, as became the Oracles or God.” *Magnalia*, III. 16. For more on these shifts in Cotton’s preaching style see Rosenmeier, “Clearing the Medium,” 578.

⁷⁸ Cotton, *A Practicall Commentary*, 196.

⁷⁹ John Cotton, *A Modest and Cleer Answer to Mr. Ball’s Discourse of Set Forms of Prayer*, (London, 1642), 7.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 12.

⁸¹ Ibid, 13.

⁸² Ibid, 78.

⁸³ The practice of fully writing out sermons before delivering them was particularly condemned in New England. The minister was often instructed to take notes for his sermon, like one would in a commonplace book. Because of this practice, memory played an important role in the sermon's translation from study to pulpit. It would be inappropriate, according to Perkins and others, for the minister to memorize his sermon by using "artificial memory." In *The Arte of Prophecyng* Perkins defines this as memory "which standeth upon places and images" and "will very easily without labour teach how to commit sermons to the memorie: but this is not to be approved" (130). "The animation of the image," Perkins continues, "which is the key of memory, is impious; because it requireth absurd, insolent and prodigious cogitations, and those especially, which set an edge upon and kindle the most corrupt affections of the flesh" (130). Perkins, instead, recommends that the minister memorize his sermon using syllogistic methods.

⁸⁴ Toulouse, *The Art of Propheying*, 42.

⁸⁵ Cotton embraced the use of heremeneutical tools, or what he called "artificiall" helps, arguing that the arts were a God-given tool for study and that the minister had a biblical mandate to studiously apply himself to the Word. In *A Modest and Cleer Answer* Cotton distinguishes between "naturall" or "artificiall" tools and "arbitrary" tools. The arbitrary "helps," he argues are of man's invention and are forbidden by God in the second commandment, which Cotton argues does not only condemn material graven images but "all spiritual Images also." These arbitrary helps do not include those natural and artificial tools such as "Tongues and Arts" that aid in understanding, nor the helps for worship that "help the natural sense" like "Scaffolds be to mens hearing;" Cotton encourages the use of these natural and artificial tools. (33) Cotton's acceptance of such tools, and the need for them, suggests a different understanding of the mediating quality of language than those of Hooker and Shepard.

⁸⁶ KJV.

⁸⁷ Jesper Rosenmeier argues in "Clearing the Medium," that Cotton came to believe that God "made a believer know that he had been saved, [and] He did so according to principles that could be 'scientifically' studied" (583).

⁸⁸ Cotton, *A Practicall Commentary*, 71.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 314.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 59.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 17.

⁹² *Ibid*, 8.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 8-9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 317.

Chapter 2

Monstrous Words: Anne Hutchinson, the Quakers, and Heretical Speech

I. Miscarried Theologies

In 1638 Anne Hutchinson's sixteenth pregnancy miscarried, producing half a dozen or so monstrous creatures all "at once; some of them bigger, some lesser, some of one shape, some of another, few of any perfect shape, none at all of them [...] of humane shape."¹ Several months earlier Hutchinson was tried and imprisoned as an Antinomian, and just a month before her trial she had helped another Antinomian woman, Mary Dyer, through her own miscarriage. Then governor, John Winthrop, describes the product of Dyer's birth as such:

it had a face, but no head, and the ears stood upon the shoulders and were like an ape's; it had no forehead, but over the eyes four horns, hard and sharp; [...] behind, between the shoulders, it had two mouths, and in each of them a piece of red flesh sticking out; it had arms and legs as other children; but, instead of toes, it had on each foot three claws, like a young fowl, with sharp talons.²

For the ministers and magistrates, these monstrous births were material evidence of theological error and spiritual failure—hence Winthrop's rendering of a conventional, if tiny, devil and Thomas Weld's refusal to see any "humane shape" among Hutchinson's progeny. Weld makes explicit the correlation between monstrous births and monstrous ideas: "Then God himself was pleased to step in with his casting voice [...] by testifying his displeasure against their opinions and practices, as clearly as if he had pointed with

his finger, in causing the two fomenting women, in the time of the height of the opinions, to produce out of their wombs, as before they had out of their brains, such monstrous births.”³ To the ministers and magistrates, Hutchinson’s and Dyer’s miscarriages were easily legible signs of error, demonstrating an epistemology characteristic of mid-seventeenth-century New English Puritanism. That is, material and physical realities were visible signs of invisible truths: the Pequot War was a sign of providential displeasure, conversion narratives verbalized unseen spiritual realities, and the world and the self were searched for tangible evidence of grace.

The first chapter argues that the sermonic plain style was an attempt to hold on to this epistemology, to make language a link between the visible and the invisible. But at the core of the heretical claims that led to Hutchinson’s trial and banishment was an assertion that the invisible world was immediately accessible without the need for a system of visible signs.⁴ The ministers, Hutchinson believed, were vulnerable to biblical misinterpretation and ineffective preaching, suggesting that their rhetoric, sermonic style, and hermeneutics shielded the fact that language somehow failed to participate in an epistemology that posited the visible as a direct sign of the invisible. Hutchinson pursued a religious experience that removed (or at least compensated for) the third terms of the sermon and the minister. She claimed to receive immediate revelations from God and therefore, to eliminate the epistemological uncertainties of divine knowledge by asserting an immediacy that precluded any possibility of miscarriage—between the Bible and its reader, between the sermon and its hearer, and between God and the individual.

Hutchinson believed that relying on Christ's voice in immediate revelation (transcending the biblical text) would render interpretive miscarriages unlikely. The distinction between the Bible and Christ as Word was a defining characteristic of seventeenth-century Quakerism as well, to which Mary Dyer converted after being banished from Massachusetts following her monstrous birth. In her 1659 *For Those that Meet to Worship at the Steeplehouse*, Quaker Rebecca Travers succinctly captures the position of her fellow Quakers and of Hutchinson: Travers reprimands those who had "turned the invisible God into the similitude or likeness of visible things" and "let Ink and Paper in his place, calling it by his Name."⁵ Hutchinson may not have drawn an explicit opposition between the Bible and Christ, but her embrace of immediate revelation did assume that Christ's voice was not limited to "ink and paper." At stake for Hutchinson, Dyer, and Travers was a central contrast between letter and spirit. Travers takes her cue from 2 Corinthians 3:6—"for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life"—in order to oppose what she saw as the natural text of Scripture to the spiritual force of Christ. The prophetic speech of Hutchinson, Dyer, and Travers exposed the orthodoxy as relying on the Bible as a third term, a mediating object obscuring direct divine experience.

Hutchinson and the Quakers sought to bridge the gap between text and experience they saw in the Puritan orthodoxy by making language reflective and generative of spiritual experience. But New England authorities targeted Quaker and Antinomian speech, in particular, as certain evidence of spiritual error. Hutchinson's prophetic speech in her court trial, the contagious quality of Antinomian speech, the strangeness of the

Quaker “thou,” and the Quaker silent meeting all received criticism as sites of enthusiasm and unrestrained speech. The orthodoxy described this speech as heretical in stark opposition to their own ordered rhetoric. The plain style stood as a corrective for the kind of enthusiastic experience the orthodoxy assumed was occurring in the Quaker meeting, where there was no minister and no official sermon, as well as in the prophetic speech issuing from Hutchinson’s immediate revelations.

Puritan ministers emphasized the text over experience, Hutchinson and the Quakers believed, but Hutchinson and the Quakers sought to give the letter spiritual life by bringing it closer to experience. This chapter looks at the “heretical” responses to the same questions posed in the first chapter, which examined the Puritan orthodoxy’s positions on the relationship between language and religious experience. I ask how Hutchinson and the Quakers, some of the most fiercely targeted heretics in mid-seventeenth-century New England, posed an alternative theology that mapped itself out in and against a rhetorical rubric for accessing, understanding, and communicating religious experience—particularly the experience of hearing Christ speak directly to the soul. Hutchinson’s immediate revelations and prophetic speech offered an alternative model of religious experience that insisted on unmediated access to God, but the Quakers thoroughly embraced immediate revelation and systematized the relationship between revelation and public speech. They performed the same type of prophetic speech Hutchinson did—speech arising from an unmediated experience of God’s voice—but they organized their doctrine and public meetings around this practice.

Both Hutchinson and the Quakers went against the grain of Puritan orthodoxy by claiming access to divine revelation; for Hutchinson this was immediate revelation, and for the Quakers it was the inner light. Though immediate revelations and the inner light had importantly different theological implications, they shared a sense of proximity to God that transcended or superseded orthodox Biblical revelation, thus ostensibly rendering meaning transparent. In this Hutchinson and the Quakers acknowledged that the Bible, as written text, was liable to all kinds of miscarriage; language was always potentially confused and confusing, and they sought ways to make divine truth more accessible, communicable, and understandable by modeling alternative relationships between religious experience and language. Rather than attempting to impose order on experience rhetorically, as the plain style did, Hutchinson and the Quakers imagined language arising from religious experience. Bridging the gap between text and experience that they saw in the orthodoxy, Hutchinson and the Quakers sought a theology without any third terms—without miscarriage.

II. Speech without Miscarriage: Hutchinson's Prophetic Speech

Anne Hutchinson was taken to civil trial at the Boston General Court in November, 1637, officially banished from Massachusetts colony and held prisoner in a Roxbury home for some months (while Thomas Shepard worked to convince her of her errors), and then given a church trial in March of 1638, before finally leaving Massachusetts. Hutchinson's accusers found much threatening in her immediate revelation and attending unorthodox hermeneutic, but they also found easy evidence of

heresy in the form of her speech.⁶ Winthrop described Hutchinson's language as he did her womb: as the source of unrecognizable, prolific, and uncontrolled monstrosity. He and Weld saw Dyer's and Hutchinson's monstrous births as clear providential signs of punishment, and Winthrop characterized Hutchinson's language as the clear agent of the controversy and of her own fate.

Winthrop's account of Hutchinson's trial and the Antinomian Controversy, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians* (1644), opens with a catalogue of the erroneous and false opinions that Hutchinson and the other Antinomians held.⁷ Thomas Weld is the author of this list, and among the twenty-nine errors he lists, language and its uses appear in several. The first error, "That the Law, and the Preaching of it is no use at all, to drive a man to Christ," exposes a ministerial fear that Hutchinson invalidated their spiritual and earthly purpose by questioning the salvific role of preaching and of the Bible itself.⁸ What is more, Hutchinson undermined the value of words, not just *the* Word, by using her language to seduce and manipulate. Winthrop maintained that Antinomian speech, not just Antinomian ideas, seduced away members of the church: "with much faire speech they caused them to yeeld, with the flattering of their lips they forced them."⁹ Her speech was cunning, Winthrop insinuates, but it was also a legible sign of error:

for here she hath manifested, that her opinions and practise have been the cause of al our disturbances, & that she walked by such a rule as cannot stand with the peace of any State; for such bottomless revelations, as either came without any word, or without the sense of the word, (which

was framed to humane capacity) [...] for they being above reason and Scripture, they are not subject to control.¹⁰

The “here” Winthrop mentions is Hutchinson’s admission, on the second day of her two-day trial before the General Court of Boston, that God would deliver her from the “calamity” of the trial by a miracle, and that she knew this by way of immediate revelation. The controversy is condensed into Winthrop’s above sentence: Hutchinson’s Antinomian opinions are the source of civil unrest, but in this passage Winthrop does not focus on matters of justification and sanctification or the covenants of works and grace (some of the major theological issues at stake). Instead, he concentrates on the Word and its proper uses, thereby positing a relationship between Hutchinson’s unruly tongue and her disorderly relationship to Scripture. In Winthrop’s assessment, Hutchinson’s abuse of language made her dangerous, but it was also the error that led to her banishment: her “owne mouth should deliver her into the power of the Court,” Winthrop wrote. Winthrop believed he had caught her in a trap of her own making when she admitted to immediate revelation, and he read her prophetic speech as direct evidence of her reliance on immediate revelation, because it came without any “sense of the word,” meaning it was fully unmoored from the doctrine of sola scriptura. Hutchinson did rely on the Bible as a source of spiritual truth, but she exposed Winthrop and her ministers as substituting the Bible—either the word or the sense of it—for immediate religious experience. She claimed they put ink and paper in God’s place.

Hutchinson’s unruly tongue has received much critical attention, though scholars often focus on issues of gender when discussing her speech. Jane Kamensky argues that

Hutchinson's dissenting voice "offered New England leaders a chance to define their own voices as the speech of authority by classifying the words of disorderly women as the archetype of social danger."¹¹ Although Hutchinson's "feminine" speech certainly was threatening, focusing solely on gender obscures the criticism she leveled at her ministers' use of language. In her "unruly" speech she claimed interpretive agency and exposed her ministers' biblical interpretations as faulty. As Lisa Gordis has argued, Hutchinson "highlighted the interpretive crisis and the ways in which it was shaped by Puritan theories of reading, preaching, and interpretation. Most dramatically, Hutchinson's claims about immediate revelation exposed the potential dangers of Puritan theories of exegesis."¹² Hutchinson challenges the very basis of Puritan epistemological systems, but she does so, first and foremost, by criticizing her leaders' conception of language and positing an alternative way of understanding the relationship between word and thing.

Patricia Caldwell, in her 1976 "The Antinomian Language Controversy," was the first to call sustained attention to the linguistic theories at play in the Antinomian Controversy. She argues that, on one level, Hutchinson was "speaking a different language" than her adversaries.¹³ She does not mean, simply, that Hutchinson was making heterodox theological claims, though Caldwell assumes this; instead she means that Hutchinson saw language as "imprecise and uninformed before grace and [was] swept away in a tidal wave of spirit after grace."¹⁴ Hutchinson, according to Caldwell, believed that words could not "fill their basic denotative function" and that words were not a "part of what one is."¹⁵ Although I agree with Caldwell that the Antinomian Controversy, and Hutchinson's trial in particular, represents a controversy over language,

not just theology, she misreads Hutchinson's distrust of language.¹⁶ Rather than thinking of language as incapable of truly representing one's heart and mind, Hutchinson argued that her ministers misused and abused language, severing the word's relationship to thing. Hutchinson herself, though, used her prophetic speech as a means of overcoming the linguistic failure she saw in her leaders. In this sense, her language was caught up "in a tidal wave of spirit"—not deposed by the Spirit, but a part of it—but Hutchinson did not argue that language was swept away by or in spirit.

Tamara Harvey has most directly responded to Caldwell's argument, pointing out that "*all* Puritans were suspicious of human language and interpretations."¹⁷ For Harvey, the difference between Hutchinson and "all" Puritans was in how each "conceptualized language's performative actions."¹⁸ In opposition to the rejection of language that Caldwell identified in Hutchinson, Harvey argues that "[f]or Hutchinson, bodies and the Word are not stable signs that signify God's will but rather are conduits for the Holy Spirit, witnessing to God's will functionally."¹⁹ Harvey emphasizes the "functionally" here, arguing that Hutchinson's performative body was a "third term" in her testimony. She "recognizes the limits placed on her body," Harvey writes, "but challenges the accepted relationship between body and soul and in doing so, redefines 'power' such that her body is no longer a manipulated object within a symbolic hierarchy, but rather a transitory vessel serving as a conduit for the Holy Spirit."²⁰ Against Caldwell, then, Harvey argues that Hutchinson imagined an alternative relationship between material (word, body) and immaterial (signified, soul) that reclaimed language from the abusive hands of her ministers. And in Harvey's assessment, as in my own, Hutchinson espouses

a view in which the material is overcome by the spiritual; language is remade as spiritual power and the body as spiritual vessel.

I argue that, though in many respects they contradict one another, both Harvey and Caldwell are right. Although, as Harvey argues, Hutchinson attempted to reclaim language and her body as vessels of the Spirit, she ultimately failed, as Caldwell helps us realize. Hutchinson failed because her attempts to reclaim language ended in a repudiation of the very epistemological link between seen and unseen that Puritanism posited and in which Hutchinson sought a more consistent role for language. Hutchinson's trial, then, uncovers a shift in her conception of language. Although she tried to reclaim her ministers' epistemology from what she saw as errors in their use of language, she failed. In her speech to the court she left behind the literal, physical text of the Bible and she denied her body's physicality. She was made over, and made the text over, in the image of the Spirit, but with that renovation she lost control over her material existence and was banished from the colony.

Throughout the first half of her trial, Anne Hutchinson seems a confident, careful, and smart speaker: she overturns the faulty arguments of her accusers, uses the law to her advantage, and employs scriptural references to support her arguments and defeat those of her accusers. She is decidedly in control of her language, and understands its potential to persuade; she does not assume a voice that is purely prophetic. Eventually, though, this control over her own voice fails to spare her from punishment when she admits to immediate revelations, and as we have seen, delivers herself into the hands of the court by "her owne mouth." Because of this Hutchinson's admission is often read as surrender:

Hutchinson simply gives up, gets too weak, or sees no way around her fate.²¹ While we now understand, especially in the wake of Janice Knight's *Orthodoxies of Massachusetts*, that the Antinomian theological "errors" were not inherently unorthodox, but merely vying for the upper hand in a theological, social, and political battle of ideas, we still imagine Hutchinson as an unruly speaker.²² Certainly, she loosened her voice from the social strictures of her moment and upset convention, but her performance in her court trial is disciplined, at least initially. It is precisely in the speech in which she admits immediate revelation—often read as unruly—that she becomes most verbally disciplined, because she relies on a disciplined hermeneutic of reading Christ's voice and understands her own voice as disciplined by God. Hutchinson must submit herself to God's voice; she must die to the flesh to become a vessel for the Spirit's voice. But ultimately language spins out of control. It is not the case that Hutchinson's voice is unruly; instead, language itself is severed from things. Language has no material ground in Hutchinson's attempts to make her body and voice pure spiritual vessels.

If, as I will argue later, the Quakers rejected an orthodox hermeneutic for immediate revelations accessed through the inner light, Hutchinson does not transgress quite so far; she never denies the literalism of the Bible, and she unequivocally states that she derives all her theological opinions directly from Scripture. When asked to provide scriptural support for holding meetings in her home to instruct other women, Hutchinson quickly offers one: "I conceive there lyes a clear rule in Titus, that the elder women should instruct the younger."²³ After some debate about whether it is lawful for Hutchinson to instruct any men that come to her, Hutchinson asks the court to "set me

down a rule by which I may put them [men] away,” and Winthrop responds that it is not the court’s job, but hers: “You must shew your rule to receive them.”²⁴ Hutchinson reminds them that she had previously brought scriptural rules as support, but then Winthrop changes the burden of proof by arguing that her meetings are “greatly prejudicial to the state” and completely abandons the scriptural line of argument.²⁵ The ministers and magistrates do not, in the court trial, respond to Hutchinson’s miscarried interpretation with substantial debate about the meaning of her scriptural references or offer her religious guidance; instead they abandon their arguments. In the face of Hutchinson’s careful and quick speech, the ministers and magistrates are silent.

Although she uses the proper hermeneutical tools, Hutchinson’s interpretation miscarries into a monstrous claim about divine revelation. Hutchinson follows the exegetical guidelines handed down to her from her ministers but still derives an unorthodox reading, thus threatening to undermine the hermeneutical system of New England Puritanism by implying that if the sermon and biblical hermeneutics were to correspond to the ministers’ epistemological assumptions, there could never be real theological consensus. Hutchinson sees her ministers’ reliance on hermeneutical tools, or human helps, as a tacit acknowledgment of the impossibility of a truly unmediated relationship to God, thus also admitting that language itself fails to truly represent. In place of this she turns inward to the voice of God, searching for a more legible and communicable experience.

Hutchinson’s admission of immediate revelations occurs in the context of her longest speech in the trial. In response to one of the fiercest charges against her—that she

undermined the authority of her ministers by claiming that many of them were under a covenant of works—Hutchinson takes the floor: “If you please to give me leave I shall give you the ground of what I know to be true.”²⁶ “What I know to be true” is immediate revelation. Hutchinson begins her story in England, describing her religious journey of the past few years. She recalls being tempted to become a separatist, doubting the Church of England’s authority, and questioning whether “papists” are not actually “anti-christ” because they do not deny Christ in the flesh.²⁷ In some ways, Hutchinson’s speech presents itself as a conversion narrative, but it does not follow most of the genre’s rhetorical conventions. Those it does incorporate are turned to new ends: although Hutchinson chronicles her movement from a place of doubt into clarity, she not only discusses her own justification and sanctification, but also her ability to discern these in others. And while she describes how God had opened her heart and mind through Scripture, her realizations come through “the voice of his own spirit to my soul” and not Scripture alone.²⁸ This narrative reveals Hutchinson’s own epistemological struggles, but she closes with an assurance of spiritual knowledge achieved through a direct experience of God’s voice that disciplines her sight and her speech.

As a result of her divine experience, Hutchinson believes God has given her the ability to discern the inner spiritual state of individuals—particularly her ministers. Much of the trial is spent confirming the rumors that Hutchinson had questioned her ministers’ authority. Early in the trial Thomas Dudley, the deputy Governor, says that Hutchinson had “disparaged all our ministers in the land that they have preached a covenant of works, and only Mr. Cotton a covenant of grace.”²⁹ Though Hutchinson attempts to deny this by

saying that “one may preach a covenant of grace more clearly than another,” the court does not believe her. Eventually Hutchinson admits that she might have said the ministers preached a covenant of works, but here she makes a distinction between preaching a covenant of works and being under such a covenant. She, like Travers, uses 2 Corinthians 3:6 to argue the difference.³⁰ When Hutchinson claims to know the “clear ministry,” then, she means this distinction between the letter and the spirit. Those ministers preaching a covenant of works, Hutchinson argues, labor under the Law, not the Gospel. For Hutchinson’s accusers, the Gospel was the new covenant of grace, marking the passing away of the Law, but Hutchinson, like Travers, argued that her ministers emphasized the letter over the spirit, accusing them of making “ink and paper” their god. She exposed their faith as false, because highly mediated, and she dismissed the authority of any who would deny her an immediate experience of God.

Hutchinson’s speech in her trial opens with and turns on the question of interpretive authority. But unlike her ministers, whom she views as having assumed authority, Hutchinson asks who has authority. In an earlier moment of doubt, Hutchinson reports, the Lord had opened the Scripture to her and brought to her mind a passage from Hebrews, revealing to her that “those which did not teach the new covenant had the spirit of the antichrist.”³¹ Hutchinson begins conventionally, describing the Lord opening a passage to her—a customary way of describing the bible-reading experience—but then transcends the sense of that passage by applying it to something outside its explicit meaning. She continues:

upon this he [God] did discover the ministry unto me and ever since. I bless the Lord, he hath let me see which was the clear ministry and which the wrong. [...] Since that time I confess I have been more choice and he hath let me to distinguish between the voice of my beloved and the voice of Moses, the voice of John Baptist and the voice of antichrist, for all those voices are spoken of in scripture.”³²

Hutchinson goes beyond claiming an interpretive authority that some of her ministers, Cotton in particular, encouraged, to asserting an ability to discern who had such authority.³³ She makes the Bible the ground for all of these claims, something her ministers and judges overlook, but such a claim to discernment relies on immediate revelation, not the Bible. To her claim to distinguish which of her ministers is in the “clear ministry,” Hutchinson adds that she has gained the ability to discern the voice of her beloved, the voice of God. This discernment is a form of discipline, and Hutchinson implies that her spiritual journey is fully realized when she gains discernment of voices. It is a sign, to her, that she hears God’s voice outside biblical revelation, and it affirms her belief in an unmediated experience of God.

The minister and magistrates seize on this moment, attempting to expose Hutchinson’s “discernment” as enthusiastic, or absolutely undisciplined. When asked how she knew that the Spirit, as opposed to Satan or her own fancy, gave her this discernment Hutchinson answers, “How did Abraham know that it was God that bid him offer his son,” to which Winthrop responds, anxiously one imagines, “By an immediate voice.” Hutchinson replies without any apparent hesitation: “so to me by an immediate

revelation.”³⁴ Claiming the kind of revelation Abraham experienced on Mount Moriah constituted, from the perspective of the court, a contagious enthusiasm that undermined real (biblical) revelation and warped the Word of God. Hutchinson claimed to discern between the “bad” and “good” ministers and practiced an alternate hermeneutic—not the one modeled by her ministers, but one directed by God’s voice and not Scripture alone. God spoke to her, she believed, not just through Scripture, but above it, and Scripture was of little direct application when discerning which of her ministers practiced the “clear ministry.”

After Hutchinson’s speech, Winthrop rejoices that God’s providence has made her “lay open her self” and tells the court that “the ground work of her revelations is the immediate revelation of the spirit and not by the ministry of the word [...] Ey it is the most desperate enthusiasm in the world, for nothing but a word comes to her mind and then an application is made which is nothing to the purpose, and this is her revelations when it is impossible but that the word and spirit should speak the same thing.”³⁵

Winthrop takes issue with Hutchinson’s speech, not because she claims that God had revealed something to her, but because she claims this through the Spirit, not the Word. Winthrop, and the other authorities in the court room, believed that the Bible was the source and touchstone for any revelation, but here Hutchinson receives revelations from “nothing but a word.”

From her perspective, though, these were clearly God’s words, and her applications were something “to the purpose.” For instance, when God “revealed” to her a “place out of Daniel,” promising her deliverance, Hutchinson was practicing a

typological reading, applying moments from the Old Testament to living individuals and to the community as a whole. The end result, and not the method, is what Winthrop found disruptive. What her ministers saw as a miscarriage between method and monstrous product, Hutchinson claimed as evidence that their hermeneutic and epistemological systems were obstacles to an immediate experience of God. Hutchinson's biblical interpretation married method and product in a way her ministers' exegesis could not.

At the close of her narrative, Hutchinson assumes her prophetic voice and preaches to the court, providing evidence that immediate access to the Spirit is manifested in language. After she offers her reading of Daniel, wherein she claims God had promised to deliver her from the "calamity" of the trial, Hutchinson moves outside the literal text of the Bible. She ends her speech with these words:

Therefore I desire you to look to it, for you see this scripture fulfilled this day and therefore I desire you that as you tender the Lord and the church and commonwealth to consider and look what you do. You have power over my body but the Lord Jesus hath power over my body and soul, and assure yourselves thus much, you do as much as in you lies to put the Lord Jesus Christ from you, and if you go on in this course you begin you will bring a curse upon you and your posterity, and the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.³⁶

Although she opens with reference to Daniel, Hutchinson offers no scriptural support for the argument she sets forth. She does not bring "rules" or make explicit her exegesis. Rather, the language of this paragraph is typical of prophecy, and when Hutchinson

closes with “the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it” she unequivocally marks the preceding speech as a prophetic one. She moves outside the language of Daniel that precipitates her speech and speaks directly to her accusers. What is more, she represents her words, unambiguously, as God’s words.

With this conclusion, Hutchinson suggests the entire speech had been prophetic. Her language reflects her immediate religious experience and demonstrates a rejection of an ink and paper God. Throughout the speech she relies on experience, even turning the biblical text into a tool for accessing God. The text does not mediate because she always moves beyond it. Hutchinson’s claim that God has power over her body and soul suggests a relationship between the two that is mirrored in her prophetic speech, as Harvey argues. Language ushering from the Lord’s mouth, to her soul, to her mouth suggests an immediacy between God, soul, and body. Hutchinson exposes her minister’s sermonic rhetoric as obscuring the intimate connection between God and the individual, and she offers prophetic speech as an alternative. The ministers and magistrates, Hutchinson says, put Christ “from” them, but her prophetic speech assumes his absolute immediacy.

Yet some of Hutchinson’s heretical theological opinions suggest she did not think of the body as an agent in the way Harvey characterizes it. Instead, Hutchinson imagined the body as swept away in the spirit, almost immaterial. Her speech in the trial, as a manifestation of God’s immediacy, reaffirms this. Hutchinson imagined an alternative to her ministers’ sermonic rhetoric, but it was a highly spiritual alternative. Her speech was prophetic, or spiritual. In this sense, Caldwell is right: Hutchinson did not imagine

language as fundamentally ineffective, as Caldwell argues, but she also did not imagine efficacious language as material. Prophetic speech renounces the material word.

Hutchinson's prophetic speech in the trial corresponds to her mortalism, one of the theological heresies most discussed in her church trial.³⁷ And her mortalism further suggests that she understood her prophetic speech as evidence of an unmediated relationship to God.

In the seventeenth-century, there were various forms of mortalism, and while the most extreme, annihilationism, professed the ultimate spirituality of the soul and denied any resurrection of body or soul, most argued for a "soul-sleep," in which the soul dies or sleeps upon death and is resurrected in the general resurrection at the end of history. In all versions, though, mortalism was a spiritist argument that denied individual selves agency in history and instead prioritized God acting in and through the self. Although there is some argument about whether Hutchinson was an annihilationist, her mortalism suggests a particular understanding of the relationship between the visible and the invisible. Orthodox eschatology held that while the body and soul separated upon death, awaiting their reunion at the general resurrection, the soul lived on eternally, but Hutchinson's mortalism argues for the primacy of the invisible over the visible. In Hutchinson's mortalism, we see the invisible overtaking the visible; the soul is valued highly above the body, and the self dissolves into God's being. Thus, when she claims that the court may have power over her body and not her soul, she thinks to render them essentially powerless.

A hint of perfectionism underlies Hutchinson's mortalism. Although she did not profess perfectionism, she implies it in her church trial—or at least her judges thought so. As evidence for her perfectionism, the court argued that she read many scriptural resurrection prophecies as speaking of earthly bodies rather than spiritual bodies after death and that she denied the resurrection of the physical body. So, they argue, Hutchinson believed God had transformed her earthly body into a spiritual one. In place of an orthodox eschatology, Hutchinson implied that a spiritual resurrection occurred upon reception of saving grace; the gracious individual received an immortal spiritual body on earth. Like language, the body was immaterial. Both functioned as pure spiritual vessels, thus removing the gap between the material and immaterial by making everything spiritual.

Hutchinson's trial begins with her desire to correct the failings of her ministers' linguistic forms, to replace the plain style sermon with immediate, inspired prophetic speech. But she ends with a rejection of the plain style's epistemology. "You have power over my body, but the Lord has power over my body and soul," are almost her last words, and with these—seen in the light of her mortalism—Hutchinson realizes that the body is not an empirically reliable sign of the soul's state. Her only recourse is to abandon the body for the soul, to embrace a spiritism that denies the need for an epistemological link between the visible and invisible. Hutchinson's theology and her speech tend toward a repudiation of the visible, and directly after her speech she says "But now having seen him which is invisible I fear not what man can do unto me."³⁸ These words conjure Travers' words about those who turn the invisible God into the likeness of a visible thing.

Hutchinson, in her prophetic moment, turns toward the invisible God, leaving the tangible object of the Bible in the shadows of his immediate voice. And having accessed the invisible, Hutchinson believes that what happens to her body is ultimately inconsequential. After her speech, Hutchinson speaks very little; when she does, her words are strikingly bare of the self-defense that marked the first half of the trial. Once God has spoken through her, once she has heard his promises and spoken forth his warnings, she has nothing left to say, and why should she if man cannot harm her? Her repudiation of the visible resigns her to silence.

That is, until her last line. Once the court has pronounced its verdict, Hutchinson asks, “I desire to know wherefore I am banished” and plunges back into the visible world, suddenly concerned with the details of her physical life. “I fear not what man can do,” she had said, but here the body asserts itself as a reminder of material life. Winthrop refuses to comfort her: “Say no more, the court know wherefore and is satisfied.”³⁹ And with that, Hutchinson is officially silenced—one last attempt by her authorities to assert their power—once again reminding her that the court did in fact have power over her body.

While the Quakers practiced the same kind of prophetic speech Hutchinson did in her trial, understanding the need for divinely disciplined speech, they also saw language itself as an epistemological tool—something Hutchinson’s spiritism could not realize. By regulating words themselves, in daily speech as well as religious practice, the Quakers found linguistic forms that collapsed the visible and the invisible. But rather than rejecting the visible world, as Hutchinson had, the Quakers believed that the spiritual

transformed the natural. New Creatures were born out of the inner light. This was the essential difference between Hutchinson and the Quakers; their systemization of immediate revelation enabled them to demonstrate their epistemology in and through language and to make language itself a tool for experiencing God. Their speech achieved what Hutchinson's could not.

Just as the authorities in Massachusetts charged Hutchinson with unruly speech, the courts and churches relentlessly persecuted the Quakers as strange, disorderly speakers.⁴⁰ The accusers, of both the Antinomians and the Quakers, were concerned with theology, but speech was a visible sign and thus an easy target. I have argued that Hutchinson's prophetic speech marks a rejection of orthodox rhetorical and sermonic form and instead models a prophetic speech that claims immediate access to the invisible world, and the Quakers systematized this process by organizing a hermeneutic for hearing Christ speak to the soul. In addition to their systemization of immediate revelation, the Quakers transformed their daily speech, disciplining their language, and transforming it—like themselves—into the image of Christ, the incarnate Word. Rather than repudiating the material, like Hutchinson, the Quakers transformed language into the material reflection of God's Spirit.

III. “To Speak New Things”: Quaker Speech and Silence

When, in 1676, Roger Williams, once a defender of freedom of conscience in New England, wrote his scathing critique of Quakerism (directed at Quaker founder George Fox and Quaker writer Edward Burroughs), titled *George Fox Digg'd Out of His*

Burrows, Fox quickly retaliated, defending his faith against every one of Williams's critiques. Although not the most theologically significant point of contention for Fox, what seemed to agitate him most was Williams's harsh condemnation of Quaker speech. Early Quaker speech was composed of several features aimed at transforming daily language, such as the rejection of conventional polite greetings, a mandate to address all people by first names, the refusal to swear oaths, and the use of the second person singular "thou" in place of the plural "you." They called this the pure language, and the Quaker "thou" was the characteristic on which Williams—and countless other anti-Quaker writers—focused most.

The Quakers were prolific writers and published countless tracts, pamphlets, and broadsides defending themselves against their accusers; they also debated amongst themselves the purpose, value, and proper theology of their use of language. Their persecutors, in turn, churned out an enormous body of anti-Quaker literature.⁴¹ While this literature most often came out of the British press, New England was never far out of sight, for it was the location of the most violent anti-Quaker activity, and countless English texts cited the colonial situation as representative of the severity of Quaker persecution. The Quakers first went to the colonies in July of 1656, when the first of several groups of Quakers landed in Massachusetts Bay to spread their particular gospel. It did not take long before the General Court took legal action against the Quakers: the two Quaker women who came to the colony in July were imprisoned for five weeks before being banished, and in the same month the General Court passed the first of many anti-Quaker laws, which stipulated that anyone caught importing Quaker books to the

colonies would be fined. The severity for breaking anti-Quaker laws quickly escalated, and by 1659 Mary Dyer was led to the gallows—the first round of Quaker executions in Massachusetts Bay.⁴²

This persecution quickly drew attention from England, and the General Court began to defend its actions through the English press. In 1660 *A True Relation of the Proceedings Against Certain Quakers* was published in London, and it offered legal and ecclesiastical support for the Massachusetts executions in October of 1659, when Dyer was first sentenced to death and two other Quakers were hanged. The whole “design” of the Quakers, the *True Relation* states, was to “undermine and ruine” the “peace and order” of the colony.⁴³ The *True Relation* directly opposes Quaker unruliness, violence, and contagion to the measured prudence of the court, aligning the English and the Boston Court against the Quakers: the court had followed the “example of England” and its anti-Jesuit laws, it had acted according to English laws more generally, and it was prepared to confront the Quaker threat because it had “intelligence from good [English] hands.”⁴⁴ Both the English and colonial authorities targeted speech as one of Quakerism’s most unruly characteristics. Though the *True Relation* makes no explicit charge against Quaker language and speech, the Quakers’ “impetuous frantic fury,” which the Massachusetts General Court claimed necessitated action, was one of the most common indictments against Quaker speech on both sides of the Atlantic.⁴⁵

Most Quaker writers, though, argued that the pure language, in particular the second person changes, were encouraged, if not mandated, by Biblical precedent. In *The Pure Language of the Spirit of Truth* (1655) Richard Farnsworth was the most direct,

claiming that the pure language was “the proper Language to any single person whatsoever.”⁴⁶ Farnsworth has no patience for the critics of the Quaker “shibboleth,” for they “cannot endure the language and life that gave forth the Scripture, therefore art thou manifest to be the serpent, and the painted Harlot, which was ever judged with the spirit of truth, in which is the pure Language, which is the judge of all false Languages, and the judge of unclean spirits.”⁴⁷ Farnsworth sets up a direct relationship between spirit and language, arguing that pure language can only emerge from pure spirits.

Quaker critics also saw speech as a visible sign, but one of spiritual error rather than redemption. The very name “Quakers,” to which they objected (often referring to themselves as “those scornfully called Quakers”), carried with it an assumption of bodily unruliness. Texts mocking Quakers often played on this assumption and read the body as a sign of spiritual error, in the same way Winthrop read Hutchinson’s and Dyer’s monstrous births. Perhaps the best example of such a text is *The Character of a Quaker in his True and Proper Colours or, The Clownish Hypocrite Anatomized* (1671), written by R. H. As the title states, R. H. paints the Quaker as a clown, but he uses this mockery to sell his stronger claim about Quaker monstrosity. From the very first sentence, R. H. draws attention to Quaker speech as essential evidence for their heresy and hypocrisy. Calling Quakers the “fag-end of the Reformation,” he criticizes their “characteristick *Thou*” and their idolization of “*Phrases*,” and assumes his readers will easily identify a Quaker because he refuses to “speak like his Neighbours.”⁴⁸ The Quaker, R. H. reveals, is an “enemy to all Order,” and nowhere more than in his speech:

His discourses are nothing but a *Rhapsody* of oft repeated *Non-sense*; and when he hath darkened your understanding with a cloud of insignificant *Babble*, he cries, *Ah! Friends mind the Light*. He usually begins with *Raving* like *Mahomet* in his *Falling-fit*, or the Devil of *Delphose's Priests*, that never delivered their *Lying Oracles*, but with *extravagant gestures* and *odd distortions* of body. *Swear not at all*, is his Motto, but *Lies* he holds in many cases *venial*. [...] He cheats worse then a Long-lane Broker, by pretending to deal *at a word*.⁴⁹

By aligning the Quaker with Islam and comparing him to the priests of the Delphic oracle, R. H. draws on a host of assumptions that malign the Quaker's theology and verbal and bodily manifestations of that theology.⁵⁰ The Quakers were often criticized as greedy, double-dealing merchants (Long-lane being notoriously associated with especially dishonest brokers of second-hand clothing), but here R. H. roots that deception in language.⁵¹ The Quaker's theology, body, and speech are all characterized by frenzy, disorder, and, ultimately, a lack of substance. Their speech, R. H. repeatedly asserts, is meaningless, and deception is their norm. R. H. writes that the Quaker "*strew'd his face into a Religious frame, and tun'd his voice to a puling sanctimonious key.*"⁵² Though unruly, R. H. claims, the Quaker is fundamentally ineffective. The sheer amount of literature written to unmask the Quaker, however, proves that R. H. and his ilk did, in fact, fear the Quaker's voice.⁵³ R. H. was but one among many who dismissed Quaker theology by mocking the Quaker clown's language, but underneath his mockery one can sense an abiding fear of Quaker monstrosity and theological contagion. For R.H.

hypocrisy was the Quaker's essence, and the mismatch between external claims to truth and internal spiritual state made the Quaker much more dangerous than a clown; it made him a monster.

Roger Williams was one of the most bombastic colonial critics of Quaker speech. In Fox's response to Williams, *A New England Fire Brand Quenched* (1678), he quotes Williams's original denunciation: "And *thou* say'st: In their first Creeping [...] out of the Cradle, how doth this Spirit dare the Spirits of Kings &c. to Thou and Thee to the Faces of Mighty Monarchs: with what Brazen Faces." Fox replies: "The Reader may see, what a plague the word THEE and THOU is to R. W! yet was the Language of Christ and the holy Men of God both to Superior and Inferior. And R. W. who calleth himself an Orator, what! hath he not read his Accidence and Grammar, Plural and Singular?"⁵⁴

Readers of Fox, both then and since, have focused mostly on his implication that the pure language was modeled on a biblical stylistic precedent, but his recourse to grammar here matters. The Quaker pure language was not a rejection of language, or a search for a prelapsarian, Edenic ideal; it was, as Fox's grammatical focus demonstrates, grounded in the material. It was not an effort to transcend language, but rather to mirror in language the incarnational principle of Christ as Word. The goal of the pure language was to transform carnal, material language into holy, material language—to redeem language.

Amidst all of the concern over Quaker verbal frenzy, the Quakers were sitting quietly in their meetinghouses, awaiting God's voice. The Quaker "silent meeting," as it was called, had no minister or sermon; instead every Quaker sat silently until moved to witness or prophecy and then spoke whatever God had revealed to him or her through the

inner light, Christ within. The Quaker meeting received censure for its sheer strangeness, but much of this criticism focused on the rather loud aspects of the meeting. Roger Williams, for example, wrote about the cacophony he witnessed in the Quaker meetinghouse, describing the meeting as full of “vapours,” “gusts,” and “interruptions.”⁵⁵ The Quakers, however, saw this possible proliferation of speech as the ordered Word of God ushering forth. In *Let Your Words be Few* (1983), one of the most comprehensive studies of seventeenth-century Quaker speech and language, Richard Bauman describes the play between Quaker silence and speech as essentially ordered. In his assessment, Quaker silence was not only a means to a prophetic end but was the ideal result of speech: “it was also the ultimate purpose, the desired outcome, of speaking.”⁵⁶ To demonstrate this Bauman quotes George Fox: “the intent of all speaking is to bring into the life [...] and to possess the same, and to live in and enjoy it, and to feel God’s presence, and that is in the silence.”⁵⁷ Any prophecy uttered by any Quaker (and any Quaker could witness, regardless of class or gender) was meant to bring individuals into new silenced supplication towards God. The silence was not mere preparation for an official sermon, for which the Quakers criticized the formalism of Protestantism. Bauman describes the relationship between silence and speaking as circular: silence begets speaking, which in turn produces more silence. The Quaker meeting, as Bauman notes, attempted to slough off the forms of the world, especially empty linguistic forms. Bauman rightly characterizes the Quaker rejection of formalism, but by focusing on Quaker silence he wrongly argues that Quakers desired to transcend language. Quaker writings reveal that they paid careful attention to the form of their speech: the silent

meeting had an attending hermeneutic that was an organized system for hearing Christ speak to the soul and then communicating that revelation to the religious community. I argue that, ultimately and ideally, the silent meeting would transform speech in order to manifest God in the word. Rather than transcending language, Quakers sought to redeem language.

William Britten's *Silent Meeting, a Wonder to the World* (1660) best represents this system, and Britten begins by defining the silent meeting in opposition to the formal Protestant sermon. Britten describes the highly mediated, and therefore dishonest, quality of the Protestant pulpit: "and speaking by hear-say (*as others did*) and not upon experience from Christ within me, but by imitation; as Players on a Stage, assume the Names, and act the person or Princes, Nobles &c. but being come off, and unmasked, they are no such men."⁵⁸ Britten exposes, or unmasks, the Protestant sermon as mere performance, lacking the substance of experience. In contrast, the Quaker meeting brings internal "experience from Christ," because "when earthly thoughts, earthly words, and earthly works are all laid aside, and the Temple within us is ready, the Light of Christ shining in it, and the Lord with a further Manifestation of his Love, enters it by his Eternal Power [...] making us feel the power of an endless life."⁵⁹ Part of what the critics objected to was the emotional tenor of this experience. Britten's description fits the definition of enthusiasm all too easily, but Britten anticipates and undercuts these censures by arguing that those who do not keep watch over the tongue, through silence, "run hastily upon action, and their tongues speak unadvisedly, in hasty Questions and Answers, oftentimes proceeding to Passion, and Rage, like short fits of madness."⁶⁰ The

silent meeting, he argues, is a corrective for enthusiasm. Silence itself disciplines the religious experience and the language uttered as part of that experience. Britten's contention that "earthly words" must be laid aside in order to truly experience Christ does not mean speech had no place in the Quaker meeting, but it does distinguish carnal from spiritual language. The speech uttered in the silent meeting was prophetic, but it did not assume the spiritism of Hutchinson. Quaker speech was the earthly container for spiritual language, just as Christ was the physical incarnation of God.

Christ's light shining in the "temple within" is the Quaker inner light—the source of this discernment. As Britten describes it: "except Christ in Spirit be within, to work Faith and Obedience, the seeing, hearing or reading the Letter avails little without us."⁶¹ The inner light enables the Quaker to do more than read the letter (the Bible or the Law) and acts as a source of continuous immediate revelation. Although the inner light is a constant presence within the individual, the Quaker meeting requires that each individual discern between private revelations and those meant to edify the community. Britten offers a hermeneutic for listening to this inner light, and whatever passivity "silent meeting" might suggest, this hermeneutic requires alertness in mind and body, and profound activity of the soul.

Britten describes the interior work that occurs in the silence, when the "tongue speaks not": "The body in Silent-Meetings, resting from labour (which is all the rest in a carnal man's worship) but we go further, with a heart striving to rest from sinful imaginations, and entering upon a true rest in God, of which we feel, see and taste in its beginnings, as an earnest of our blessed Inheritance."⁶² He distinguishes the Quaker

meeting not by the lack of motion or noise (other meetings have that outer stillness, which is but a form), but by internal striving and entering. “Striving to rest” seems paradoxical, if not impossible, but Britten’s phrase encapsulates the essence of the silent meeting. While “rest” is Britten’s stated goal, self-denial being necessary for hearing Christ, that rest is neither passive nor achieved without the full activity of body, mind, and soul. It is only in this “true rest” that the individual becomes alive to God, to “feel, see and taste,” fully experiencing. The quietness of body and mind, then, is necessary for true experience of God, but this “true rest” is brimming with activity, activity Britten describes in bodily, sensory language. This sensory awareness is brought on by striving. Only the disciplined can achieve a full religious experience.

Britten breaks this silent striving into several distinct steps: 1) A Spiritual Watch, 2) A Spiritual Touchstone, and 3) The Spiritual Scales. As he describes this process, Britten articulates a hermeneutic of silence. He argues that because the “time of Tryal” is unknown, “the spiritual watch must be truly kept within” always.⁶³ Failing to keep watch results in the enthusiastic unbridled tongue, and to keep a true watch, one must “learne first to come unto a *pure Silence* in thine own self, which is *to silence all in thee that is evil* [...] so thy tongue, heart and hands shall be under the *Faithful Watch*, and the Actions without in the body, with thy Actions within of the mind, as Love, Joy, Desire &c, will by degrees be all brought into true Obedience.”⁶⁴ Although Britten is clear that this work happens “by that Eternal Power of God,” it is still a work that occurs “by degrees” and requires constant vigilance. And this silence transforms the “actions within of the mind” but also the “Actions without.” Body and mind must both be “brought into

true Obedience”—a divine discipline—but the “faithful watch” is carried out by God *and* the striving self. The silent meeting is not the only place of silence; pure silence is lived silence, in both body and mind—a fully experienced silence.

The last two steps of Britten’s hermeneutic describe what types of speech are acceptable in the silent meeting and how one discerns their rightness. Britten describes the Touchstone, the step wherein the silent individual tries the “work, word or thought” aroused through the silent striving to determine whether it is “pure or impure.” The touchstone thus exposes words of “zeal, or pretence of holiness,” as Satan “cover[ing] Vices under the name of Virtues.”⁶⁵ While the evidence for or against a pure work, word, or thought seems murky, Britten provides some guidelines: “note in the words themselves, how sometimes they are *too many*; sometimes *unsound* and *untrue*; sometimes *too short*, in telling *but half a truth*.”⁶⁶ Britten connects the form and content of words, and uses the form itself as a touchstone. The form of one’s speech acts as a touchstone, but impure words could be either “too many” or “too short,” suggesting that speech in the silent meeting was judged not by its abundance or scarcity but by its intention and spiritual value. The “Spiritual Scales,” the last step of the spiritual hermeneutic, asks the potential speaker to “weigh, ponder, or consider all things to be spoken or done, before they pass from thee.”⁶⁷ This differs from the touchstone because it involves the act of speaking, and the scales assure that one will speak what he or she means: “Yea and Nay, Yes and No, must be the same as they are spoken, and so speak the same thing intended.”⁶⁸ This is the philosophy guiding the pure language as well—transparency and honesty—not scarcity.

The spiritual hermeneutic is an internal one, but Britten maintains that it should have legible external consequences. New Creatures, changed by Christ within them, “*Speake and Act New Things* from that Law of God written in their inward Parts; and such dare not Vent their Frothy words, as Flesh did formerly.”⁶⁹ The new creature does not stop at speaking fresh words, he or she *acts* new things—the natural becomes spiritual. Internal spiritual changes have external effects, and the external is made over in the image of the spiritual. The monstrous flesh is transformed, and “all their *Parts, Members, Faculties, and Abilities*; are put to a *New Use*, the *New Heart*, and the *New Spirit* is in them.”⁷⁰ The transformation is not just spiritual for Britten; the new heart and new spirit ensure that members, faculties, and abilities—“all their parts”—are also changed. As part of this transformation, the new creature speaks a new language—a language as pure as the silence.

The pure language is a manifestation of internal transformation, but it is also a disciplined effort to live that transformation—to endure the constant, daily striving to enter an internal silence. The alteration of daily speech marked the Quakers as a people set apart, made over as New Creatures, but it also communicated important theological and epistemological assumptions. The pure language was an attempt to speak the language of the Bible, to discipline language itself. But Quakerism understood the Bible as only one instance of divine revelation, and it was neither the primary source of revelation nor the single touchstone for other revelations. Throughout Quaker writing, Christ as Word replaces the Bible as the source of revelation and language. The Bible, many Quakers argued—George Fox foremost among them—was not the Word of God;

Christ was. This fundamental belief structured Quaker theories of language, and the pure language was an attempt to bring language closer to Christ.

George Fox describes how spiritual transformation generates a metaphorically silent speech, a daily language that manifests the inner light. *A Battledoor for Teachers and Professors* (1660) is perhaps the most comprehensive and polemical case for the pure language. Fox begins with the English “battledoor,” moving through various languages and arguing in each case that the “thou” is singular and the “you” is plural. Though this looks much like a pedagogical grammar, and Fox did intend it to be read by teachers and scholars, it is also a defense of Quaker speech and theology. In the introduction he writes that “all Languages are to me no more than dust” but bemoans the degeneration of the English tongue.⁷¹ He begins by describing all language as ineffectual and insubstantial, but he ends by arguing that the pure language offers redemption.

What at first seems a straightforward rejection of “natural,” earthly language becomes more complicated and contradictory as Fox moves through the *Battledoor*. He states that language itself offers no redemption, reprimanding both Catholics and Protestants for believing that they can “make their Divines by their Tongues” and that training will allow these ministers and priests to transcend or reverse Babel and make their sermons comprehensible to all. He writes that “Tongues is no more to learn then to do a natural thing, and is attained and gotten in that knowledge and wisdom, that must be confounded.”⁷² What Fox criticizes here is not the notion that language is spiritually efficacious; he finds fault with the order in which the divines place the relationship

between language and soul. Language cannot make one holy, Fox argues, but language is a manifestation of the state of one's soul.

Fox argues that the divines' language is evidence of spiritual degeneration: "If they have degeneration from their own words, and goings as they have from their own Tongues, from the Tongues which are natural [...] sure all cannot but judg that they are far degenerated from the Divine things, and Spiritual things."⁷³ Natural degeneration is a sure sign of spiritual degeneration. This epistemological link between the visible and the invisible leads Fox to demand a transformation of speech that is not "natural" or taught, but that is an organic reflection of internal, spiritual transformation. The pure language accomplishes this:

But now there is a redemption from Degeneration, from the naturalls, and nature is come and coming into its right course again, and so now the Truth hath to drive all this degeneration back gain to the Pope from whence it came, and to travel through to the Protestants through all their degenerations till it come to the head of the Pope [...] that all may come into the true understanding of God again.⁷⁴

"That all may come into the true understanding of God again"; Fox looks for a redemption from spiritual ignorance perpetuated by all those (Catholics and Protestants, for example) who do not have true divine knowledge. The pure language offers redemption from the degeneration of language, which is a reflection of spiritual degeneration. But the pure language itself does not effect transformation; rather, the truth

shadowed forth in and through language redeems language. And the truth in language is Christ.

In a 1659 broadside directed at the magistrates of Nottingham (whom Fox calls inquisitioners), Fox describes the relationship between Christ as truth and language:

Did you never read that the Scriptures saith Christ is the Word, and the Word of God? Is not he the living Word? and the Word immortal; are writings immortal? [...] what would ye have done to John if he had been under your power, who tells you Christs name is the word of God? And tells you, the Revelation is words? [...] will you set the scriptures in the room of God, and give them his name? [...] you want the Word to give you an understanding to know a fulfiller, and that which is to be fulfilled; a fulfiller is the Word, and that which is to be fulfilled is the words and outward types and figures of changeable things: so who is in the Word, he is in the unchangeable which was in the beginning, in whom the Scripture end, Christ.⁷⁵

For Fox the Bible is simply a declaration of all that Christ eventually fulfills and is itself merely words. All languages are dust, because they are mere “figures of changeable things,” but Christ the Word as the source of all words transforms the dust into something immortal and substantial. Fox takes his description of Christ as the Word straight from the language of the Bible: Christ is living, immortal, reconciling, and the fulfillment. Fox suggests that the passages of Scripture to which he alludes here are not self-referencing, and instead he points to the Word behind the words. When the biblical text speaks of the

Word as immortal, then, it means Christ. If, for Fox, the Bible is a declaration of all that Christ fulfills, Christ trumps Scripture; the Word surpasses words.

Fox goes on in his broadside to argue that the distinction between the Word and the words of Scripture is a natural one: “are you not blind that cannot distinguish writings, weh [sic] is Scriptures, from Christ, & God, but put them in their place? Surely you are far off from spiritual things, while you do not understand natural things, have you not read that *John* saith in the beginning was the Word, and was writings at the beginning?”⁷⁶ The Bible, as text, is a natural thing, and those who rely on texts over an immediate experience of God will be but blind guides. “You remain in the mortal,” he tells the magistrates, “where the jars and strifes are about words,” but Fox, seeing beyond the natural thing of Scripture to Christ rises above such strife and is “redeemed out of language.”⁷⁷ The battles about words, interpretations, hermeneutics, and philosophies of language, all cede before the Word. The pure language is, therefore, not a mere prelapsarian linguistic ideal. The pure language is a spiritual language, transcending arguments about words themselves and actually using words to reach Christ, the Word and source of all words.

Thus, the Quaker shibboleth—the “thou”—comes directly from the Bible, which is one manifestation of Christ as Word, and it marks daily language as redeemed out of the natural and made over in the image of Christ. The hermeneutic of the silent meeting is also a redemption out of language, because the words spoken there are literally God’s words. The individual is made a New Creature, and his or her language reflects that transformation. Language becomes a visible sign, but it is also more than mere sign. Just

as Britten argued that the silent meeting would transform the striving person, Fox claims that language—both that of the religious meeting and everyday speech—is redeemed out of the natural. Both the silent meeting and the pure language are attempts to make language capture and reflect the Word with a capital W. Christ, manifested in language, redeems language, and language thus mirrors the internal silence of the silent meeting, where “*earthly* words” are “laid aside,” and the Light of Christ shines in the temple within.

The Quakers, working from the same epistemological assumptions that eventually led Hutchinson to repudiate the visible world, did just the opposite. They made over the whole visible world in the image of the spiritual. Everything becomes more than mere sign, and words themselves provide access to the Word, Christ. Where the Quakers saw Christ in everyday words, Winthrop saw devils in the banality of childbirth, but both saw the invisible world encroaching on the visible. The visible was not, even for Winthrop, just an echo of the invisible, a small window into a greater reality. In Winthrop’s view the material world was overtaken by the monstrosity of sin, and the Quakers strove to transform the natural into the spiritual—to let the inner light shine until it was all that was visible. In the end, Hutchinson alone seems stuck in the visible world, try as she might to escape it. Her last words in the trial are a reminder that she must go about living in this monstrous world—a world that would imprison and banish an ill, pregnant woman. The material realities of life overwhelm her, and at times the materiality of language escapes her grasp. More than once in the trial Hutchinson excuses her theological errors by arguing that her words do not properly convey her meaning: “I do not acknowledge it to

be an Error but Mistake: I doe acknowledge my Expression to be ironious [erroneous] but my Judgment was not ironious, for I held befor as you did but could not express it soe.”⁷⁸

In these moments, words are loosened from the things they represent, and Hutchinson once again is caught in a trap of her own making. The Quaker ideal was that words would never stray from the things they represented, because words themselves could have a spiritual quality, but Hutchinson held no such ideal, and in the end the materiality—of language, of place, of daily life—disrupted her access to God, and her words became monstrous, even in her own mouth.

Notes

¹ Thomas Weld, Preface, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians, The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, ed. David D. Hall (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 214.

² John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649* (Boston: Little, Brown and co., 1853), 314. For modern medical diagnoses of the “monstrous births” see Emery Battis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 248n; and Eve LaPlante, *American Jezebel: the Uncommon Life of Ann Hutchinson, the Woman who Defied the Puritans* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2004), 217.

³ Quoted in Winthrop, *History*, n1 314-15.

⁴ Tamara Harvey, in *Figuring Modesty*, has also noted Hutchinson’s awareness of this epistemological gap. Although both Hutchinson and the orthodoxy “are acknowledged as recognizing the failure of human expression and cognition to coincide with God’s will,” Harvey argues, “Hutchinson and the Antinomians are read as being more modern in their awareness of an epistemological gap” (87).

⁵ Rebecca Travers, *For Those that Meet to Worship at the Steeplehouse, Called John Evangelist* (London, 1659), 14.

⁶ While a belief in immediate revelation was not orthodox in Puritan Massachusetts, nothing Hutchinson said actually undermined scriptural authority or the centrality of the Bible to faith and life, as many scholars have noted. See, for example, Gordis *Opening Scripture*, 169.

⁷ Bryce Traister has usefully exposed a critical tendency to reduce all “dissenting practices to Anne Hutchinson’s singular (bodily) agency.” See “Anne Hutchinson’s ‘Monstrous Birth’ and the Feminization of Antinomianism,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 27.2 (1997), 136. My focus on Hutchinson in this chapter is not intended to provide an analysis of the Antinomian Controversy writ large, but I do want to stress that by dismissing Caldwell’s argument, its flaws notwithstanding, we have ignored the linguistic elements and implications within the Antinomian Controversy. Hutchinson’s gender made her an easier target for the authorities, but other Antinomians were also condemned for upsetting the conventions of religious speech.

⁸ Weld, Preface, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians*, 202.

⁹ *Ibid*, 205.

¹⁰ John Winthrop, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians*, 274.

¹¹ Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue*, 73.

¹² Gordis, *Opening Scripture*, 169.

¹³ Caldwell, “The Antinomian Language Controversy,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 69.3 (1976), 346.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 353.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 353, 356.

¹⁶ I do agree, though, with Michelle Burnham, who argues that language and theology cannot be separated: “Ultimately, the theological, linguistic, and economic dimensions of this crisis cannot be treated in isolation, not only because they repeat each other’s terms, but because together they represent a complex articulation of a crisis in subjectivity that registered its effects in all these domains.” See *Folded Selves: Colonial New England Writing in the World System* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2007), 341. The linguistic dimension I explore here is, as Burnham states, a manifestation of a larger crisis, and while it may be, too, a crisis of subjectivity, I read it primarily as a crisis in epistemology.

¹⁷ Harvey, *Governing the Tongue*, 87.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 87.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 81.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 112.

²¹ See Edmund S. Morgan, *Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (New York: Harper Collins, 1958) for the most famous and influential instance of the claim that Hutchinson’s admission was a tactical error. Jane Kamensky notes the critical trend too, when she says that the Boston authorities and “subsequent chroniclers alike have construed Hutchinson’s admission that she had experienced ‘immediate revelation’ [...] as the fatal flaw in her testimony.” Kamensky, though, challenges these readings of Hutchinson’s prophetic voice to argue that other aspects of her “ungoverned speech [...] may have been more threatening,” and that, perhaps, the prophetic voice “derive[d] instead from popular notions of women’s speech,” not from Hutchinson’s own voice. Kamensky does read Hutchinson’s admission as a central moment in the trial records, but through the lens of gender and civil attempts to “govern” women’s tongues. See Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue*, 79-80.

²² See Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts*.

²³ “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newton,” Hall, 315.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 315.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 316.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 336.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 336.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 337.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 318.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 326. Caldwell reads this scene as evidence of Hutchinson’s belief that word and thought are fundamentally separate and that words fail to denote anything at all. See Caldwell, “The Antinomian Language Controversy,” 356-7.

³¹ “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newton,” 336.

³² *Ibid*, 336-7.

³³ For more on how Cotton encouraged lay interpretive authority see Gordis, *Opening Scripture*, chap. 2.

³⁴ “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newton, 337.

³⁵ Ibid, 342.

³⁶ Ibid, 338.

³⁷ For more on Hutchinson’s mortalism see James F. Maclean, “Anne Hutchinson and the Mortalist Heresy,” *The New England Quarterly*, 54.1 (1981).

³⁸ “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newton,” 338.

³⁹ Ibid, 348.

⁴⁰ Many have argued that Anne Hutchinson’s Antinomianism anticipated colonial Quakerism in some way. David Hall, in his edition of the Antinomian Controversy documents, argues that she “prefigured the radical stance of the Quakers,” and James F. Maclean, commenting on her mortalism in particular, calls Hutchinson the link between “the radical reformation of the sixteenth century and the ‘realized eschatology’ of the Quakers in the mid-seventeenth century.” See David D. Hall, Preface, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, 2nd (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), xi; and Maclean, “Anne Hutchinson and the Mortalist Heresy,” 77.

⁴¹ There were many texts printed in the last half of the seventeenth-century that intended to “unmask” the Quakers. For examples of such texts see John Deacon, *The Grand Imposter Examined* (London, 1656) about James Naylor’s famous trial; Ellis Bradshaw, *The Quakers Whitest Divell Unvailed, and their Sheeps Cloathing Pulled off, that their Woolvish Inside may be Easily Discerned* (London, 1654); and Matthew Caffyn, *The Deceived, and Deceiving Quakers Discovered* (London, 1656).

⁴² For more on the history of the Quakers in the British colonies see Carla Gardina Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Arthur J. Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1980).

⁴³ Rawson, *A True Relation of the Proceedings Against Certain Quaker* (London, 1660), 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 1.

⁴⁶ Richard Farnsworth, *The Pure Language of the Spirit of Truth* (London, 1655), i.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁸ R. H., *The Character of a Quaker in his True and Proper Colours or, The Clownish Hypocrite Anatomized* (London, 1671), 1, 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁰ I read R. H.’s references to Mohamet, or the prophet Muhammed, as highlighting by analogy the Quaker’s “pretended” claim to revelations. The meaning of “Delphose’s Priests” is harder to determine, but most likely draws on stories of the Oracle’s frenzied prophecies or those tales of the priests translating her gibberish visions for the supplicants.

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- ⁵¹ For a description of Long-Lane, see Jacob Henry Burn, *Descriptive Catalogue of London Traders, Taverns, and Coffee Houses* (London, 1855), 123-125.
- ⁵² R. H., *The Character of a Quaker*, 8.
- ⁵³ *The Character of a Quaker* seems to have been popular, contentious, or circulated enough that R.H. published a *Plus ultra* to the first pamphlet in 1672, Samuel Austin published a pamphlet under the same title as R. H.'s original, with very few changes, in the same year, and Thomas Rudyard published a Quaker's reply to the "libel" in 1671. See R. H., *Plus ultra, or, The Second Part of the Character of a Quaker* (London, 1672); Samuel Austin, *The Character of a Quaker in his True and Proper Colours, or, The Clownish Hypocrite Anatomized* (London, 1672); and Thomas Rudyard, *The Libeller Characteriz'd by his own Hand in Ansvver to a Scurrilous Pamphlet, Intituled, The Character of a Quaker* (London, 1671).
- ⁵⁴ George Fox, *A New England Fire Brand Quenched, Being an Answer unto a Slanderous Book, Entituled, George Fox Digged out of his Burrows* (London, 1679), 181.
- ⁵⁵ Roger Williams, *George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes* (London, 1676), 67, 45, 91.
- ⁵⁶ Bauman, *Let Your Words be Few*, 125.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid, qtd. 125. For the original see George Fox, *Something Concerning Silent Meetings* (London, 1657), i.
- ⁵⁸ Britten, *Silent Meeting a Wonder to the World* (London, 1660), 3.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid, 2.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid, 9.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, 4.
- ⁶² Ibid, 6.
- ⁶³ Ibid, 9.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid, 9-10.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid, 10.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid, 10.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid, 10.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid, 10.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid, 11.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid, 11.
- ⁷¹ George Fox, *A Battle-door for Teachers and Professors to Learn Singular and Plural* (London, 1660), ii.
- ⁷² Ibid, 19.

⁷³ Ibid, 18.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 18.

⁷⁵ George Fox, *Surely the Magistrates of Nottingham are Blinde* (London, 1659), 1.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 1.

⁷⁸“The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newton,” 361.

Chapter 3

Metamorphizing Words: Native American Language and Translation

I. Strange Speech

For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee.

-Ezekiel 3:5-6

Cotton Mather's 1707 *Another Tongue Brought in to Confess the Great Saviour of the World* opens with the second half of this passage from the book of Ezekiel, obscuring the communication gap at the heart of cross-cultural encounter: if sent among "people of a strange speech and of an hard language," the prophet's speech would be heard and understood because it is God's speech. God's language is transparent, Ezekiel and Mather both suggest. Yet *Another Tongue*, because it is a catechism in Iroquois intended for use by "English and Dutch traders among the Iroquois," implicitly acknowledges the necessity of translation in the Indian missionary project.¹ *Another Tongue* was published decades after the English colonists first began to evangelize the Native Americans, but earlier translators—the kind who made Mather's circulation of an Iroquois catechism possible—recognized the "hardness" of learning Indian languages. And unlike Mather they did not portray translation as a transparent process.

In his influential *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (1991), David Murray argues that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonists portrayed language as fully transparent and portrayed translation as invisible. The "process of translation," Murray writes, "is obscured or effaced" in many

texts. Rather than effacing the act of translation, as Murray suggests and as Mather demonstrates, the most well-known seventeenth-century New English translators of Native American languages, John Eliot and Roger Williams, worried about what translation itself might efface or obscure, namely the original text and experience.² Both men recognized the limits of language to fully capture experience or describe the divine, and they imagined Hebrew—their version of a heavenly or universal language free from constructed representations—as an ideal to which their own English could never ascend. Native languages, though, seemed to mirror, or even be linguistically related to, Hebrew, and Eliot and Williams hoped native languages would bridge the gap between language and experience. Because native languages were not written and were thought to arise organically, they seemed to emerge straightforwardly from experience. Native languages seemed to connect words to things.

Williams and Eliot approached the problem of reconciling experience and text differently, and they had distinct ideas about how native languages fit into this project, but their translation work among the Native Americans reveals their theological and theoretical ideas about language—how it works, where it fails, and how it corresponds to or diverges from one’s experience of God and the natural world. This chapter examines the ways Williams and Eliot engaged with the complexities of language and its relationship to meaning and experience, specifically in relation to the work of translation.

Eliot and William worked among the Native Americans in the wake of British universal language schemes, that flourished from the 1640s through the 1680s. The language schemes attempted to bring word and thing into a one-to-one correspondence

and influenced Williams's and Eliot's conceptions of translation. Like the British advocates of philosophical grammars and universal language, Williams and Eliot strove to make language correspond to experience and to link words to things. But unlike universal language theorists such as John Wilkins or Cave Beck, Williams and Eliot faced the daily problems of translation. What was only theory in England was practice in the New World. For Eliot, native languages failed to deliver the promise of a universal language, and translation exposed the layers of mediation between experience and text. Therefore, Eliot tried to manage the failure of translation through the proliferation of translated texts, which resulted in a self-perpetuating cycle. For Williams, on the other hand, translation was generative of new knowledge and novel experiences. Where Eliot imagined translation as the foundation to Indian evangelism, Williams saw translation as an epistemological tool.

The connection between Native American language and universal language schemes has been provocatively elucidated by Sarah Rivett in "Empirical Desire: Conversion, Ethnography, and the New Science of the Praying Indian" (2006). Rivett argues that native languages offered evidence for "the possibility of a universal language that would make divine phenomena visible in their pure, spontaneous, and unadulterated forms."³ By identifying Native Americans as a lost tribe of Israel, seventeenth-century missionaries and thinkers categorized native languages as a linguistic cousin to, or descendent of, Hebrew. Because of their assumptions about the representational capacity of divine language, these thinkers saw in native languages confirmation of the potential for a universal language. The Native American conversion testimonies Eliot translated in

texts like *Tears of Repentance* (1653), Rivett argues, “presented an idealized vision of a universal language.”⁴ Yet the actual practice of translation, removed from the philosophical community of something like the Royal Society, reveals a more complicated picture of seventeenth-century language theory than the one Rivett describes. Eliot and Williams offered their English audiences curiosities and evidence, and certainly they themselves sought tangible evidence of invisible grace as Rivett argues, but the work of translation necessarily removes some of the idealism with which Rivett characterizes seventeenth-century translation theories.

Limiting the study of translation theory to English philosophy narrows critical understanding of the practice of translation; similarly, recent revisionist narratives of native-colonial encounter that uncover the complexity of native language and communication discount how these encounters also transformed the colonist and his theorizations of language.⁵ Some of the recent work attending to language and translation has argued that trans-cultural contact transformed both the Native Americans and the colonizers, but none demonstrate how.⁶ Matt Cohen observes in *The Networked Wilderness* (2010), that colonial assumptions about communication confronted a complicated and sophisticated indigenous system, resulting in what he calls “a complex interplay involving emulating, appropriation, subversion, signifying, and outright contest.”⁷ Similarly, Susan Castillo’s *Performing America* (2006) challenges the critical tendency to characterize colonialism as a “unidirectional flow of language, institutions and ideological structures from the active, stable, economically and technologically advanced colonizer to the passive, barbaric colonized.”⁸ In her intervention, though,

Castillo is more concerned, as are most of her fellow scholars, with revising the picture of the “passive, barbaric colonized” than with reimagining the “unidirectional flow” as a dynamic process of exchange and mutual transformation.⁹

I want to stress the mutual transformation that occurred through indigenous-colonial encounter. What happened to colonial assumptions about language as a result of inter-linguistic contact? Eliot’s and Williams’s respective approaches to translation and their preconceptions of indigenous language led to distinct ideas about language in general and about native language itself. Eliot’s *Indian Tracts* reveal not simply a controlling desire to civilize and convert, and Williams’s *A Key into the Language of America* is not only the possession of the colonizer.¹⁰ These texts also depict language theories forged through contact with and translation into native languages and the resulting linguistic mixture that was seen, alternately, as corrupting or productive.¹¹

Both Williams and Eliot, in their work of rendering the complicated texture of translation, sought guiding principles or reproducible structures. In their early translation work, they experimented, searching for the formula(s) that would make future translation less fuliginous, though not necessarily less arduous. They pursued, as Rivett demonstrates, a language that bridged the gap between visible and invisible, but the very process of translation exposed that gap and complicated its mediation.

II. Breaking the Ice: John Eliot and Translation

To form Words of Art, is a work that requireth time and judgment. I have adventured to break the ice.

-Eliot, *Logick Primer*

From the 1640s through the 1680s, John Eliot worked among the Algonquian people, spreading the Gospel and establishing “Praying Towns” of converted Native Americans.¹² Eliot understood that without fluency in native language, he “would make but slow progresse” in converting the Indians.¹³ Throughout the Eliot Tracts he underscores the need for increasing his own language skills, for finding Native American interpreters, and for teaching the people to read and write. When Eliot began evangelizing the Algonquians, they had no written language; he faced a culture whose orality posed a stark contrast to his own textually-oriented religion and culture.¹⁴ Thus, translation of the Scriptures became Eliot’s life task.

In translating the Bible for the Native Americans, Eliot believed that he provided them with a textual center for the faith to which he introduced them. As a good Puritan minister, Eliot imposed the tenet of *sola scriptura* on the Native Americans, but he also recognized the mediating nature of the biblical text in a faith that was meant to be unmediated.¹⁵ Translation, of course, is another form of mediation, and Eliot was anxious about the mediating role the translated text and he, the translator, played. He writes in the preface to the *Logick Primer* (1672), an Algonquian guide to the reasonableness of the Scriptures, that “To form Words of Art, is a work that requireth time and judgment” and that he had only first begun “to break the ice.”¹⁶

The *Logick Primer* appears roughly halfway into, but at the height of, Eliot's missionary career, and in it he acknowledges that his translation work has merely scratched the surface. Fewer Native Americans had been converted than Eliot had hoped, the whole Bible had not appeared in translation, and few English had competency in Algonquian.¹⁷ Eliot struggled with the seeming fruitlessness of his evangelism, and he saw translation as part of the problem. Translating the Bible had failed to actualize Eliot's dream, and though he never abandoned it, he saw the work of translation as an unfulfilled promise. Despite Eliot's doubts and frustrations, he continued to conceive of translation as the formation of "words of art." Contrary to the way much scholarship portrays him, Eliot was interested in the texture of language.¹⁸ In his translations of Indian confessions, or conversion narratives, in conjunction with his more explicit theorizations of language, Eliot theorized the problem of mediation inherent in translation and in religious experience.

In *Tears of Repentance* (1653), a collection of Indian confessions from inhabitants of Natick, the first and most famous Praying Town, Eliot theorizes conversion, translation, and the relationship between experience and text. He explicitly represents translation as a problem.¹⁹ *Tears* is a language experiment, offering experimental proof, demonstrating the reproducibility of the confessions, and attempting to establish a methodology for the translation of the confessions.²⁰ Grappling toward a methodology, Eliot interrupts the confessions with a justification for his translation:

And because all witnesses [translators] failed me, let me say but this, I began and have followed this work for the Lord according to the poor

measure of grace received, & not for base ends. I have been true and faithful unto their souls, and in writing and reading their Confessions, I have not knowingly, or willingly made them better, than the Lord helped themselves to make them, but am verily perswaded on good grounds, that I have rendered them weaker [...] than they delivered them; partly by missing some words of weight in some Sentences, partly by my short and curt touches of what they more fully spake, and partly by reason of the different Idioms of their Language and ours.²¹

Eliot appends to his text a statement of the translation's faithfulness because he was the only English Algonquian speaker present for the confessions and because he realizes that the process of translation is not transparent. His own shortcomings as a translator, he suggests, perform the erasure of his mediating presence. Eliot's translations themselves are not the evidence of grace his audiences seeks; readers desire proof of experience, which comes through the tears in Eliot's title. The authenticity of the confessions is hindered by their representation in text, because translation further removes the reader from the source. Though Eliot argues that the message will be communicated despite his "weak" translations, his faults as translator do not suggest the transparency of translation; instead they claim the transparency of the confessor's experience. Translation, if anything, obscures the authenticity of experience: it makes the confessions seem weaker.

Because the translated text of Indian confessions alone is not evidence enough of authentic conversion, *Tears* multiplies assenting witnesses. In *Tears'* opening letter to the Christian reader, Richard Mather invites the reader to "weigh and consider the ensuing

Confessions” as proof that “any sound and saving work be yet wrought in” the Indians.²² Mather sets the stage for Eliot’s experiment, acting as witness and inviting readers to become additional validating witnesses. Then he presents the problem—translation: “But how shall we know that the Confessions here related, being spoken in their Tongue, were indeed uttered by them in such words, as have the same signification and meaning with these that are here expressed”²³ Mather, and by extension Eliot, is concerned that readers will doubt the results of the conversions represented in the confessions because Eliot was the sole translator. “It is true,” Mather writes, that we only have only one man’s testimony, “but yet it is such an one, as is unwillingly alone in this matter, having seriously endeavored to have had divers other Interpreters present at Natick that day.”²⁴ Mather puts his trust in Eliot’s translations and argues that the readers should do the same. Other interpreters, though, and witnesses like Mather, could not verify that the English words in *Tears* “have the same signification and meaning” as the Algonquian words the Indians spoke. Mather’s validation appeals to the experience of the Natick Indians—to their tears—and not to the veracity of the translations.

Eliot’s familiarity with Algonquian was unusual. He could not find any other qualified English-speaking translators to certify his translations at Natick, and he was thus compelled to find someone else to justify his translations in the opening letter. It is important that Mather, rather than Eliot alone, did the work of justification; he was an assenting witness to Eliot’s character and to the faithfulness of his translations, but he himself could not speak the native language. Mather’s authenticating opening letter suggests that translation hinders transparency, and he instead turns to other kinds of

evidence. Those present during the confessions who were unable to understand the language spoken, like Mather, could still understand the events occurring: “To see and to hear the Indians opening their mouths, and lifting up their hands and their eyes in solemn Prayer to the living God” was confirmation enough. Hearing the mouth open, without understanding what it produces, is coupled with seeing; bodies, not words, authenticate experience for Mather and for Eliot’s English audience. Mather goes on to accumulate evidence for the confessors’ true faith:

And though they spake in a language, of which many of us understood but little, yet we that were present that day, we saw them, and we heard them perform the duties mentioned, with such grave and sober countenances, with such comely reverence in gesture, and their whol carriage, and with such plenty of tears trickling down the cheeks of some of them, as did argue to us that they spake with much good affection, and holy fear of God.²⁵

Mather, and the others present, read the bodies of the Indians as evidence of conversion. Bodies become assenting witnesses, and countenances stand in for words. When linguistic translation fails, material signs must be read, and the very necessity of this body-reading confirms the difficulty of translation itself. Mather is not the lone witness in *Tears*. In some individual confessions, Eliot appends a witness statement to an Indian’s speech. After Waban’s speech, for example, Eliot includes another witness’ testimony that Waban “spake these later expressions with tears.”²⁶ Proliferating witness statements

testify to the authenticity of an Indian's conversion, and they are necessary because translation is not transparent.

Not only is translation opaque, but Eliot suggests that translation exposes another site of opacity; it reveals the gap between text and experience. The gospel Eliot preached to the Indians was not simply textual; his goal was to prepare Native Americans to have a saving experience of God by providing them with basic knowledge of his faith. Through his missionary and translation work, Eliot sought to forge a link between the experimental and the textual. In one sense, translation further removed the text from experience: it presented another layer of mediation. Yet the goal of translation for Eliot was to bring text closer to experience by providing Bibles and religious texts in the Algonquians' own language. The complexity of translation meant that it had the potential to reinforce or undo the link between text and experience. Like all his fellow Puritans, Eliot believed that a direct experience of God was the only authentication of true conversion and that, although the text (biblical, sermonic, etc) could facilitate that experience, the text could also become one more mediating obstacle to an immediate encounter with the divine. Translated texts, Eliot worried, posed an even greater risk of mediating experience and obscuring truth.

Yet Eliot firmly believed that by providing religious texts in the Native Americans' own language, he was giving them individual access to God. In 1664, Robert Boyle wrote to Eliot that "we desire care may be taken that they reteyne their owne native Language."²⁷ Both men recognized the importance of this, not only for the conversion of the Indians, but also for the project of scientific inquiry. Rivett reads Boyle's desire as an

expression of the Royal Society's "nullius in verba," thus Eliot "marks an epistemological turn from reliance on textual language to reliance on a disciplined kind of sensual data discernable through techniques of performed speech and witnessing."²⁸ Eliot expected that his translations would enable the Indians to access God in their own language so they would not need to "take [someone's] word for it." Because most Native Americans could not read, the text was most often a "performed speech;" therefore Eliot hoped that the translated text would act more like "sensual data" for the listening Indian than as an obstacle to conversion.

But in response to Boyle's letter, Eliot wrote the *Indian Grammar*, a text designed to teach the Indians to read, and his ultimate goal was to produce an entire Bible in their language. So Eliot marks a crossroads in the epistemological turn Rivett rightly identifies; in his translations, he made the Indians reliant on a "textual language" and on an empirical "science of the visible."²⁹ Throughout the Eliot Tracts, Eliot enacts an empiricism of grace, teaching the Indians methods for discerning grace in their own souls while yet relying on the text as a technology of grace.

Although the Bible was central to Eliot's missionary project, the text was never a substitute for the experience of grace. In a June 1681 letter to Boyle Eliot writes: "Lord open a gospel dore! until we have Bibles, we are not furnished to cary the Gospel unto them for we have no means to cary religion thither."³⁰ The text, then, was the means, the vessel through which authentic experience of the saving gospel could occur. Like his fellow ministers in New England, who worked to compensate for the mediating nature of the Bible as textual center of religious experience, Eliot sought to lay the foundation for

an experimental faith. At the close of one of the Eliot Tracts, *The Light Appearing More and More* (1651), largely a collection of Eliot's letters, compiler Henry Whitefield explains the role of the biblical text in conversion:

The Lord hath made this Word the only outward instrumental means to bring home these wandring sinners; to the Word they have attended from the first; from this they have received their light; unto this they have given up themselves; without this they will not stirre; from this they will not depart; from hence they have their peace, and have seen good days under the Kingdome of our Lord Christ.³¹

English assumptions about Native Americans ooze through Whitefield's words. He highlights the agency of the material text as a kind of token ("outward instrumental means"); its anchoring affect on a people whose presumed nomadic way of life seemed to stand in the way of English religion (from "wandring sinners" to "they will not depart"); and its pacifying nature for an ostensibly war-like people. Like Whitefield's conclusion, most of the Eliot Tracts emphasize how the Bible enacts change on Indian culture, but even Whitefield writes that the text is only an "outward instrumental means." The Indians receive "their Light" from the Word, but the Spirit of God is the source of that light. In order to prepare the Indians for the light's reception, Eliot also taught them to appeal to the natural world and to their natural reason as sources of divine knowledge.

In *The Light Appearing* Eliot records a question some Indians had asked him: "Can one be saved reading the book of the creature?" Eliot tells his readers that the Indians had asked this question when he "taught them, That God gave us two books, and

that in the book of the creature, every creature was a word or sentence.”³² The natural world, like the biblical text, instructs on matters of faith. Though we cannot know just what Eliot taught the Indians about the book of creation, that he taught them to read their experience of the natural world confirms his interest in experimental faith. Other tracts demonstrate Eliot’s appeal to the Indians’ natural reason. *A Further Accompt of the Progress of the Gospel* (1659) includes, in addition to several of Eliot’s letters, a translation; “Some Helps for the Indians Shewing them how to Improve their Natural Reason” is a short defense of the Christian religion that relies on reason not Scripture. In *A Further Accompt*, “Some Helps” follows Eliot’s attempts to undermine the concerns of some commissioners that his translation might not be “understood” or “true,” but then he offers not a biblical translation but a treatise on natural religion.

“Some Helps” displays the link between experience and text that translation potentially threatens: it prepares a way to the biblical text through experience. The title page suggests that the text will “improve [the Indians’] natural reason” in two ways: “1. By leading them to see the Divine Authority of the Scriptures. [and] 2. By the *Scriptures* the Divine Truths necessary to *Eternall Salvation*.”³³ “Some Helps,” though, only provides the foundation for these realizations. Although it functions as a language-learning tool—the opening letter gives instructions on pronunciation and parts of speech—“Some Helps” appeals to the spiritual man through the natural man. As the letter to the reader states, “Some Helps” will persuade the Indian reader that he is “*utterly out of the way*” and then will move him to “*inquire* what he shall do to be saved, *and listen*

unto that.”³⁴ “Some Helps” demonstrates Eliot’s theorization of the relationship between text and experience. Texts can only appeal to the natural.

The main text of “Some Helps” is written in Algonquian with the English translation printed in small text directly above it, and it is structured in question and answer format, the first question being “How prove you that there is a God?” (343). The text proceeds to answer this and logically subsequent questions without recourse to Scripture. To the question “How can you prove that there is but one God?,” for example, the text answers: “Because the reason why singular things of the same kind are multiplied is not to be found in the nature of {God} for the reason why such like things are multiplied is from the fruitfulness of their causes: but {God} hath no cause of his being, but is of himself therefore he is one.”³⁵ The natural world is a religious manual for the illiterate and “natural” Indian that ultimately opens the way to an authentic religious experience.

In his letters to the New England Corporation and other English audiences, Eliot emphasizes the experiential transformation of individuals in the praying towns. The importance of experience in faith is apparent in the frequently included lists of the Indians’ questions, like that in which the question about the book of the creature appears.³⁶ The questions also communicate to the English the Indians’ interest and instruction in doctrinal knowledge. Experience, the proof of faith, and text merge in the question lists. Eliot writes, “You may perceive many of the questions arise out of such texts as I handle, and I do endeavour to communicate as much Scripture as I can,” but

communicating scripture could not assure the saving experience of grace, nor was knowledge of it evidence of conversion.³⁷

The first of several questions Eliot lists in *The Light Appearing* exhibits his dual stress on experience and text. One question the Indians “have propounded,” Eliot writes, is “If a man know Gods Word, but beleeve it not; and he teach others, is that good teaching? and if others beleeve that which he teacheth, is that good believing, or faith?”³⁸ Eliot brings attention to the potential broken linkage between textual knowledge and experiential faith. He does not include whatever answer he gave this question, but the question with which he replies accentuates the distinction between knowledge and experience. The Indians respond to Eliot’s query, “how they could tell when a man knoweth Gods Word that he doth not beleeve it,” with “When he doth not do in practice answerable to that which he knoweth.”³⁹ This is not simply faith versus works, for certainly Eliot the Puritan believed that only God can truly judge the soul; here he demonstrates the Indians’ awareness that knowledge—in particular, knowledge of the Text—does not equal experiential transformation.

The Eliot Tracts intimate that the Indians often inquired about the disjunction between external behavior and the internal state of the soul. The Indian confessions, or petitions for church membership, that appear throughout the Tracts also highlight the potential discontinuity between textual and experiential knowledge. Although true grace, for Eliot, does come through the Bible, it does so only once it is experientially felt. The goal of translation should be to offer the biblical text in its purest possible form, a form that is not experience itself but that paves the way for experience.

Though the confessors do attempt to demonstrate some doctrinal knowledge, their main purpose is to narrate their paths towards conversion and to provide evidence for their changed souls. They do so by illustrating how their attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, but most of all, hearts have been transformed. *A Late and Further Manifestation* (1655) recounts the examination of a small group of Native Americans who were intended for church membership at Roxbury in April of 1654. The elders sought to determine whether the Indians truly understood their answers through lived experience: the elders “thought it not fit to ask them in Catechisticall method strictly, in which way Children might answer”⁴⁰ The elders seek confirmation of catechistical and doctrinal knowledge requisite for Church membership even among the English colonists, but the examination privileges questions pertaining to experience.

Eliot writes that the recorded trial concerning doctrine was the second part of an extended examination, the first being “what experience they had found of Gods grace in their hearts, turning them from dead works, to seek after the living God.”⁴¹ Though Eliot writes that he had a better knowledge of the confessors’ sincerity than others might and “believed the conversion of these poor *Indians*,” he and the elders express caution about too quickly granting church membership.⁴² Eliot’s witnessing of Indian conversions confirms for him an experiential knowledge that the language of the examination and the textual words of confessions could not capture.

Like his contemporaries Cotton, Shepard, and Hooker, Eliot emphasized the necessity of transforming the heard word into lived experience. His letter to the reader in

Tears shows that his Indian audience enacts this transformation despite his own linguistic failings:

their expressions, both in Prayer, and in the Confessions which I have now published, are far more, and more full, and spiritual, and various, then ever I was able to express unto them; in that poor broken manner of Teaching which I have used among them. Their turning Doctrins into their own experience, which you may observe in their Confessions, doth also demonstrate the Teachings of Gods Spirit.⁴³

“Turning Doctrins into their own experience” is Eliot’s ultimate hope. The Spirit, not the text, is the true teacher. Eliot represents his work among the Indians as prophetic work, demonstrating the power of God’s word and the agency of human language inspired by the Spirit. He desires that the Indians will overlay previous experience with new, godly experience, which the text facilitates, giving experience a foundation and vocabulary. But experience supersedes the text.

The initial act of hearing is central to each confession and confirms for Eliot’s English audience the important role he and other missionaries have played and have yet to play. One confessor, Monequassun, makes the experience of hearing the word central to his conversion. He recounts multiple occasions on which he had heard the word but “broke” or rejected it until he finally prayed, “teach me to hear thy Word.”⁴⁴ The “word,” in each confession, has multiple meanings: a text from Scripture, a catechism, a sermon. For Monequassun and others, the repeated act of hearing eventually takes effect and God’s Spirit uses the word to induce internal realization and lived experience. But

hearing becomes especially tricky when language barriers exist. The confessions in *Tears*, Eliot argues, will become “instruments” of conversion for their readers, but he admits that the instrument and its resulting knowledge could be limited by the challenges of translation. Although he ultimately argues that linguistic obstacles only serve to confirm the experimental nature of Indian conversions—God’s language breaks into their souls via spiritual, not natural, means—he recognizes the opacity of translation and its potential to disrupt authentic experience.

While both text and experience must be active in true conversion, Eliot’s emphasis on the text creates problems for translation. In *Tears* and in the confessions included in *A Further Account of the Progress of the Gospel* (1660), Waban expresses concern that something is lost in translation. He begins: “Unto this day I do understand but little of the English Language; the Word of God came not first unto my heart by the English Language.”⁴⁵ Because he did not first hear the Word of God in what he takes to be its original language, Waban fears he does not understand it. After this first sentence, he continues in the traditional confession structure, but his confession is haunted by the anxiety that his ignorance of the English language suggests the deficiency of his belief. In *Tears*, Waban asks if he “prayed to God in our Language, whether could God understand” his prayers, and Waban mentions this in the *A Further Account* confession as well: “but if I should pray, it may be it is vain to pray in my language; could I speak *English*, I might learn to pray.”⁴⁶ Though he confesses that he comes to faith and learns that God can understand all languages, Waban feels a barrier between himself and the

text. Because Eliot emphasizes the text as a tool for accessing God, Waban's felt distance from the text means he also senses an experiential lack and feels a distance from God.

Waban's anxiety implies that the Bible and the Christian God are the property of the English—that language and content are inseparable and that God is bound by words. Though Eliot does not comment on it, Waban's fear echoes through the Eliot Tracts. Eliot recognizes a similar fear in the New England Corporation's reluctance to support the printing of an Algonquian Bible.⁴⁷ In every text from the Tracts that contains translated Indian confessions, and in each moment where he addresses the process of translation, Eliot legitimizes the translations. The self-anxiousness of these justifications echoes Waban's fear that the translated text is somehow inauthentic and cannot therefore generate a genuine experience of God.

Again, Eliot does not let his assenting voice stand alone. In *A Late and Further Manifestation*, Eliot informs his readers that before the examination he told the assembly:

if any one doubted of the Interpretations that should be given of their Answers, that they would Propound their doubt, and they should have the words scanned and tried by the Interpreters, that so all things may be done most clearly. For my desire was to be true to Christ, to their soules, and to the Churches: And the trying out of any of their Answers by the Interpreters, would tend to the satisfaction of such as doubt.⁴⁸

In this passage, one of many similar calls for validating witnesses, Eliot acknowledges translation as an often opaque and difficult process and admits that his readers may doubt

the veracity of the translations. The “trying out” is necessary because translation does not work in a one-to-one correspondence.

The universal language theories, with which Eliot was familiar, sought the one-to-one correspondence that translation made impossible; they attempted to reverse Babble, and they looked for a language free from ambiguity. Though Eliot had some faith in such a project, he did not find its confirmation in the native language he translated; he did not find a “pure” and natural language. Rather than opening up previously unexplored meanings, the meeting of languages in translation exposed the fundamental difficulty of making language correspond to experience. His experience with translation suggested to him all the more the need for such a universal language.

In a letter to English minister Richard Baxter, Eliot shows his hand: he worries over translating Baxter’s *A Call to the Unconverted*, performing humility but also exposing his own anxieties about how translation transforms a text. In asking permission to translate *A Call to the Unconverted* for the Indians, Eliot writes to Baxter that he is “forced sometime to alter the Phrase, for the facilitating and fitting it to our Language, in which I am not so strict as I was in the Scripture.”⁴⁹ He at once apologizes to Baxter for taking such arrogant liberties, worrying that he might alter the meaning of Baxter’s sermon in some fundamental way. If the Bible’s form is essential to its meaning, as Eliot suggests, then translation does transform it. The impossibility of a one-to-one correspondence in translation necessarily results in transformation.

Eliot goes on in his letter to Baxter to dream of some way around the problems of translation. A “universal Character and Language,” Eliot writes, would be “a singular

Promotion of the great Design of Christ.”⁵⁰ He proposes Hebrew as a universal language because “it is capable of a regular Expatiation into Millions of Words” and, as an added bonus, because it is the language spoken in heaven, so “why may we not make ready for Heaven in this Point?”⁵¹ Eliot slightly misses the goal of universal language schemes, as Baxter hints in his response, but he nonetheless implicitly acknowledges that translating the Bible from one language to another changes the text in meaning not just in outward form.⁵² Baxter addresses Eliot’s interest in the universal language in his response: “For the universal Character that you speak of, many have talked of it, and one hath printed his Essay, and his way is only by numeral Figures, making such and such Figures to stand for the Words of the same signification in all Tongues; but nobody regards it. I shall communicate your Motion here about the Hebrew, but we are not of such large and publick Minds as you imagin.”⁵³ Baxter all but dismisses Eliot’s idealism, arguing for the impossibility of erasing the problems of translation.

The epistemological problems Eliot identifies in the work of translation address a fear, not unlike Waban’s, that translation somehow corrupts the original text. Eliot’s does not suggest that the universal language projects he has heard rumors of would be exempt from the kind of textual corruption he imposes on Baxter’s sermon; instead, he proposes Hebrew construed as a language apart from all others. It is the language of heaven, God’s language, and thus—as the doctrinal scripture in Mather’s *Another Tongue* intimates—free from problems of mediation. In Eliot’s mind, Hebrew allows access to the original, uncorrupted biblical text.

Even the English Bible was a translation, whatever Waban may have thought, and it, too, further removed the reader from God's voice. Eliot believed and practiced *sola scriptura*, but because translation exposed a gap between text and experience, text itself was never a sufficient barometer of experience or the authenticity of that experience. The text could only enlighten the natural mind and prepare the heart for the experience of grace. To authenticate the conversions of his praying Indians, though, Eliot always propped up his texts with validating voices, but those voices, too, were textualized and translated.

In a letter to the New England Corporation dated October, 1658 and included in *A Further Accompt*, Eliot encloses several "notes" from various Indians at Natick. These notes, he writes, are "exhortations" the Indians "did deliver" on a day of fasting and prayer, and they directly respond to some passage from either Genesis or Matthew, the only two biblical books to have been translated at the time. Waban begins his note with a summary of a biblical passage, loosely following the plain style sermon format by opening with the doctrine.⁵⁴ He then offers an explication and an application: "Therefore what should we doe this day? goe to Christ the Phisitian. [...] Again, what is the lesson, which Christ would have us learne, that he *came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*"⁵⁵ Through these notes, Eliot demonstrates how avidly—and more importantly, how correctly—the Natick Indians read the Bible and digest its message. *A Further Accompt* was written as a plea for further funding for the printing of the entire Bible in Algonquian, and Eliot used the Indians' own voices to validate the success of his translation project.

By relying on Indian voices for validation, though, Eliot relied on translation. Thus, his translations proliferate, building one upon the other. First, Eliot translated the English Bible (which was, of course, already translated) into Algonquian; then the Indians translated it into experience (which was essential for conversion and what the confessions meant to prove); then the Indians translated that experience into verbal confessions; finally Eliot enacted a double translation, transcribing the oral confession into written English text. Not all of these layers were acts of linguistic translation, but the possibilities of misreading proliferated within each layer. This is why so much ink in the Eliot Tracts was dedicated to authentication and why readers at each level offered their own validating testimonies.

That Eliot includes witnesses for each stage of translation suggests his acknowledgement that translation always includes interpretation. There is not a one-to-one correspondence between English and Algonquian. And because a one-to-one correspondence between word and thing is the ideal of universal language schemes, Eliot's acts of interpretation further reveal native languages to be inadequate substitutes for a universal language. Only God's language is transparent, and all human attempts to approximate that fall short. Eliot himself acknowledges this when he prefaces his *Logick Primer* with his ice-breaking metaphor: "To form Words of Art, is a work that requireth time and judgment. I have adventured to break the ice; Lord raise more able Workmen to follow, and to mend both the Foundation and the Building."⁵⁶ When Eliot says he has "adventured to break the ice," he means that more translations are necessary, that more people need to evangelize the Native Americans and to learn their languages, but he

intimates that the promise of translation is always unfulfilled. In an August 1664 letter to Boyle he writes,

my purpose is if the Lord will, & that I doe live, to set upon some essay & beginning of reducing this language unto rule, which, in the most common & usefull points, I doe see, is reducible: though there be corners, & anomalies full of difficulty to be reduced under any stated rule, as, your selfe know better than I, it is in all languages. I have not so much either insight or judgment, as to dare to undertake any thing worthy the name of a Grammar. [...] But as this is a work for the morrow, to day my work is Translation.⁵⁷

That Algonquian can be reduced to rule means it is like all languages, full of obstacles and anomalies, but “this is a work for tomorrow,” Eliot argues. When Eliot published his grammar, *The Indian Grammar Begun* (1666), only two years later, he found confirmation that language was “full of difficulty.” Though Eliot never abandoned his belief in the necessity of translation, his layering of validating text upon validating text betrays his awareness of the opacity of translation and of the difficulty of language. He looked to Hebrew as a language free from this difficulty, but unless Hebrew was embraced universally, each witness, each confession, each grammatical rule would merely break the ice—only to leave the witness, confessor, writer, or reader drowning in the difficulties of language.

III. A Box Full of Keys: Roger Williams's *A Key into the Language of America*

A little key may open a box, wherein lies a bunch of keys.

-Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*

Roger Williams writes this in the first paragraphs of *A Key into the Language of America* (1643). Though *A Key* has been read as a grammar, as an ethnology, or as the foundation of our knowledge about seventeenth-century Native Americans, Williams's text openly presents itself as a text that is more than the sum of its parts, as the door to more doors, as the "little key" that opens a box full of keys.⁵⁸ I take the box full of keys to be the guiding metaphor of Williams's translation work, in juxtaposition to Eliot's ice-breaking metaphor. Eliot breaks through ice only to find more obstacles, but Williams's doors open to a multitude of new discoveries. Williams finds door after door, but he has the key to each. Because Williams's work among the Narragansett was less textually centered than Eliot's missionary work, he was able to think of translation as generative rather than stunting. Native languages offered him more promise than Eliot; he saw them as a key to narrowing the gap between experience and text or language. Though he, like Eliot, recognized the opacity of translation, he saw this opacity as productive of new mixtures that generated new knowledge. Williams idealized the communalizing function of Narragansett orality and the language's reflection of the natural world. Both of these claims about language realized a connection between experience and language that mirrored universal language projects.

David Read, in *New World, Known World* (2005), argues that "Williams treats the relative simplicity of Native American life not sentimentally but experimentally; to

engage with that life is, so to speak, to have a ‘clean lab’ in which to study God’s plan being acted out in the wilderness—that is, in the human plane.”⁵⁹ As Read and others explain, Williams’s *A Key* provided the English with more knowledge of Native American culture than they had previously, and Williams made comparisons between the Narragansett and the English in order to better understand God’s ways working themselves out in humanity.⁶⁰ I think Read is right in part: Williams did imagine *A Key* as a study in which careful observation could lead to larger principles. But *A Key* is much more than an ethnological study of “primitive” humanity; it is about how language works. The many texts about the new world printed for English audiences, whether language-centered texts like Williams’s and Eliot’s or travel narratives, functioned as curiosity cabinets; they presented evidence in the lab Read describes.⁶¹ But for those engaged in the actual work of translation, theory had to become practice. *A Key* is both an example of practical translation and linguistic theory.

The key to the Narragansett language was also a key to their culture and to language itself. The structure of *A Key* follows its opening logic: each chapter focuses on an aspect of Narragansett life and culture, and Williams begins each chapter with particular observations on that aspect, moving between observations and dialogues in Narragansett that are translated into English. At the close of each chapter the topic opens into an “observation in generall.” In chapter VIII, “Of their persons and parts of the bodie,” for example, Williams concludes with the general observation that “Nature knows no difference between Europe and Americans in blood, birth, bodies, &c. God

having of one blood made all mankind.”⁶² Every chapter concludes with a “more particular” observation in verse form. Chapter VIII ends with this verse:

Boast not proud English, of thy birth & blood,
Thy brother Indian is by birth as Good. [...]
By nature wrath’s his portio, thine no more
Till Grace his soule and thine in Christ restore
Make sure thy second birth, else, though shalt see,
Heaven ope to Indians wilde, but shut to thee.⁶³

Like many of *A Key*’s general observations and verses, this chapter conclusion compares the Indians to the English, seizing the opportunity to reprimand the “civilized” English for their depravity. Williams proclaims the essential and natural goodness of the Indians, a common refrain in the chapters’ conclusions, but he reminds all readers that ultimate meaning lies in the salvation and spiritual transformation of both the “wilde” Indians and the English. The closing verses move from the particular to the general and from the cultural to the spiritual. Thus, the particularities of Indian culture act as keys for understanding the nature of the people in general and for observing the visible as evidence of what cannot be seen; English and Narragansett material life and language are signs of their respective spiritual states. For Williams, language is most often the key that opens both of these doors—a key to culture and a key into divine mysteries. Because language is the key, Williams structures his observations, particular and general, around dialogues in Narragansett translated into English. The key that opens a box containing more keys is language, but language is also what lies behind the unlocked doors.

In *Forked Tongues*, David Murray writes that Williams's *A Key* has been used more as a source of knowledge about early Indian culture "than for any specifically linguistic insight."⁶⁴ Almost twenty years after Murray published *Forked Tongues*, this is still largely true. Even Cohen's recent analysis of *A Key*, which focuses on Narragansett communication structures, scarcely comments on the translation at the heart of the Williams's text. My purpose here is to attend to the linguistic, to mine *A Key* for insight into how Williams might have imagined the epistemological work of language and translation.

If anxieties about the text's corruption seep into Eliot's translation project, Williams presented a more flexible idea of language itself. Rather than viewing language as the necessary foundation for civilization and conversion, Williams sought an understanding of the language in its own right and for the subsequent knowledge it would open. Whereas those surrounding Eliot worried that translation corrupted the text, Williams saw the process of translation as productive, generating new knowledge and new ways of accessing that knowledge.⁶⁵ *A Key* thus represents inter-linguistic contact as genuine exchange, as opposed to the exchange of religion for riches that Mather suggests in *Another Tongue*. Williams offered the Indians a written language and the English a grammar book, but he gained from his education in Narragansett the belief that text could faithfully mediate language and experience.

Like Eliot, Williams thought of translation as an experimental project. Whereas Eliot experimented with the role of language in conversion, or the nature of the translated text, Williams's interest in translation posed an experiment with the theories of universal

language projects. Williams's language experiment was not, like Eliot's, about deciphering and representing authentic religious experience; instead Williams argued that the Narragansett language functioned ideally as a more transparent mediator between words and experience than English. Against Eliot's doubt, Williams embraced the ideal of a universal language represented in Narragansett and theorized how language in general could reach toward this goal.

Williams's relative idealism was possible, in part, because his relationship with the Narragansett was not primarily religious and because he imagined his work to be that of the linguist more than the evangelist. Because he did not translate the Bible, his translation work had the freedom to explore language in its own right rather than as a tool for conversion. In *A Key's* opening letter to the reader, Williams writes that knowledge of the Narragansett language will enable his countrymen to converse with the "*Natives* all over the *Coutrey*: and by such converse it may please the *Father of Mercies* to spread *civilitie*, (and in his owne most holy season) *Christianitie*."⁶⁶ "God's most holy season" is a refrain seen throughout *A Key*; Williams hopes and prays for the conversion of the Indians, but he does not see it as his primary calling. He writes that he has "uprightly labored to suite my endeavours to my pretences: and of later times (out of desire to attaine their Language) I have run through varieties of *Intercourses* with them" concerning the things of religion, and he emphasizes that "there is no small *preparation* in the hearts of Multitudes of them."⁶⁷ Williams is attuned to the state of Indian souls, but he acknowledges his primary goal to be the attainment and understanding of language.

In *Christenings Make not Christians* (1645), Williams elaborates on his reasons for not evangelizing the Indians more aggressively. He notes the objection made against him, in which the critic adopts Williams's own language: "Why then if this be *Conversion*, and you have such a *Key of Language*, and such a dore of *opportunity*, in the knowledge of the Country and the inhabitants, why proceed you not to produce in *America* some patterns of such conversions as you speak of?"⁶⁸ The door Williams's key opens is not the door to conversion; he would not undertake such a "worke without a *Word*, a *Warrant* and *Commission*, for *matter*, and *manner*, from God," he writes.⁶⁹ His commission is to open the door of knowledge through language.

In his various justifications for not engaging more heavily in the project of Native American conversion, Williams emphasizes language as his first priority. *Christenings* defends Williams's lack of "productivity" by noting the "hardship" and necessity of learning Narragansett: "In matters of Earth men will helpe to spell out each other, but in matters of Heaven (to which the soule is naturally so averse) how far are the Ears of men hedged up from listening to an improper Language?"⁷⁰ A proper language, Williams suggests, will open ears to heavenly matters. Hence, he writes *A Key* partly with the goal of converting the Native Americans: language acquisition is the first step in evangelism. This, too, was Eliot's position, but *A Key* demonstrates more than just Williams's education in Narragansett; it also reveals what it had taught him about communication or language in general. "In matters of Earth men will helpe to spell out each other," Williams wrote, and Narragansett offered him a model for the kind of communal verbal exchange that could open reluctant ears. He structures *A Key* as a dialogue for the sake of

accessibility but also in order to demonstrate the kind of verbal exchange he sees as the foundations of Narragansett culture. The Narragansett conventions he describes in *A Key*—authenticity and community—are the principles on which he bases his translation.

Narragansett oral codes were the keys to understanding their culture and the keys to transforming language in general. The Narragansett relied on oral communication to persuade the community to consensus, and Williams saw oral persuasion as a linguistic and social ideal. In *A Key*, one sees the beginnings of a colonial interest in the eloquent Indian, which Thomas Jefferson wrote about more than a century later.⁷¹ Williams does not go as far as Jefferson will in suggesting that the Indian practice of deciding all communal action through persuasion, rather than through compulsion, is a model on which to build the early Republic, but Williams does idealize Narragansett oral practice. In chapter XXII, “Of their Government,” he notes that the leaders, or sachims, “have an absolute Monarchie over the people; yet they will not conclude of ought that concernes all, either Lawes, or Subsidies, or warrers, unto which the people are averse, and by gentle perswasion cannot be brought.”⁷² When taken with Williams’s opening remarks on the importance of pronunciation and on the “copiousness” of the Narragansett language, this passage suggests that Narragansett has a greater capacity to create understanding and consensus. And Narragansett “copiousness” mirrors the people’s “delight” in verbal exchange. “Their desire of, and delight in newes,” Williams writes in Chapter VIII, “Of Discourse and Newes,” “is great, as the Athenians.”⁷³ As Cohen notes, Williams “links Native audiences explicitly to classical republicanism through their valorization of

information circulation”—and I would add, through their belief in the ability of language to persuade, transform, and create consensus.⁷⁴

There is evidence of such a position with the text of *A Key*, as well. Williams structures the text around snippets of dialogue. He writes in the prefatory, “Directions for the use of the Language,” that he had originally intended to shape the entire text as a dialogue but abandoned it “for brevities sake.” But he continues: “yet (with no small paines) I have so framed every Chapter and the matter of it, as I may call it an Implicite Dialogue.” This form gives the text wider application, Williams believes, than a grammar or dictionary would, but it also highlights the role of conversation in Narragansett culture: dialogue is the key that opens an authentic exchange of minds.

That Williams configures the text through dialogue further demonstrates the centrality of verbal exchange to Narragansett culture and to his own linguistic theory. The dialogue that follows Williams’s observation on Narragansett government highlights the role of verbal exchange:

Péititeatch.	Let him come
Mishaúntowash.	Speak out.
Nanántowash.	Speak plaine. [...]
Wunnadsittamútta	Let us search into it. [...]
Cuttiantacompáwwem.	You are a lying fellow. ⁷⁵

In this exchange, the speakers use dialogue to “search into” truth. Thus, dialogue functions not only as a cultural ideal, but as an epistemological tool. Verbal exchange keeps the speaker accountable and uncovers the truth. The demand for authentic, plain,

and honest speech does not only reveal a defect in the Christianized English and an innate tendency toward civil order in the Indians; it also forms a foundational principle of Narragansett culture.

In chapter VIII, Williams describes a typical scene of Indian orality demonstrating why the language has many ways of describing honesty and falsehood. Honesty in communication is valued because verbal exchange determines who will lead: “Their manner is upon any tiding to sit round double or treble or more” wherein “a deepe silence they make, and attention give to him that speaketh; and many will deliver themselves either in a relation or news, or in a conflutation with very emphaticall speech and great action, commonly an houre, and sometimes two hours together.”⁷⁶ The audience’s attentive silence is matched by the speaker’s vocal and bodily presence; the speaker commands attention through his eloquence and physical persuasion. This description underscores the importance of public speech in Narragansett culture, and it marks orality as material. The body, not just words, persuades, and the body’s materiality mirrors the mouth’s speech. The body, then, becomes another mark of authenticity. It reflects the “emphaticall speech,” creating union between the oral and the material.

Williams’s praise for the orality of Narragansett culture was directly opposed to the politics of verbal exchange he fought in his own culture. Williams’s stance on the issue of conscience in religion informed his idealization of Narragansett orality. In the years surrounding *A Key*’s printing, Williams engaged in a pamphlet war with John Cotton on the subject of freedom of conscience. In his *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* (1644), Williams professes freedom of conscience, taking Cotton to task for a letter

written some years earlier that argued the state should punish religious offenses (such as blasphemy and idolatry) as well as civil ones.⁷⁷ The Narragansett practice of forestalling action until reaching a verbal consensus was the model Williams desired in his own public sphere. Open religious debate, he believed, would strengthen both church and state.

Cohen most persuasively examines the relationship between *A Key* and William's theology and politics and argues that the "visual, linguistic, and generic features of *A Key* imply, rather than insist on, a separation of the religious garden from the civic realm."⁷⁸ The formal elements of the text, including "material and linguistic structures," Cohen writes, "model[] the mode of passive proselytization" Williams practiced.⁷⁹ The content, Cohen argues, matches Williams's political writings, but the very materiality of the text demonstrates this claim. Thus both *A Key* and the larger body of Williams's work verify his admiration for the Narragansett practice of persuasion; a society in which language was used for debate and eventual consensus was more desirable than a society wherein language trapped and divided, which was Williams's own experience with his expulsion from Massachusetts.

Williams idealized Narragansett orality as politically and socially efficacious, but he seems to have understood the challenge of textualizing an oral language. In his prefatory "Directions for the use of the Language," Williams writes that he has "been at the paines and charges to Cause the Accents, Tones or sounds to be affixed" to the Narragansett type, "Because the Life of all Languages is in the Pronunciation."⁸⁰ The Narragansett admiration for one who speaks eloquently with "great action" is reflected in

Williams's sense that Narragansett is a living, oral language, but he extends this claim to "all Languages." Williams is aware that his act of textualizing Narragansett transforms it in some way.

Sandra Gustafson argues that in Eliot's missionary model, "'the Book' is the central symbol," but Williams's model, she claims, is the spoken word.⁸¹ He held a "relatively deep understanding of and appreciation for Narragansett society" that "included a lively sense of the spoken word's power for them and the importance of authentic speech."⁸² She speculates that if Williams had "continued with his early missionary efforts, he might have developed a missionary style with some fidelity to native oral modes of spiritual practice," a fidelity that Eliot, in her account, ignores.⁸³ I take this distinction between Eliot and Williams, for Williams's interest in orality enabled him to imagine language and translation as more generative than Eliot did. For Williams, the text did not necessarily undermine experience, and the material textuality of *A Key* mirrors Narragansett principles of orality.⁸⁴

In "Directions," Williams guides his reader through the process of maintaining the original character of the language as best as possible, but in these instructions he also acknowledges that the translations are not always equivocal: "The English for every Indian word or phrase stands in a straight line directly against the Indian: yet sometimes there are two words for the same thing [...] and then the English stands against them both." Williams is describing the material appearance of the translations on the page: the translations are arranged in columns, with the English directly parallel to the original,

divided by a vertical line. Often there is more than one Narragansett word for the English equivalent:

Npenowauntwâumen.	<i>I cannot speak your language.</i>
Matta nippánnawem	<i>I lie not.</i>
Cuppánnowem.	<i>You lie.</i>
Mattanickoggachòusk	<i>I am no lying fellow.</i>
Matntiantacómpaw.	
Matntiantásampáwwa. ⁸⁵	

The last three Narragansett words all translate to “I am no lying fellow,” but they each have a slightly different connotation. Williams does not elaborate here on these distinctions, yet in the preface, he writes that “their Language is exceeding copious, and they have five or six words sometimes for one thing.”⁸⁶ The material page reflects Williams’s translation theory: translation is not equivocal. “In a straight line directly against” materially represents the exchange between the two languages, but the columns on each side of the line are not equal; each language represents meaning differently. The movement on the page attempts to reflect the living, spoken word.⁸⁷ The copiousness of Narragansett opens it to a larger capacity for authentic verbal exchange, and this abundance is manifested on the material page.

Narragansett verbal profuseness, Williams argues, is beneficial, but it is also the result of Narragansett’s reflective relationship to the land. Ultimately, both of these qualities mean a more mutually reflective relationship between language and experience. Cohen notes the Narragansett’s connection between the people, their language, and the

landscape: they were a people on the move, he observes, “cued by the flux of food availability, disease, and trade.”⁸⁸ And landscape and language mutually structure one another: “Brush and rock piles were used to commemorate people and events, while landscape features in the undulating New England topography [...] were used to structure storytelling.”⁸⁹ The most striking aspect of Cohen’s analysis, though, is its extension to the material page. Cohen brings our attention specifically to layout and typography, arguing that “these features play with the temporality of reading, analeptically and proleptically restructuring interaction with the text.”⁹⁰ This “moving page,” as Cohen terms it, is in my reading also a manifestation of Williams’s interest in the relationship between the landscape and the Narragansett language. The oral/aural and material components of language are intimately connected, and both, Williams demonstrates, are structured by the land.

Throughout *A Key*, Williams observes that the Narragansett language displays the people’s unique relationship to the land; they are formed by their relationship to nature. In his chapter on the religion of the Narragansett, for example, Williams presents a dialogue concerning the creation of the world:

Tà suóg Mannítoowock.	<i>How many Gods bee there?</i>
Maunañog Mishaúnawock.	<i>Many, great many.</i>
Nétop machàge.	<i>Friend, not so.</i>
Paūsuck nañnt manit.	<i>There is only one God.</i>
Cuppíssittone.	<i>You are mistaken.</i>
Cowauwaúnemun.	<i>You are out of the way.</i> ⁹¹

Williams observes how this last phrase—“Cowauwaunemun”—“much pleaseth them, being proper for their wandering the woods, and similitudes greatly please them.”⁹² That Narragansett is structured by “similitudes” to nature suggests to Williams the people’s organic relationship to the land. In *Dispossession by Degrees* (1997), Jean M. O’Brien argues for a related reading of native language, one in which linguistic conventions “formed a principal source of identity and a sense of place that included but also transcended natal village.”⁹³ Language literally marks place. She gives as an example a reading of a passage from *A Key*: “The Narragansett word ‘Nqussutam, ‘*I remove house*,’ gave expression to a mobile way of life geared toward reaping seasonally available resources that fundamentally shaped the relationship of Indians to the land.”⁹⁴ O’Brien argues that language shaped native identity, but Williams goes beyond her model in suggesting that language organically reflects an identity shaped by the land; language grows out of landscape.

Language’s rootedness in nature reflects a major goal of universal language projects: to create a more organic language in which the word or symbol inheres in the meaning of the thing represented. John Wilkins’s *An Essay Towards a Real Character and Philosophical Language* (1668) offers a representative example of these universal language projects. His text attempts to reverse linguistic corruption by creating a language in which “signs and names express their *natures*,” and he argued that in his new scheme there would be no semiotic ambiguity, no false appearances caused by this ambiguity, and that words would be “answerable in their *character*” to the things to

which they correspond.⁹⁵ Williams saw in Narragansett an expression of the nature of things, because their language was situated so closely to the natural world.

Though he never explicitly linked Narragansett, or native languages in general, to universal language projects, Williams did identify Narragansett with Hebrew. In *A Key*'s letter to the reader, he observes that "some of their words [...] hold *affinitie* with the Hebrew," and he connects Narragansett culture to that of the Old Testament Jews (they both anoint heads, offer dowries for wives, and separate their women "during the time of their monthly sickness").⁹⁶ So though he did not claim native languages as a model for universal language schemes, he did see Narragansett as functioning as a universal language would. Williams saw the potential in indigenous language to narrow the space between text and experience. A language that emerged from the land and that structured communal life better reflected experience of the natural world and of daily life.

The success of Wilkins's project was dependent upon his assumption that all people agree to the same "internal notion or apprehension of things" because these notions are communicated to the mind through sensory experience.⁹⁷ Williams's *A Key* similarly assumes that the English and Narragansett had the same ideas about things, but the process of translation also reveals distinctions between languages that are ultimately productive of new knowledge: the copiousness of Narragansett gives the English a new way of thinking about honesty, for example, and the text-likeness of English prepares the Indian for eventual conversion.⁹⁸ Linguistic exchange is productive, but it is not transparent. In Williams's assessment, it neither corrupts the English text nor erases

Indian orality. The key opens the door from both sides. And because translation is not transparent, it becomes a key opening a box containing many more keys.

IV. Eliot and Williams in Context

Of course, the trans-cultural exchange *A Key* represents is also fraught with political trouble. Williams's key also affords the English a tool of control. Ultimately, *A Key* represents an orthodox desire to subsume native languages within a theologically prescribed hierarchy—even as Williams's own heterodoxy makes this a text about the superiority of “natural” language over the performative rhetoric of the plain style. He, like Eliot, cannot be exonerated from charges that translation also works to erase and control.

Both Williams and Eliot professed ideals about language that corresponded in many ways to contemporary universal language projects. Rather than reading their translation work as effacing the process of translation, I propose we read them as explicitly acknowledging that translation was not transparent. Instead, they worried about what it does efface—the original Hebrew text and authentic experience—that ultimately revealed a gap between text and experience that was the landmark anxiety of early American Puritanism—even in its heterodox forms.

Earlier seventeenth-century texts depicting inter-cultural communication often erased the process of translation, as Murray argues, or represented linguistic barriers as irrelevant in light of “English eloquence,” as Randall C. Davis says in his “Early Anglo-American Attitudes to Native American Languages” (2006).⁹⁹ But Eliot and Williams are

representative of English colonial attitudes toward translation. They first imagined native languages as complex in their own right and then openly depicted the work of translation as often opaque and riddled with difficulties, and these distinctions were a result of their Puritanness.

Translation sometimes exacerbated the Puritan anxiety about the gap between text and experience and sometimes offered new ways of compensating for that gap. Later Puritan encounters with Native Americans do not display this same anxiety. Jonathan Edwards's missionary work almost a century later demonstrates this shift: he avoided any direct linguistic encounter with Native Americans. Though he preached many sermons to Native American audiences during his tenure at Stockbridge, he always relied on interpreters. Translation was not effaced in Edwards's life and work; he entirely avoided it. Perhaps he never learned native languages because his career at the Northampton congregation ended in disaster, perhaps because he was getting along in age, or perhaps because it aroused an anxiety his philosophy worked to dispel. Edwards gave his career to theorizing and attempting to bridge the gap between text and experience, but Indian language never attracted his attention. Williams and Eliot, however, confronted the gap between text and experience. In this, they were very much like their fellow New England Puritans.

Notes

¹ Cotton Mather, *Another Tongue Brought In to Confess the Great Saviour of the World* (Boston, 1707), 3.

² David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 7.

³ Sarah Rivett, "Empirical Desire: Conversion, Ethnography, and the New Science of the Praying Indian," *Early American Studies* 4 1 (2006), 26.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵ Rivett's work is one strong exception to this. Craig White notes in that many scholars "restrict native expressions to terms either of tractability or resistance to conversion," but he proposes an alternative reading of Eliot's translation of the Indian confessions. White sees "extensions of native antecedents" in Eliot's forms, and he argues that these oral texts, though they survive only in translation, attest to the strength and perpetuity of early American native traditions. Similarly, Joanna Brooks, urging the narrators of early American religious-literary history to account for the plurality of experiences and the simultaneous violence and harmony of inter-cultural interactions, argues that native peoples learned English and "submitted to missionary indoctrination" in order to "defend their territorial homelands." White, "The Praying Indians' Speeches as Texts of Massachusetts Oral Culture," *Early American Literature*, 38.8 (2003), 439; and Joanna Brooks, "From Edwards to Baldwin," *Early American Literature*, 45.2 (2010), 428.

⁶ Most work on native languages and translation focuses only on how indigenous language changed as a result of contact with Europeans. Kathryn Napier Gray argues that Algonquian speakers "engaged with a cross-cultural understanding of language," and that incorporation of English, through cross-cultural encounters and, more importantly, through translation work like Eliot's, transformed native languages in ways that resist erasure narratives. Translation "provoked and quickened linguistic assimilation between different Algonquian dialects," and Eliot—despite his imposition of European linguistic and cultural models onto Algonquian—wanted to "maintain Algonquian communicative practice in speech as well as text." Most compelling, Gray demonstrates how Algonquians appropriated the translated Bible: she analyzes marginal notes in Indian Bibles to argue that these "written traces [...] establish a new form of dialogue" that occurs "without colonial interruption or explanation." "Written and Spoken Words and Words: John Eliot's Algonquian Translations," *Symbiosis* 7.2 (2003), 247, 248, 253. See also Susan Castillo, *Performing America: Colonial Encounters in New World Writing, 1500-1786* (London: Routledge, 2006). Castillo reads Eliot and Williams's as representative of dialogic encounter.

⁷ Matt Cohen's *The Networked Wilderness* also notes that recent scholarship has challenged the once-ingrained assumption of a strict binary division between Indian orality and colonial print culture. Native Americans, we now acknowledge, employed a system of communication that was materially constituted and read, or in Cohen's language, "inscribed," in that material—just as the colonists used the material book in ways that book history has elucidated. Cohen "The generation, archiving, and transmitting of messages involved language, narrative form, music, rhythm, intonation, gesture, choreography, costume, painting, and a range of inscriptive techniques" (7).

⁸ Castillo, *Performing America*, 14.

⁹ Scholarship concerning Native Americans outside New England has noted more specifically how indigenous linguistic forces shaped colonial languages and assumptions. See *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800*, eds. Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), especially the essays by Lieve Jooke, ("Descriptions of American Indian Word Forms in Colonial Missionary Grammars") and Rüdiger Schreyer ("Savage Languages in Eighteenth-Century Theoretical

History of Language”); and *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carmine G. Di Biase (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

¹⁰The Eliot Tracts consists of documents written and published from 1643 through 1671 concerning missionary work to Algonquian Indians in New England. Not all of the included texts were written by Eliot, though most were. Many are letters from Eliot to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, updating the English commissioners on his progress. For more on the Society’s role in the missionary project see Michael P. Clark, “Introduction,” *The Eliot Tracts*, 11-15.

¹¹ Castillo argues that Williams portrays “himself as the sole possessor of linguistic knowledge of Narragansett.” See Castillo, *Performing America*, 61. I agree with her on this point, but I want to open the text to a more complex reading that allows for acknowledgment of inter-cultural influence.

¹² For more on the “Praying Indian” and praying towns see John Eliot, *A Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England* (London, 1671). For scholarship see Dane Morrison, *Praying People: Massachusetts Acculturation and the Failure of the Puritan Mission, 1600-1690* (New York: P. Lang, 1995); Jean M. O’Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot’s Mission to the Indians before King Philip’s War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Kristina Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons: Praying Indians in Colonial America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.).

¹³ John Eliot, *The Glorious Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England*, ed. Edward Winslow, (London, 1649) in *The Eliot Tracts: With Letters from John Eliot to Thomas Thorowgood and Richard Baxter*, ed. Michael P. Clark (Westport, Ct: Praeger, 2003), 157. All pagination of the Eliot texts cited in this chapter is from Clark’s edition of *The Eliot Tracts*, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁴ For more on the materiality of Indian language, culture, and systems of communication see Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness*.

¹⁵ I would add to Gustafson’s argument, that Eliot further “textualized” Native American culture and experience by folding Native Americans into a biblical narrative through the use of typology. For example, in his *A Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel*, Eliot writes: “The English town called Marlborough doth border upon [the town Ogquonikanguamesut], as did the lines of the Tribe of Judah and Benjamin” (404). This is but one small example of Eliot’s inclination to typologize the Native Americans. Later in his career, Eliot took his typology beyond metaphor; he became convinced that the Indians were one of the Lost Tribes of Israel. For more on Eliot’s interest in this see Clark, “Introduction,” *Eliot Tracts*, 26-30. For primary material see Eliot, “The Learned Conjectures of Reverend Mr. John Eliot touching the Americans, of New and notable consideration, written to Mr. Thorowgood,” Clark, 409-428.

¹⁶ Eliot, *Logick Primer* (London, 1672), ii. The *Logick Primer* is not included in the Eliot Tracts.

¹⁷ By 1675 there were more than 500 praying Indians, but King Phillip’s War (1675-6) killed many and ravaged the missionary effort. See Clark, “Introduction” *The Eliot Tracts*, 15-24.

¹⁸ Kathryn Napier Gray writes, in “Written and Spoken Words and Worlds,” that Eliot’s *The Indian Grammar Begun* (London, 1666) creates a grammatical framework for Algonquian based on the verbs for “‘to be wise,’ ‘to pay,’ and ‘to keep’” so that “[w]isdom, money, and ownership become the basis on which the language is transcribed and understood” (243). Gray’s suggestion is the familiar one that Eliot imposed European cultural values on Native Americans through language. While Gray correctly observes Eliot’s reliance on verbs in his translations, her claim that Eliot did not “address,” or even understand, “the complex nature of the relationship between language and culture” fundamentally misreads Eliot’s

translation work and his anxiety about it (244). Gray, though, merely takes David Murray's cue that Eliot was not interested in language itself. See Murray, *Forked Tongues*, 14. For more on the role of verbs in Eliot's translation of native language see Catherine Fountain, "Worthy the Name of a Grammar: Verb Morphology and Conjugation in Carochi's *Arte de la Lengua Mexicana* (1645) and Eliot's *The Indian Grammar Begun* (1666)." *Historiographia Linguistica*, 36:2/3 (2009).

¹⁹ There is debate about to what extent Eliot himself participated in any of his translations. We know that he relied on Native American interpreters, who had probably learned English more thoroughly than he had Algonquin or Massachusett. David Murray argues that Eliot's translators did the "bulk of the adaptation and translation" and that the critical focus on Eliot at the expense of these interpreters has resulted in the story that "the encounters are presented as heroic cases of cultural adaptation by Eliot." *Forked Tongues*, 7.

²⁰ I mean to invoke a Boylean experimental model here, which I discuss at more length in chapter 1. Eliot corresponded with Robert Boyle throughout his missionary career, as Boyle oversaw the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Eliot explicitly framed his translation as experimental in a Boylean sense, it is not a stretch to argue that Boyle's empiricism influenced Eliot. Boyle was an advocate for Eliot's translations and seems to have inspired Eliot's *An Indian Grammar Begun* (London, 1666). See "Eliot to Boyle, 26 August 1664," *The correspondence of Robert Boyle* eds. Michael Hunter, Antonio Clericuzio and Lawrence M. Principe. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), 305-6. For more on the relationship between Boyle, Eliot and the empirical projects of both men see Sarah Rivett, "Empirical Desire: Conversion, Ethnography, and the New Science of the Praying Indian." Here Rivett also depicts Eliot's work as experimental, but as an experiment in grace.

²¹ John Eliot, *Tears of Repentance; Or, A Further Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel among the Indians in New England*, eds. John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew, Jr. (London, 1653), Clark, 283.

²² Richard Mather, "To the Christian Reader" *Tears of Repentance*. 264.

²³ *Ibid*, 264-5.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 265.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 266.

²⁶ Eliot, *Tears*, 272. The witness was John Wilson, pastor of the First Church in Boston from 1632-1667.

²⁷ John Eliot, "Eliot to Boyle 30 Sept 1670," *The Correspondence of Robert Boyle*, 188.

²⁸ Rivett, 22-3.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 19. Rivett borrows the term "science of the visible" from Michel Foucault, *The Order of Thing: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002); Rivett defines it "as a technology for producing evidence of grace as well as natural taxonomies" (19).

³⁰ John Eliot, "Eliot to Boyle 17 June 1681," *The Correspondence of Robert Boyle*, 256.

³¹ John Eliot, *The Light Appearing More and More Towards the Perfect Day, or a Farther Discovery of the Present State of the Indians in New England*, ed. Henry Whitefield (London, 1655) in Clark, 207.

³² *Ibid*, 193.

³³ Ibid, 341.

³⁴ Ibid, 327.

³⁵ Ibid, 348.

³⁶ In *The Poor Indian: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), Laura Stevens also comments on the questions Eliot includes in his Indian writings. In her reading they are signs of Eliot's mediation between the Indians and English readers: the questions, among other "rhetorical strategies," emphasize "the active role people in England can play in the conversion of Indians through the mechanism of overheard petition and thanks, and [they] display[] the results of prior charity through descriptions of the Indians' improved spiritual and material lives" (71).

³⁷ Eliot, *The Light Appearing*, 197.

³⁸ Ibid, 193.

³⁹ Ibid, 193.

⁴⁰ John Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospel among the Indians in New England* (London, 1655) in Clark, 309.

⁴¹ Ibid, 318.

⁴² Ibid, 319.

⁴³ *Tears*, 261.

⁴⁴ *A Late and Further Manifestation*, 18.

⁴⁵ John Eliot, *A Further Account of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England* (London, 1660) in Clark, 374.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 7, 374.

⁴⁷ In a letter to the New England Corporation in October, 1658 Eliot wrote that the commissioners had "moved this doubt whether the Translation I had made was generally understood." See *A Further Accompt of the Progresse of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England* (London, 1659) in Clark, 330.

⁴⁸ *A Late and Further Manifestation*, 308.

⁴⁹ John Eliot, "John Eliot to Richard Baxter, July 6, 1663," Clark, 430

⁵⁰ Ibid, 432.

⁵¹ Ibid, 432. John Wilkins argued that, in his universal language, words would be "answerable in their character" to the things to which they correspond. See Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character and Philosophical Language* (London, 1668), 17. Ultimately, Wilkins imagines a language free from representation. For more on universal language schemes see Robert Markley, *Fallen Languages: Crises of Representation in Newtonian England, 1660-1740* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁵² Eliot proposes a universal language that functions like any other language, though he imagines Hebrew as distinct. Many universal language theories proposed, instead, a kind of mathematical or symbolic language that ostensibly erased the ambiguity between word and thing. See Markley, *Fallen Languages*; and Vickers and Struever, *Rhetoric and the Pursuit of Truth*.

⁵³ Eliot, "John Eliot to Richard Baxter," 434.

⁵⁴ Waban's passage is Matthew 9:12-13: "But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." KJV.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 333.

⁵⁶ *The Logick Primer*, ii.

⁵⁷ "Eliot to Boyle, 26 August 1664," Clark, 306.

⁵⁸ In *Performing America*, Susan Castillo writes of the metaphor of the key as an "image of infinite regress, the key that opens boxes containing other keys, which in turn presumably open other boxes containing still more keys," which "implies that the meanings of America, like that of language itself, are virtually inexhaustible" (62).

⁵⁹ David Read, *New World, Known World: Shaping Knowledge in Early Anglo-American Writing* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 111. Read goes on to argue that like anthropology's premise to observe and "extract structural principles," Williams's *A Key* "employs a [...] premise in a largely pre-scientific, nonsecular fashion: the witness in the wilderness describes the nature of humankind" (111). To describe Williams's project as secular, though, is a fundamental misreading. Williams did, I believe and like Read argues, mean to study the nature of humanity, but he also strove to understand God's ways unfolded in human history.

⁶⁰ In Read's assessment, "the Narragansetts present an opportunity to observe, in as close to an unmediated fashion as one is likely to find, the ways that God works his purpose out at the most basic levels of the human condition" (120).

⁶¹ For more on curiosities and the way descriptions of Native Americans functioned as evidence see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing off in Early America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), especially chap 1; and Rivett, "Empirical Desire," respectively.

⁶² Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, (London, 1643), 53.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 53.

⁶⁴ Murray, *Forked Tongues*, 14.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Beecher Field similarly argues for a productive exchange between English and Narragansett, or Williams and the Indians: *A Key* "can be used to open the door from either side." See "A Key for the Gate: Roger Williams, Parliament, and Providence," *New England Quarterly*, 80.3 (September 2007), 368.

⁶⁶ Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, iii.

⁶⁷ Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, ix.

⁶⁸ Roger Williams, *Christenings Make not Christians* (London, 1645), 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 19.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 18-19.

⁷¹ For more on Jefferson's interest in the eloquence of the Native Americans see Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993) and Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷² Williams, *A Key*, 142.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 55.

⁷⁴ Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness*, 108.

⁷⁵ Williams, *A Key*, 142.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 55.

⁷⁷ See also John Cotton, *The Bloody Tenent Washed and Made White in the Bloud of the Lambe* (London, 1647) and Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent Yet more Bloody: By Mr. Cotton's Endeavour to Wash it White in the Bloude of the Lambe* (London, 1652).

⁷⁸ Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness*, 123.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 123.

⁸⁰ Williams, *A Key*, xiv.

⁸¹ Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power*, 36.

⁸² *Ibid*, 36.

⁸³ *Ibid*. 36.

⁸⁴ Cohen argues for a reading of *A Key* that attends to both its oral and material, or literate, elements. In its pages, Cohen argues, a reader finds not "the comforting space of Comenius's pedagogy or the illuminating realm of emblemata but instead a forest of gestures." (26). Translation engages both the printed and the oral, but Cohen does not consider translation in his analysis. If, as Cohen writes, Williams, and other seventeenth-century Englishmen who encountered the Indians, were engaged in "self-conscious theorization of communication," then translation must have been key for Williams's theorization (28). In addition, I argue, against Cohen, that for Williams, as for Eliot, the linguistic philosophy of Comenius and like-minded universal language advocates was essential and influential.

⁸⁵ Williams, *A Key*, 55.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, xiv.

⁸⁷ Cohen rightly corrects a misreading of the vertical line between the Narragansett and English columns; the line is perforated and thus demonstrates and mirrors Williams's political argument about threshold crossing. See Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness*, 114-5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 102.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 107.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 114.

⁹¹ Williams, *Key*, 131-2.

⁹² *Ibid*, 132.

⁹³ O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 17.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 17.

⁹⁵ Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character and Philosophical Language*, 13, 17.

⁹⁶ Williams, *A Key*, vi-vii.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 20.

⁹⁸ Of course, the Narragansett language itself changed as a result of inter-cultural encounter. Randall C. Davis argues that *A Key* acknowledged the "practical difficulties involved" in communicating across cultures more than previous accounts had, and he observes some of the ways that native languages changed. For example, *A Key* records "several Narragansett neologisms that were derived from English" See Davis, "Early Anglo-American Attitudes to Native American Languages," *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period*, 229-238.

⁹⁹ Davis mentions Columbus, Thomas Harriot, and John Smith as representative of those writers that depicted translation as unnecessary: "the eloquence of the English speaker is assumed to transcend any practical difficulties of translation." Though Davis does depict Williams as distinct from these writers, he argues that Williams still assumes "the superiority of English literacy." "Early Anglo-American Attitudes to Native American Languages," 234, 235.

Chapter 4

The Material Word: Jonathan Edwards and Language as an Image of the Divine

I. Words, those Dreadful Enemies

From March of 1739 to March of 1745, during the height of the Great Awakening in New England, Sarah Pierpont of New Haven, Massachusetts kept a diary.¹ Over the course of these years, Pierpont documented the sermons she heard and her reactions to them. In June of 1742, she records, she heard a sermon “Preached from those words ‘Examine yourselves whether ye be in the Truth,’” and she writes that she saw an image of herself in the minister’s words, just as the face sees its reflection in a mirror: “My Heart went sweetly along with the Sermon I thought I could say that a face answers to face in a glass. So my Heart answered to the Marks there given My soul seemd for a Little Space to be almost overcome with a sense of the sweet union.” Throughout the manuscript, Pierpont flags her spiritual journey through sermons such as this one. Sermons, the diary is explicit, do something to her: they instigate change, reflection, hope, and conviction. But spiritual transformation took place in the space between sermons as she reflected on them, wrote about them, and worked out her doubt through the act of writing. As minister Ebenezer Parkman’s introductory remarks to the Memoirs state, “She was one that obtained her orthodoxy not only by Tradition and History but by Tryal and Experience.” The sermons she heard communicated tradition and history, but they also gave her ways to work out her salvation experientially—through tests and trials. Pierpont’s diary was a space of testing herself against the sermons; the material act of writing was as important as hearing the sermon and sensing God’s work on the soul.

In April of 1740, Pierpont records hearing eighteen sermons preached by “the wonderful Mr. J...E.”² These sermons, she writes, are the “most soul-searching sermons that ever I heard,” giving “shocks” to her soul and her whole “frame.” This passage begins as a recollection of Mr. J. E.’s sermons but ends as a self-reflection: Pierpont transitions from recalling her unsteady frame at the time of hearing the sermon to a soul-searching, present-tense plea for God to appear “to discover to me that I am in a state of nature and [...] push me out of doubt.” J. E.’s sermon awakened Pierpont’s soul and body in the moment of its aural reception, but its effective work continued and deepened as Pierpont reinforced the initial experience through the act of writing. Jonathan Edwards, perhaps Pierpont’s mysterious “J...E,” would have been well pleased with Pierpont. Throughout his career as pastor of the Northampton, Massachusetts church, he worked to retain a sense of spontaneity and the Spirit’s immediate presence in his sermons. Pierpont, whether her J. E. was Edwards or another Great Awakening preacher, experienced an unmediated encounter with God in the eighteen sermons she heard, and her Memoirs model just what Edwards desired: that the auditor would experience the immediate presence of God in the sermonic moment and then reflect on and carry out that encounter through her own experience.

Jonathan Edwards was the most important chronicler and philosopher of the experimental faith fostered by the Great Awakening. As part of this philosophy, he forged a middle ground between the Old and New Lights—the two rival doctrinal groups of the Great Awakening—attempting to work out a philosophy of religious experience and to develop a vocabulary for bodily affect so that language would mirror the

performance of religious affection.³ There were, Edwards argued, no sure visible signs of regeneration, but he maintained the importance of right religious affections. Pierpont's *Memoirs* offer an archive for how Great Awakening sermons were experienced—for how they were heard. They describe daily religious experience in a language less mediated by religious authority; they demonstrate right religious affections that are written on the body in language that attempts to mirror and capture that experience; and they exhibit a reflexive relationship between experience and text. The Great Awakening, with its extemporaneous preaching and highly physical religious experience, threatened to separate these—or to create a gap between experience and theology. Edwards's philosophy responded to this gap; he attempted to write empiricism into a rigorous theology, hoping to suture experience and theology. And text was always the mediating center: for Edwards, experience was initiated, reflected on, and manifested in language.

In this sense, Edwards differs from the other figures I have treated throughout the dissertation. He turned the problem of the mediating text into an advantage: the convert could literally write his or her own experience as a tool for accessing the divine. The act of writing was a means for bridging theology and experience. Yet Edwards's philosophical mind at times saw language as an inadequate tool for accessing and describing spiritual things. In this sense, he struggles with the same epistemological problems of language his Puritan predecessors had. Edwards is distinguished from them by his philosophical redefinition of language and by his belief in the writing act as spiritually transformative. Here I trace the development in his thought that allowed him to

view language as both a part of the natural world and a bridge between the material and the divine.

In Edwards's early writings language is always a problem: "Oh, how the world is darkened, clouded, distracted and torn to pieces by those dreadful enemies of mankind called *words*," Edwards laments at the close of his *Miscellanies* no. 4.⁴ The gap between language and experience was, it seemed to Edwards, unavoidable. Yet his philosophy and his sermons worked to overcome this, and he turned to experimental accounts of grace in his case histories—accounts that seemed to reflect and generate experience—in order to determine how experience and text could merge or how the textual account of conversion could deepen the experience of grace and even transfer it to readers. Edwards's lament over cloudy words in the *Miscellanies* would seem to suggest that he saw words as entirely arbitrary, yet he came to the conclusion that language—though a part of the natural world—was an image of the divine, capable of clarity and agent of spiritual transformation. I argue in what follows that Edwards came to this conclusion through his typology and cosmology and turned to the case histories as evidence that the materiality of language could capture and generate authentic religious experience. And the sermon was a space wherein Edwards's philosophy of language manifested itself with the highest stakes.

II. Solid Shadows: Edwards's Philosophy of Language

Edwards urged his audience to meditate on sermons in the manner Pierpont's diary demonstrates. In his sermon *Heeding the Word, and Losing It* (1734), he opens with

the necessity of hearing and obeying God's word: "there is a dependence on the word," he writes.⁵ Edwards means to alert his auditors to their responsibility in making experimental the text heard from the pulpit; the hearer needs to embrace the word, like Pierpont, in order to make it more than empty sounds—in order to give it application to lived experience. Although the individual listener has responsibility, ultimate agency rests in the word, and the word, in Edwards's definition, is God "speaking of himself, after the manner of men."⁶ Throughout this sermon, language is the medium for God's communication, and it seems a relatively transparent one: although Edwards lists several reasons men might lose the word, language does not appear as an obstacle. That is, until the close of the sermon, when Edwards warns his auditors that action alone demonstrates true "heeding" because "words are cheap:" "it would be more desirable to see a man use some vigorous endeavors to restrain degeneracy once, than to hear him lament degeneracy a hundred times."⁷ *Heeding the Word* demonstrates the linguistic tension at the core of Edwards's philosophy and sermonic theory. "There is a dependence on the word," because God communicates himself in human language, but words are cheap. By this, Edwards means that words do not necessarily correspond to the internal state of the soul.

Edwards came to think something like this concerning any external signs of an individual's spiritual state. His *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), written throughout the revivals in Northampton, asks as its central question: "what are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favor with God," or "What is the nature of true religion? and wherein do lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue and holiness?"⁸

Official doctrine did not sanction the religious experience of many Great Awakening converts, but Edwards established a philosophy of religious affections that validated affective experience without reading the affections as empirical evidence of grace. The contradictions between experience and theology Edwards observed during the Great Awakening manifested themselves in contentious debates about the validity and type of external signs of redemption. The Great Awakening has come to be characterized by several attributes “new” to American religion: the extemporaneous sermon, characteristic of much lay preaching, affected bodies materially, manifesting the signs of the New Birth.⁹ These outward manifestations were read, alternately, as evidence of enthusiasm, hypocrisy, redemption, and hysteria. Counterfeit religion, Edwards argued, was the devil’s greatest advantage, and saints lacked discernment to distinguish between what was true and what was counterfeit.

The first part of *Religious Affections* lays out various signs, like the “appearance” of love, that are “no certain signs that religious affections are truly gracious, or that they are not,” and the second part establishes “what are distinguishing signs of truly gracious and holy affections.” Even this second part clearly acknowledges that certainty is impossible: “it was never in God’s design to give us any rules, by which we may certainly know, who of our fellow professors are his.”¹⁰ Although true religion is judged by the “fixedness and strength of the habit that is exercised in affection,” it is also true that “the strength of that habit is not always in proportion to outward effects and manifestations.”¹¹ Thus, there is a gap between true godly affection and external signs. Edwards was concerned that revival converts misread outward signs—even in

themselves—as “certain” because they felt great spiritual desire, heightened sorrow for sin, or some other emotional response to God’s glory. He argued that there could be discontinuity between one’s experience of God and the theology of religious affections he describes. These gaps—between external signs and the state of one’s soul or between theology and experience—led Edwards to write *Religious Affections*, and he was led to his conclusions about the possible gaps between sign and thing represented by his reading of John Locke.

Edwards’s Puritan predecessors understood language as a divine gift, within which any failures or fissures were due to human error, but Edwards merged this concept with his reading of Locke’s notion that words signify ideas rather than things. Edwards’s worry, expressed in Miscellany no. 4, that the world is darkened by words, was also Locke’s: Book III of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, “Of Words,” addresses what Locke sees as the “imperfection” and “abuse” of words. Edwards and Locke both worked to clarify the relationship between language and knowledge, understanding language as a system of signs whose primary purpose was the communication of knowledge. In his sermon *The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth* (1739), Edwards argues that visible signs, of which the gospel is composed, are meant “to convey some knowledge of the things signified,” and Locke contends that language’s purpose is to make understanding possible—between people and of ideas.¹² Without functioning signs, Edwards argues, knowledge is impossible, and a sermon might as well be delivered in “the Chinese or Tartarian language, of which we know not one word.”¹³

Language as human construct meant for Edwards, re Locke, that words were signs of ideas arrived at through sensory experience. He addresses this again in *Knowledge of a Divine Truth*. Paul, in Hebrews 5:2, writes to his addressees that they need the taste of milk before strong meat, and Edwards argues that Paul is here reproving them for their lack of “*spiritual* and *experimental* knowledge of divine things.”¹⁴ Spiritual and experimental knowledge are not synonymous for Edwards; experimental knowledge is derived through visible signs whereas spiritual knowledge comes from the Spirit. Edwards adds that Paul reproves the Hebrews for their lack of doctrinal knowledge, and this rational knowledge—alongside the necessary experimental knowledge—comes through visible signs, like language.

But here Edwards faces a problem: sensory experience and rational knowledge, he argues throughout his writings, do not give one full apprehension of spiritual or moral things. Language is at its most cloudy when trying to represent the immaterial. In Miscellanies no. 782, where Edwards first lays out the new sense, to which Perry Miller attributes Lockean influence, he writes that God does not rely on language or signs, for he “understands himself, and all other things, by the actual and immediate presence of an idea of things understood.”¹⁵ Man, on the other hand, cannot excite actual ideas in his mind, and he relies on signs because they are more efficient—the exciting of actual ideas being a slow process and not amenable to communication among people. Actual ideas, Edwards continues, are even more difficult to excite in the mind when not concerning sensible and external things. Things of a divine, supernatural, sublime, and metaphysical nature are only truly understood (ideally apprehended, in Edwards’s language) through

the extraordinary work of the Spirit of God, which is inaccessible through natural reason or sensory experience.¹⁶ Edwards again addresses the inability of language to express spiritual things in *Freedom of the Will*: “Words were first formed to express external things,” but words “applied to express things internal or spiritual, are almost all borrowed, and used in a sort of figurative sense.”¹⁷ And figurative language is one of Locke’s abuses of language: “all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence has invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment.”¹⁸ Edwards often employed figurative language, especially in his sermons, but he did suggest that figurative language can be obscuring. Despite this, Edwards found ways, through and beyond Locke, to make language rational and authentic—even figurative language describing spiritual things.

Edwards scholars have noted his connection to Locke since Perry Miller first wrote that Edwards made “holiness” a new simple idea, but less attention has been given to how Locke’s theory of language influenced Edwards after Miller’s “Edwards, Locke, and the Rhetoric of Sensation” (1950).¹⁹ Miller’s essay describes how Edwards used Locke’s theory of sensory psychology to move the passions: Edwards determined that “an idea in the mind is not only a form of perception but is also a determination of love and hate. [...] to apprehend [things] by their ideas is to comprehend them not only intellectually but passionately.”²⁰ Miller addresses Edwards’s reading of Locke’s theory of language, describing Edwards’s “sensory rhetoric” as one that took Locke a step further by arguing that ideas could be apprehended emotionally, not just intellectually. Miller’s claim that Edwards believed ideas were emotional as well as intellectual is

critically accepted, and it uncovered a fundamental aspect of Edwards's philosophy, but Miller fails to account for Edwards's thought on language itself.

Edwards did share much with Locke's conception of language, but Edwards also argued for divinely organized substantial forms and the essential connection of words to those forms. In other words, Edwards believed that words could signify things or real essences. Locke argues that because words are dependent on the speaker's own ideas, the speaker's words may fail to excite in others the same ideas he intends: "no one hath the power to make others have the same ideas in their minds that he has, when they use the same words he does."²¹ Edwards, as sermonizer, however needed to believe that his words would excite in his listeners the ideas he took them "to be signs of."²² Locke acknowledges the possibility—and necessity—of exciting in others the ideas the speaker "makes them stand for," and Edwards made this his sermonic goal. Edwards, though, did not consider this as difficult a task as did Locke. In Locke's view, one of the false assumptions that leads to an ideal disjunction between speaker and hearer is "that nature works regularly in the production of things, and sets the boundaries to each of those species, by giving exactly the same real internal constitution to each individual which we rank under one general name."²³ Such names, he goes on, signify only complex ideas and not real essences; the "doctrine of substantial forms" does not imply that general words are connected to real essences. Edwards, though, disagrees on precisely this point. In "The Mind" no. 43 he writes

that God has not only distributed things into species by evidently manifesting, by his making such an agreement in things, that he designed

such and such particulars to be together in the mind, but by making the soul of such a nature that those particulars which he thus made to agree are unavoidably together in the mind, one naturally exciting and including the others.²⁴

Against his interpretation of Locke, Edwards argues that nature, or rather God, does work regularly in giving the same essential qualities to things tied together under a general name. Therefore, there is a “union” in the ideas tied together under genera and species—“the tying of ideas together in genera and species is not merely the calling of them by the same name.”²⁵ Because of this natural union of ideas, and because language is part of the natural world, Edwards argues that words are connected to real essences. And he adheres to something like the “doctrine of substantial forms” in his typology and cosmology.

Miller argues that Locke had taught Edwards “that the words used by persons ‘signified nothing that really existed in nature,’” but Edwards believed the things that existed in nature were in themselves signs—and signs of real substances.²⁶ The natural world, Edwards argued, was “full of images of divine things,” and these images were but shadow of what Edwards called the more substantial spiritual world.²⁷ Although language often seemed, to Edwards, incapable of grasping the glory of God, he found a solution in his philosophy of the universe. He believed that the material world inhered with spiritual truths, and this meant, in turn, that material language was capable of reaching spiritual truths. Language may be a human construct, but the material world itself is full of images of the divine. Edwards ultimately concluded that language, too, could reflect the divine.

Although Edwards believed that words as signs were cloudy when attempting to represent spiritual things, he always maintained that the words of sermons had agency. They could, as Pierpont wrote, transform the hearer. Edwards's reading of Locke presented him with a problem, but he resolved it through his view of God's communications through nature. Recent work on Edwards has noted that he saw communicativeness as one of God's most essential qualities.²⁸ "God is a communicative Being," he wrote.²⁹ Some scholars take this as a vital starting point for examining Edwards's sermonic career, the rhetorical structure of his works, his typology, his sense of his pastoral role, and his biblical hermeneutics, among other things, but few examine what this meant for his theory of language. Janice Knights's "Learning the Language of God," comes the closest to accounting for Edwards's philosophy of language: "Edwards's fundamental conviction of God's effulgence underwrote his theory of divine communications that overflow the human categories of history and ontology. The first and essential attribute—the impetus in God's self-generation and his generation of the world—is being and its communication."³⁰ Although Knight writes that Edwards believed God's communicative nature overflowed into the natural world and in the "words of the prophets," she adds that he often seemed hesitant about the value of human communication. Edwards had concluded, Knight says, that the "greatness of God must always elude mortal description."³¹ Edwards did at times express this sentiment, and to an extent, he had to admit that divine glory transcends human understanding, but because "God's effulgence [...] overflow[s] the human categories of history and ontology" even language captures something of the divine glory.

That one can access spiritual reality through the material world is the fundamental premise of “Images of Divine Things,” a collection of Edwards’s typological writings.³² Edwards reads the material world—including rivers, the sun, the Olympic games, and even wheels—as representations of moral and supernatural realities, as shadows of true substance. His eighty-fourth “Miscellany” from “Images,” for example, reads fire as a type:

The torrents and floods of liquid fire that sometimes are vomited out from the lower parts of the earth, the belly of hell, by the mouths of volcanoes, indicate or shadow forth what is in hell.³³

Fire is not mere metaphor for hell; it “indicate[s] or shadow[s] forth” hell. For Edwards, the natural world and all it contains is a shadow of divine reality, and he means shadow in a neo-platonic sense. Edwards’s types are images, “used in a sort of figurative sense” to express spiritual things, but they are not merely metaphorical. “The material world, and all things pertaining to it,” he writes in “Images,” “is by the Creator wholly subordinated to the spiritual and moral world.”³⁴ This hierarchy means that spiritual truths inhere in material things. Against Locke, Edwards argues that words are inherently imbued with the representation of particular things. The difficulty is reading that connection.

“Images of Divine Things” is devoted to reading these inherent truths, and it contains a systemized hermeneutic for discerning the divine in the natural world. The manuscript’s alternative title, “The Language and Lessons of Nature,” suggests a theorization of language that overshadows Edwards’s worry that “words are the enemies of mankind.” He understood the types in the natural world as signs, a system of language,

by which humanity accesses God's communication of his own being: "The works of God are but a kind of voice or language of God, to instruct intelligent beings in things pertaining to himself."³⁵ Certainly, this language is not perfect; again, Edwards argued that only the extraordinary work of the Spirit could excite actual ideas in the mind. But if, as Edwards argues, the lessons of nature are empirically legible through the natural senses—if not fully apprehensible as ideas—human language must, too, be able to capture the spiritual truth that even man-made objects reflect.

In "Images of Divine Things," Edwards quotes George Turnbull's *The Principle of Moral Philosophy* to support his own argument that "external things are intended to be images of things spiritual, moral and divine."³⁶ Turnbull espouses a similar position—that moral objects are "clothed with a sensible form or image, and represented to us as it were in a material shape and hue."³⁷ The material world is a manifestation of true (spiritual) substance. Edwards quotes Turnbull further:

not only are wit and poetry owned to take place only in consequence of this analogy or resemblance of moral and natural ideas; but even all language is confessed to be originally taken from sensible objects, or their properties and effects.... Words cannot express any moral objects, but by exciting pictures of them in our minds. But all words being originally expressive of sensible qualities, no words can express moral ideas, but so far as there is such an analogy betwixt the natural and moral world.³⁸

Turnbull reads language itself as a type, reasoning back from language to the nature of the universe. Edwards does not suggest that language is a type, but it does work like a

type. In Miscellany no. 782 Edwards writes that the signs we “substitute in the room of the actual ideas themselves” are “the ideas of some external sensible thing that some way belongs to the thing, some sensible image or resemblance, or some sensible part, or some sensible effect.”³⁹ The names of things do have some relationship to the material qualities of the thing, or the material qualities of some analogous thing.

In “The Mind,” Edwards more fully articulates the cosmological foundation for his typology: the “corporeal world is to no advantage but to the spiritual,” he writes, arguing that true substance is “the infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea in God’s mind together with his stable will.”⁴⁰ In other words, the world exists as ideas in God’s mind. However, as Jasper Reid points out in “Jonathan Edwards on Space and God,” this does not mean that bodies (those excited by God’s mind) do not exist outside of the mind. In “The Mind” no. 51 Edwards writes that when he says “the material universe exists only in the mind, I mean that it is absolutely dependent on the conception of the mind for its existence.”⁴¹ For Edwards, Reid argues, the world exists in God’s will, or in “God’s volition to arrange ideas—created ideas, that is—in certain particular patterns in our minds.”⁴² Reid’s argument for Edwards’s conception of the divine will reinforces his interpretation of Edwards as an immaterialist, but it also implicitly refocuses our attention on the status of the *material* in Edwards’s philosophy. The material world is a shadow of immaterial substance; the immaterial is more substantial than the material; and the material world is read through sensory experience. In “The Mind” no. 13, when arguing that the universe exists in God’s mind, or will, Edwards writes “That which truly is the substance of all bodies [...] shall gradually be

communicated to us, and to other minds, according to fixed and exact established methods and laws.”⁴³ Because the natural world is God’s language about and to himself, and human language is derived from the natural world, there is some connection, however shadowy, between God’s essential communicative nature and human language.

God’s essential quality of communicativeness was never far from Edwards’s mind, and “The Mind” and “Images,” taken together, establish a system for reading God’s communication of himself in the material world, allowing human minds to apprehend ideas by natural law and its attending epistemologies as well as spiritual methods and laws. If the material world gives humans access to the spiritual, then language—derived from the material world—must be, at least in part, able to communicate something of the spiritual. Language, then, is saved from clouding the world in two respects. It works like Edwards’s typology: words are images of ideas just as material things are images of spiritual ideas. And words themselves are natural, connected to the natural world in such a way that they work like simple ideas. So, Edwards returns to Locke, writing in *Religious Affections* that “Ideas of certain marks upon paper, such as any of the twenty-four letters, in whatever order, or any sounds of the voice, are as much external ideas, as of any other shapes or sounds whatsoever.”⁴⁴ Words, then, can act as external ideas. If words communicate simple ideas it would make sense within Edwards’s philosophical universe that words would be inadequate for communicating spiritual, or sublime, things to the mind, but the relationship between the material and immaterial means that those material or sensible qualities that generate language are shadows—though *but* shadows—of moral truths. Words become extensions

of the natural world. By accepting language as part of the natural world (re Locke) and by understanding the natural world as the shadowy reflection of the divine, Edwards constructs an epistemology that is connected to and grounded in experience. And by accepting from Locke the notion that words exist in order to communicate ideas in the speaker's mind, Edwards ameliorates the gap between text and experience.⁴⁵

In "Images," Edwards makes a direct comparison between typological images and the words of language:

I expect by very ridicule and contempt to be called a man of a very fruitful brain and copious fancy, but they are welcome to it. I am not ashamed to own that I believe that the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of the holy Scriptures, be full of images of divine things, *as full as language is of words*.⁴⁶

That Edwards opens this claim with an anticipation of ridicule suggests his awareness of the novelty of his typology, as others have noted, though very little has been made of the comparison Edwards makes here.⁴⁷ The analogy Edwards draws between the "whole universe" and language suggests that language can function like Edwards's universe: words as signs, though human constructs, can represent actual ideas of a spiritual nature. Edwards's concerns about the imperfections and abuses of language appeared most often when he was combating bad theology or attempting to describe particularly complicated aspects of his philosophy. Worries about language expressed in such texts have dominated critical perceptions of Edwards on language, but Edwards did express hope in the ability of language to capture the divine.⁴⁸ In "Images" Edwards makes an essential

comparison between his typology and language: the world is as full of images as language is of words. For Edwards, the material universe consists in images; it is *only* images. Just as words are images. The material universe and language work in just the same way.

Edwards embraced Locke's idea of language as a human construct signifying ideas in the mind of the speaker, but he then merged it with his own belief that the material world is a kind of divine language, and he ended with a sense that language is a material reflection of immaterial truth. Part of Edwards's initial concern that words were incapable of expressing spiritual ideas came from his sense that language and experience did not always seem to match up, but his typology reveals a world in which experience occurs through signs; spiritual knowledge can be, at least partially, apprehended in signs and images, and words are such signs and images. Nothing suggested this to Edwards more strongly than his study of conversions and religious experiences during the Great Awakening. Edwards wrote several texts describing the experiences of converts as they were related to him, and he edited one diary—that of missionary to the Indians, David Brainerd. These texts influenced Edwards's understanding of the relationship between language and experience, reflected his philosophy of language and the material world, and informed his composition of sermons. Text and experience, the case histories demonstrate, need not be separated. Language is capable of capturing spiritual ideas.

III. Let the Judicious Reader Observe: The Case Histories

Language, Edwards argued, is material: a human construct, corporeal, and a shadow of spiritual substance. But as another image of divine things—even man-made things like clocks were images for Edwards—language had agency to instruct spiritually and to generate and reflect authentic religious experience. And Edwards waged spiritual war with material words. He introduces his *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival* (1743) with a defense of the text itself as a published expression of his opinions on the awakening. Although he condemns ministers for supposing “that they were the persons to whom it especially belonged to dictate, direct and determine,” he acknowledges the necessity of such expressions in tumultuous times.⁴⁹ “Private subjects offer their sentiments to the public from the press, concerning the management of the war with Spain,” he says, and the Great Awakening suggests New England is “engaged in a more important war.”⁵⁰ Therefore, it is imperative that “something should be published, to bring the affair in general [...] under a particular consideration.”⁵¹

Some Thoughts was but one of the texts Edwards penned during and after the Great Awakening about the revivals, and it contains one of the several spiritual autobiographies or conversion narratives that have come to be known as his case histories. In *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737) he describes the conversion experiences of Abigail Hutchinson and a child, Phebe Bartlet; in *Some Thoughts* he shares that of his wife, Sarah Edwards, though he disguises her identity by omitting any reference to name and gender; and in *The Life of David Brainerd* (1749) Edwards edits and annotates the missionary’s diary.⁵² Edwards represents each of these

cases as exemplars of Christian experience, a particularly important task for him in light of the controversies and debates stimulated by the revivals over what constituted true conversion and piety. Edwards's goal in the case histories was to defend the "raised affections" of the Great Awakening as not necessarily enthusiastic, and thus he describes the affective responses of Bartlett, Sarah Edwards, and Brainerd, among others, as examples of "truly, holy and solid affections."⁵³ The case histories demonstrate Edwards's philosophical arguments concerning the agency of material language. Words affect their hearers: bodies manifest these effects, and the act of writing one's experience is spiritually transformative.

Though the case histories act as evidence for language's agency—the converts describe sermons and the biblical text as transformative, and these accounts are meant to correct wrong assumptions about the awakening and also transform their readers—they contain a tension between the material and immaterial. Each convert demonstrates a renewed focus on his or her spiritual state through a seeming unconcern for material life and a range of affective responses to spiritual realizations. David Brainerd, for example, writes again and again of trying to penetrate the immaterial world, and Phebe Bartlett tells her family that she has found God in heaven, adding that "heaven was better than earth."⁵⁴ Though the converts seem to reject the material world, the case histories reveal that religious experience is also material—or sensory—experience. As the converts undergo religious experience, their very bodies react. The immaterial subsumes the material, mirroring Edwards's cosmology: the universe exists as ideas excited by God's mind or will. As we have seen, it is this very philosophical perspective that allowed

Edwards to see the natural world as the language of God; God inscribes himself in the material world because communicativeness is his most essential attribute. The case histories are a rational companion to this: when God communicates, the body responds. God's language infuses bodies.

Part of the exemplarity of these cases lies in the converts' realization that the supernatural is more substantial than what they can see, touch, and hear, but also that the supernatural is fundamentally something that can be seen, felt, and heard—that the immaterial could be sensibly experienced. Edwards believed the material world was but a shadow of immaterial substance, but he also believed it was an experimentally communicative and instructive shadow. During the Great Awakening, bodies were frequently targeted as sites of legibility—of hypocrisy or piety—but Edwards argues that those who “are full of concern about the involuntary motions of the fluids and solids of men's bodies, and from thence full of doubts and suspicious of the cause” are “out of the place that Christ has set them in.”⁵⁵ Edwards reprimands ministers who would seek concrete evidence of an individual's spiritual state in physical appearances and argues that the body is not a legible sign, but his case histories inevitably read bodies.

The body is not a certain sign, Edwards writes in *Religious Affections*, but whatever occurs in the soul or mind will inevitably affect bodies: “Such seems to be our nature, and such the laws of the union of soul and body, that there never is any case whatsoever, any lively and vigorous exercise of the will or inclination of the soul, without some effect on the body, in some alteration of the motion of its fluids, and especially of the animal spirits.”⁵⁶ This does not imply that the motions of the body's fluids are

therefore certain signs of spiritual authenticity, because the mind, and not the body, “is the proper seat of the affections.”⁵⁷ The body’s motions are only effects and are “distinct from the affections.”⁵⁸ Edwards allows that bodily motions might be effects of something other than the lively operations of grace, such as a person’s voluntary “exercises” or, more dangerously, Satan’s wiles. But in *Religious Affections*, as in the case histories, Edwards works to undermine the frequent accusations against any and all bodily exercises as manifestations of deceptive demons or deluded converts. In *Some Thoughts*, therefore, Edwards uses Sarah Edwards as an example of how right religious affections can and will affect the body materially: “there is such a thing as having the bodily strength weakened by strong and vigorous exercises of love to” God.⁵⁹ Like fire, wheels, and words, bodies are images of divine things.

Edwards devotes much of *Some Thoughts* to the demonstration of this claim through the accumulation of small case histories, arguing that bodily effects occur because the spiritual world subsumes the material.⁶⁰ The material world is not always perfectly legible, but it manifests God’s movements; bodily effects can be signs of many things, but the body manifests whatever occurs in the mind and soul. Edwards’s defensive acknowledgement of bodily affect soon becomes a full-fledged reading of Sarah’s physical religious experience. In the section of *Some Thoughts* dedicated to her case, “An Example of Evangelical Piety,” Edwards focuses heavily on the body, despite his earlier warning against this kind of faulty epistemological reasoning. He describes Sarah, though cloaked in anonymity, dwelling “in that clear and lively view and sense of the infinite beauty and amiableness of Christ’s person”:

the soul remained in a kind of heavenly Elysium [...] without being in any trance, or being at all deprived of the exercise of the bodily senses [...] being frequently attended with very great effects on the body, nature often sinking under the weight of divine discoveries, the strength of the body taken away, so as to deprive of all ability to stand or speak; sometimes the hands clinched, and the flesh cold, but senses still remaining; animal nature often in a great emotion and agitation, and the soul very often, of late, so overcome with great admiration, and a kind of omnipotent joy, as to cause the person (wholly unavoidably) to leap with all the might.⁶¹

The language of bodily experience overtakes the description of Sarah's spiritual perception, and Edwards demonstrates how her religious experience has transformed her senses: she now has a "clear and lively view" of spiritual things. Her view of the spiritual world is even more substantial than her bodily senses, though Edwards qualifies that those are at work as well. A trance in which the bodily senses cease operating would suggest enthusiasm, and Edwards lists these bodily manifestations as evidence against enthusiasm. Sarah's bodily responses were not, he argues, "attended [...] with the least appearance of any laughter or lightness of countenance"—commonly suspected as signs of enthusiasm—but "have had abiding effects in the increase of the sweetness, rest and humility that they have left upon the soul."⁶² Although Edwards argues that he is not deducing authentic religious experience from these signs, by marshalling them as evidence for Sarah's character and true piety, he seems to. He is, instead, arguing that the body necessarily manifests the internal, spiritual state.

The various spiritual experiences and realizations Sarah has, such as an awareness of God's greatness or a sense of mourning for sin, are accompanied by bodily effects. As Edwards describes the "increase" of Sarah's sense of "divine views and divine love," he mentions how it affects or overcomes her body no less than fifteen times in the space of a few paragraphs: "The strength of the body very often taken away with a deep mourning for sin;" a sense of God's wisdom that "swallow[s] up the soul, and overcome[s] the strength of the body;" and a "compassion [...] to saints under darkness, so as to cause the body to faint" occurs in Sarah.⁶³ Although Edwards reads Sarah's body, the body is not an epistemological site in the sense that it can be read as evidence of true piety, but is instead one more shadow of the supernatural. One more image of God at work.

Edwards reads the body as a sign in the same manner in which he reads the fire as a shadow of hell. He continues by describing how Sarah's experience enables her to see the natural world as an image of the divine: she had "a sight of the fullness and glorious sufficiency of Christ, that has been so affecting as to overcome the body: a constant immovable trust in God through Christ, with a great sense of his strength [...] so that the everlasting mountains and perpetual hills have appeared as mere shadows to these things."⁶⁴ This is the new sense at work: Sarah's vision recalibrates, and she sees the mountains as shadows of God's strength. In turn, Edwards's reads her overcome body as a shadow of God's glory. The material world is subordinated to the spiritual, but Sarah Edwards does not, as a result, reject the material world: "High experiences and religious affections in this person have not been attended with any disposition at all to neglect the necessary business of a secular calling [...] but worldly business has been attended with

great alacrity, as part of the service of God.”⁶⁵ Because the material world is subordinated to the spiritual, material business is always spiritual business. For Edwards, the revivals confirm his immaterialism: “The New Jerusalem [...] has begun to come down from heaven, and perhaps never were more of the prelibations of heaven’s glory given upon earth.”⁶⁶ Heaven is better than earth, as Phebe Bartlett says.

Heaven may well be better than earth, but Edwards was stuck on earth. Edwards’s philosophy of language as man-made, material image was one way of bridging the gap between heaven and earth. His typology imagined an earth full of legible images of heaven, and the case histories represent that same paradigm in the language of experience. They are the chronicles of individuals experiencing God’s communicativeness, and they demonstrate one manner in which language reaches toward heaven: by showing God’s communicative movement through the body and capturing that movement in written language. The introduction to *Some Thoughts* is not simply a justification for the text that follows; Edwards lays out an argument for the role of texts in public controversy. Texts, like Pierpont’s sermons, do things. In and through them, wars are waged, individuals are transformed, and bodies are moved.

An individual’s own words, ostensibly unmediated by meddling authorities, have an even greater ability to effect such transformation. Edwards often represents the case studies as dictations, suggesting the transparency of language and erasing his own strong editorial presence. His *Life of Brainerd* is even more suggestively transparent; it is, after all, a diary. Edwards instructs the reader that he or she will see in the *Life* “not only what were the external circumstances and remarkable incidents” of Brainerd’s life, but also

“what passed in his own heart, the wonderful change that he experienced in his mind.”⁶⁷

Although Edwards believed all of his case histories would set right wrong opinions or aid in saints’ self-reflection, he attached special privilege to the *Life*. His prefatory remark that Brainerd wrote the diary for his “own private use” suggests that Brainerd’s own language could transparently represent his heart, mind, and affections, and it ostensibly erases Edwards’s presence.

Like *Some Thoughts* and *A Faithful Narrative*, *The Life* was meant to act as a concrete example of true and false religious experiences.⁶⁸ Brainerd had come through the fire of the Great Awakening’s more dangerous enthusiasms and its “extraordinary effects” into a “solid piety.”⁶⁹ In his preface, Edwards writes that Brainerd was not subject to affections that were merely “strong impressions on the imagination,” because he distinguished between those and “rational and scriptural” affections.⁷⁰ Because of his experiments in enthusiasm while at Yale, Edwards argued, Brainerd was keenly discerning. When George Whitefield preached at New Haven, even singling out Yale for its spiritual deadness, Brainerd found himself moved in enthusiastical fashion. In the winter of 1741-2 Brainerd was overheard criticizing Yale’s rector, Thomas Clap, for his opposition to the Awakening, and lambasting tutor, Chauncey Whittelsey, for having “no more grace than a chair.”⁷¹ To his life-long regret, Brainerd was expelled.

The expulsion alone did not instigate his guilt over his indiscreet enthusiasm. Throughout *The Life* Brainerd bemoans his sinful inclinations—especially toward pride—and the trials of maintaining piety in a world so full of physical hardship, social distractions, “party spirits” (enthusiasm), waning faith, and hardhearted sermon

audiences. Edwards's introductory remarks frame what will be a great theme of Brainerd's life: discernment between good and bad affections. Edwards introduces Brainerd in a way that seems directly pitched at the anti-revivalists: "however undesirable the issue of the awakenings of that day have appeared in many others, there have been manifestly happy and abiding affects."⁷² Brainerd is an even stronger example than Sarah Edwards, whose religious experience began "seven years before" the revivals, because he experienced "lively actions of true grace" during the Great Awakening but later acknowledges "that his religious experiences and affections" during the revival "were not free from a corrupt mixture."⁷³ *The Life*, then, acts as a model of piety in a context of great confusion and debate over what constituted true piety, but as both Edwards and Petit note, Brainerd was not a man without fault. Brainerd's melancholy, or "morbid introversion," distinguishes his case history from that of the others.⁷⁴

Norman Petit, editor of the Yale edition of *The Life*, suggests that Edwards goes to great lengths to dismiss Brainerd's melancholy, and Edwards does not make Brainerd's melancholy the focus of exemplarity, writing in his preface that Brainerd's melancholy is not a moral flaw and that it is not in any way tied to religious experience. Along with his introductory anticipations of Brainerd's melancholy, Edwards's editing practices reveal his resistance to Brainerd's affliction, as Petit remarks: "When Brainerd too vividly describes his thoughts, or shows a self-concern that Edwards deems extreme, the sentence or paragraph is dropped. [...] Because Brainerd frequently sank into deep despair, Edwards condensed certain passages and changed the wording. When Brainerd sank too low, the passage was simply left out."⁷⁵ Others have agreed with Petit that

Brainerd's melancholy was an obstacle for Edwards, and because Edwards claimed that he compiled and edited Brainerd's diary as a model of faith, few have offered more complicated interpretations of the apparent conflicts between *The Life* and Edwards's own theology and philosophy. Though little has been written on Brainerd's melancholy within the body of Edwardsean scholarship, that which exists argues that Brainerd's melancholic spirit undermined Edwards's goals. David L. Weddle, in "The Melancholy Saint" (1988) argues that "Brainerd is, at best, an ambiguous example of Edwards's theology of religious experience" and his melancholy is "out of harmony with Edwards's own analysis of religious experience."⁷⁶ And even Petit's more delicate reading suggests that Brainerd's melancholy was something Edwards hoped would not strike his readers as "out of harmony." But Brainerd's melancholy was not at odds with Edwards's purpose in editing the diary: it enabled Edwards to combat prejudice against the revivals, because Brainerd suffered from melancholy and yet was not excited by "enthusiastical imaginations."

Initially, Brainerd's melancholy does appear to undermine his exemplarity, but it ultimately reinforces Edwards's broader philosophy of religious experience and his typology. Brainerd yearns to "penetrate the immaterial world" and bemoans the material realities of life as distractions from true piety. He describes a moment during prayer: "I think my soul scarce ever penetrated so far into the immaterial world in any one prayer that I ever made, nor were my devotions ever so much refined and free from gross conceptions and imaginations framed from beholding material objects. [...] I have reason to think that my religion is become more refined and spiritual."⁷⁷ Penetrating the

immaterial world, Brainerd feels freed from his distracting physical senses, which he thinks induce dangerous or enthusiastic ideas. While preaching in Greenwich, New Jersey, Brainerd learns of a sick man on the verge of death, rides to visit him, and prays with the mourners when the man dies—all typical activities for a minister. But this event especially distresses Brainerd. Meditating on the reality of death, which had never “appeared more real to me,” Brainerd envisions himself in death: “I saw myself in the condition of a dead corpse, laid out and dressed for a lodging in the silent grave. [...] I never felt such an universal mortification to all created objects. Oh, how great and solemn it appeared to die! Oh, how it lays the greatest honor in the dust! And oh, how vain and trifling did the riches, honors, and pleasures of the world appear!”⁷⁸ The “universal mortification to all created objects” that reveals itself to Brainerd in this moment marks his entire existence. This is in stark contrast to Edwards’s instance, throughout *Some Thoughts*, that Sarah’s religious experiences never implied a separation from bodily existence or a rejection of the material business of life. And it seems to undermine Edwards’s own sense of the instructive quality of the natural world developed in his typology.

Yet Brainerd’s melancholic view of the natural world—his disdain for nature and his own body—suggest the very connectedness of body and mind that Edwards argues for in *Religious Affections* and demonstrates in *Some Thoughts*. Brainerd writes that his physical journeys to and from Stockbridge tax his soul, not just his body. And Edwards observes that Brainerd’s “great bodily weakness” and “exceeding painfulness in religion” occur simultaneously.⁷⁹ Brainerd’s journeys wore heavily on his already weak body, and

Edwards comments on one such journey that Brainerd “fear[ed] that the diversions of it would prove a means of cooling his religious affections, as he had found in other journeys.”⁸⁰ When Brainerd’s faith wanes, his body fails; when his faith is strong, so is his body. His body manifests internal spiritual experiences; they are written on the body. The *Life*, then, reinforces the philosophy of Edwards’s typology: the material world is full of signs of the immaterial world.

The *Life* documents a world of experience in which internal, spiritual experiences are written on the body, but Brainerd’s melancholy serves Edwards an additional purpose. Edwards argues that Brainerd displays careful discernment that grows deeper through the regular practice of self-examination in writing. “Tis a rare thing indeed, that melancholy people are well sensible of their own disease,” Edwards writes, but Brainerd “gained it gradually,” as the diary demonstrates.⁸¹ Early on, Brainerd “had so little opportunity for reading, observation and experience,” Edwards explains, that it is not surprising that he “should for a while be dazzled and deceived with the glaring appearances of that mistaken devotion and zeal” (94). But it will be “easy for the judicious reader to observe” that Brainerd grows “more and more distinguishing in his judgment” (96). The diary itself was an essential instrument of this discernment, as Edwards hoped it would be for all its readers. The text of the diary demonstrates Brainerd’s growth into discernment. He writes of his youthful enthusiasm and spiritual struggle that he “was not yet effectually and experimentally taught that there could be no way prescribed whereby a natural man could, of his own strength, obtain that which is supernatural.”⁸² Brainerd’s awareness of his own spiritual and physical weaknesses

matures as we see him, late in the *Life*, acknowledging that his lack of fervency in prayer “was very much owing to my bodily weakness” and not spiritual defect.⁸³ The *Life* records a connection between religious experience and text: text reflects, authenticates, and deepens experience.

Edwards’s *Life* chronicles the trial and experience of religious life. It models the religious experience of every reader—the cycle of faith and doubt every individual striving for piety will encounter—and Brainerd’s inclination towards melancholy makes that tension more intense. The entries record his struggle to overcome all obstacles to piety, and Edwards often breaks in to highlight the tension between faith and despondence. After a June 8, 1742 entry, for example, Edwards writes that Brainerd, for the three following days, “complains of desertion and want of fervency in religion; but yet his diary shows that every day his heart was engaged in religion, as his great and as it were only business.”⁸⁴ Though Brainerd’s bodily strength waned and his spiritual doubt grew, his diary acts as a tool of self-examination and a site of religious experience. On November 2, 1743, Brainerd writes of his intense pain and loneliness while ministering at Stockbridge. But, in the act of recording these events in his diary, Brainerd pauses: “But blessed be the Lord [...] I have a house and many of the comforts of life to support me,” and “some sense of [God’s] presence.”⁸⁵ The reader sees Brainerd working out his faith through the act of writing—much as Sarah Pierpont does. Edwards fully intended the *Life* to act as an example of spiritual life but also as an example of how to experience that life and interpret that experience. Brainerd was one who was knowledgeable, Edwards tells the readers, “especially in things appertaining to inward experimental religion,” and

models right interpretation of religious experience.⁸⁶ The manuscript of the diary opens with Brainerd's accounts of his early life and conversion, and he begins where Edwards began, with a claim that the diary records private, internal experiences: "For my own private satisfaction, etc (may it likewise be for the glory of God) I make the following remarks upon the various scenes of my life."⁸⁷ Edwards, for one, believed the diary did glorify God and act as a material tool of spiritual growth, for Brainerd and for his readers.

Brainerd was an ideal example of true piety for Edwards because he was both an "eminent person[]" and an 'eminent teacher.'" Brainerd offers the world "confirmation of the truth, efficacy, and amiableness of the religion taught, in the practice of the same persons that have most clearly and forceably taught it."⁸⁸ Brainerd was an example of what Edwards calls, in a 1744 ordination sermon for Robert Abercrombie, both a shining and a burning light: a preacher of doctrine and an example of one who has experienced and lives God's power. These two characteristics made for an effective minister, Edwards believed, and he strove to emulate this in his own preaching.

IV. Words Burning and Shining: Edwards's Sermons

The Life of David Brainerd and other case histories bridged the gap between text and experience by demonstrating experience that was manifested externally, reflected in language, and transformative for its readers. But the sermon was the most important text of religious experience, and Edwards worked, first and foremost, to bridge text and experience in his preaching. Text, experience, and theology are fused in the linguistic character of Edwards's sermons. He hoped his sermons encoded an epistemology in

which both the spoken and printed text retained immediacy to God's Spirit. The revival context in which Edwards worked out his philosophy was fraught with concerns about hypocrisy, enthusiasm, false prophets, and emotionally-charged lay and itinerant preaching, and Edwards's system for understanding, reading, and communicating individual religious experience forged a middle ground between the extremes of these responses. Although he searched for such an ordered system, Edwards concluded—in accordance with his Puritan predecessors—that external signs were effects, rather than conditions, of saving grace.⁸⁹ Hypocrisy, in other words, was not always legible.

This put the sermon in a tricky place: it was composed of man-made words but ideally composed through the assistance and inspiration of the Spirit, and it should ideally (working like the biblical text) communicate God's revelations without much interruption and confusion. In addition, Edwards needed to avoid charges that his sermons were merely inducing enthusiasm while he held to the claim that sermons should generate affective responses. These tactical challenges were not new to Edwards, but they were important to the hell-fire preaching in which he engaged at his Newhampton church. Solomon Stoddard was pastor of the Northampton congregation until 1729, when he died and passed the position to his grandson, Jonathan Edwards. Stoddard heavily influenced Edwards's sermonic philosophy—most importantly, his emphasis on the experience of conversion and his use of rhetoric.⁹⁰ As Wilson H. Kinnach argues, “in the hands of Stoddard,” the plain style sermon form “had become a finely tuned instrument of psychological manipulation. [...] For Stoddard, rhetoric was power.”⁹¹ The hell-fire

sermon, most prevalent around the awakenings in the 1710s, for Stoddard, and in the Great Awakening, for Edwards, was the most obvious and effective of such instruments.

But manipulation was not the way Stoddard would have described his rhetoric; he desired to transmit an authentic experience to his auditors. Like Pierpont, he understood the value of both tradition and experience, but elevated the latter. Stoddard's sermons inculcated terror in his congregation, but they did not arouse the fear of hell because they demonstrated with reasonable proof but because they awakened the soul to new experiential realities. "Wit and eloquence," obtained through learning, could not communicate saving grace or God's presence, but an experience of God, Stoddard argued, would "set the Consciences of Men on fire."⁹² Stoddard wrote several sermons intended to awaken both sermon-givers and sermon-hearers to this important argument. *The Presence of Christ with the Ministers* (1718), for example, argues that only the minister with experimental knowledge of God can communicate powerfully through the medium of the sermon. Tradition is not meaningless, but only experimental knowledge can make the minister's words resonate with the auditor. This privileging of experience could, of course, lead to dangerous enthusiasms, but Stoddard was no enthusiast, and he asked his auditors to hear sermons with a cautious ear and to read their own experiences with careful discernment.

In Stoddard's view, the sermon was, aside from the Bible, the main channel for accessing God's communications, and in his 1724 sermon, *The Defects of Preachers Reproved*, he demanded that ministers obtain an experimental faith if they were to have any success in the pulpit, lambasting those ministers who believed learning and

eloquence would have true or lasting spiritual efficacy. The opening letter to the reader sounds in many respects like a typical Congregationalist preaching discourse, but the circumstances surrounding Stoddard's composition of the sermon change the tenor. The sermon about sermons had been a standard genre for a long while when Stoddard preached *The Defects*, but previous sermons were usually limited to reprimanding bad preachers and preparing the auditors for right hearing. Stoddard added to this what he saw as a more essential focus on the difference between preaching and teaching: good sermons did not make good preaching. This distinction rests, for Stoddard, on experience: "some Preachers are men of Learning & Moral men" but "they want Experience."⁹³ A good preacher must be able to "speak exactly and experimentally to such things as Souls want to be instructed in"; experience alone "fits men to Teach others."⁹⁴ But Stoddard also speaks about experimental knowledge of faith in general, for the auditors and not just the orators of sermons. Those who receive their religion from their "fore-fathers by Tradition" have religion only by "hear-say," Stoddard writes, and thus have false faith.⁹⁵ Religion embraced by the understanding only, bypassing the will, is false exactly because it is not experimental. As an example of true faith, distinguished from religion received by tradition, Stoddard writes that figurative expressions of faith, such as "coming to Christ," "do imply not only an act of the Understanding, but also an act of the Will."⁹⁶ Stoddard seems to see in these expressions—"opening to [Christ]...flying to Him for Refuge, building on Him"—an active agency on the part of the faithful.⁹⁷ Yet this attribution of agency is at odds with Stoddard's doctrine: individuals receive grace from God, and nothing in their own strength can earn or achieve it. Stoddard is clear to whom

agency is granted: “Justifying faith is wrought in men by the mighty Power of God,” he writes in the following paragraph.⁹⁸ This apparent contradiction is resolved, though, in the space of figurative language.

The figurative phrases Stoddard lists do attribute agency to the individual “feeding” on Christ, but what Stoddard emphasizes here is action over understanding. Faith, he argues, is a “living principle,” and figurative language captures experience over reason. These figurative expressions are the sole example of true faith Stoddard names in opposition to some ministers’ “wrong account of the nature of justifying faith.”⁹⁹ To use and appreciate these figurative expressions of faith, Stoddard suggests, one must have experimental knowledge of flying to, building on, or sitting under Christ. Otherwise, they convey understanding without holiness, reason without experience. Stoddard’s sermonic theory emphasized the inefficacy of reasoned argument in securing sanctifying faith, but this did not imply that rhetoric had no relationship to experimental faith. *Defects* opposes reason to revelation in a fairly conventional manner, arguing that faith comes through revelation and not through reason:

Men cannot believe [...] upon probable Arguments: Probable Arguments must be looked on but as Probable and not Convincing. Men must have infallible Arguments for loving God and believing His Word; the foundation of Believing the Divine Authority of the Scripture, is the manifestation of the Divine Glory in them. There is a Self-evidencing Light in the Works of God [...] so there is a Self-evidencing light in the

Word of God; there are such things Revealed there as can be made known by none but God.¹⁰⁰

Infallible arguments are necessary for faith, but these come through the “self-evidencing light” of scriptural revelation. Only God can make himself known, but he does so through his Word and Works in an empirically accessible manner. This is not the empiricism of reason, but of revelation, and the self-evident light of the Word is that to which the will assents. The understanding is a sign of true grace only when accompanied by the witnessed self-evidence.

Experimental faith, then, was at the root of Stoddard’s argument in these sermons, and he had clear faith that sermons could inculcate experience. Stoddard concludes *Defects* with a reinstatement of his conviction that the minister’s calling is “to set the Consciences of Men on fire:” “Experience shews that Sermons Read are not so Profitable as others. It may be Argued, that it is harder to remember Rhetorical Sermons, than meer Rational Discourses; but it may be Answered, that it is far more Profitable to Preach in the Demonstration of the Spirit, than with the enticing Words of mans wisdom.”¹⁰¹ The wit and eloquence of rhetoric that Stoddard opposes to effective sermons in the earlier quotation from *The Presence of Christ* here become tools of the Spirit. Rhetorical sermons are preferable to persuasive arguments read from the pulpit, because rhetoric can stir the emotions. But the “enticing Words of man’s wisdom” are unprofitable compared to preaching “in the demonstration of the Spirit,” which, in the world of Stoddard’s *Defects* at least, requires rhetoric. Thus, even as Stoddard creates an opposition between rhetoric and “wit and eloquence” or “enticing words,” he also makes the case that

rhetoric and preaching in the Spirit are kin. By this seeming inconsistency, Stoddard means that the Spirit instills in inspired sermons a power in language otherwise absent. This empowered language communicates experience to the auditor.

Edwards's approach to sermonic rhetoric did not deny this empowered language, but unlike Stoddarean preaching, Edwardsean sermons relied on the power of the reasoned argument and a natural empirical experience. Edwards learned from Stoddard the experimental purchase of figurative language, but he carried it further by organizing his sermons around single metaphors and incorporating their use into his larger philosophy of religious experience: figurative language offered sensory experience to sermon audiences. Edwards, like Stoddard, saw rhetoric as a tool of the spirit, and he relied on figurative language to address the heart. But he combined the strategies learned from his grandfather with a belief in the value of reason: an effective minister was not just a burning light; he should also be a shining light and instruct the mind. The Spirit moving through his words enacted change, but the words themselves were essential.

In his *Warnings of Future Punishment* (1727), a sermon squarely within the hell-fire genre, Edwards argues that the reality of hell has to be realized in the audience through evidence. People dismiss the fear of hell, the sermon states, because it does not “seem real to them,” and it does not seem real because they do not have a “sensible idea or apprehension of it.”¹⁰² The Edwardsean hell-fire sermon presented the sensible experience of hell, and Edwards's philosophy of language meant that the words of the sermon were capable of provide this experience. The sermon gave the audience a sensible idea, or experience, of hell, therefore inculcating belief based on evidence, not just

tradition and example. We find ourselves, then, returning to Sarah Pierpont's categorization of faith into tradition and trial. Both Edwards and Stoddard believed the sermon's role was both experimental and traditional. But Edwards, unlike Stoddard, combined the reasoned argument with Stoddard's hell-fire sensory rhetoric to transmit experience to his auditors.¹⁰³

That said, Edwards worried that those who doubted the reality of hell did so precisely because they relied too much on sensory experience to determine truth: "they have been used to concern themselves only about sensible things, and used to depend on their senses only; and therefore nothing seems real to them but what is sensible. The business of their life has been about things that they can see and hear and feel and taste. [...] They have tied down their minds to such objects of their senses."¹⁰⁴ Yet Edwards does not attempt to change the epistemological mechanism on which his target audience relies; instead he says the sermon's goal is to "make future punishment seem real to you: first, to make you really believe that there is such a thing; and second, that you may have a more lively sensible apprehension of it."¹⁰⁵ After making a rational case for the existence of hell, Edwards describes it in concrete details (fire, scorpions, lack of water), in order to give his auditors a "lively sensible apprehension." In this early sermon we can see the beginnings of Edwards's philosophy of sensory experience concerning things immaterial. He worries that his auditors have "tied down their minds" by relying on sensible things only, yet he makes the case that hell also reveals itself to the mind as sensible objects do. This works because hell was a material reality for Edwards; it was true substance.

The work of the sermon, then, according to *Warnings of Future Punishments*, is that of presenting sensible evidence of spiritual, moral, and divine realities. Reason and evidence, Edwards argues outside *Warnings*, are not sufficient for the human mind to apprehend spiritual ideas, but the natural workings of the mind are still necessary: the mind can receive speculative, sensible knowledge of spiritual realities.¹⁰⁶ The sermon helps in this regard by transmitting reasonable arguments in language (tradition) and presenting the fodder for sensory experience (trial).

The paradigm Edwards establishes in *Warnings* is evident in many of his sermons. As Wilson H. Kinnach argues in his “General Introduction” to the Yale series of Edwards’s sermons, Edwards used imagery as a vehicle for “immediacy” and “meaning.” Kinnach writes that images offered Edwards a solution to what I call the gap between experience and language: “Imagery, fused metaphorically to abstract concepts, would touch the mind of the auditor as surely as an ‘immediate sensation’ [...] A well-chosen image could transform thought into experience and neatly fix the most paradoxical of concepts.”¹⁰⁷ Kinnach implies that Edwards’s typology poses this solution, but he still sees Edwards as full of “doubts about the adequacy of words.” Certainly, Edwards always had doubts: his Newhampton congregation always returned to their hard hearts, and his expulsion from the church in 1750 once again gave him pause over his own oratorical skills. But the images Edwards deployed in his sermons were words, and he believed those words were capable of doing things. *Warnings* uses images to make the terrors of hell sensory and therefore real, like the image of “these roaring lions dare then lay hold as it were with open mouths” to the souls of sinners.¹⁰⁸ Or, more

famously, Edwards employs the image of the spider suspended above a pit in *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. These and like images reach the listeners' hearts, arouse the fear of hell, and thus "lure" them into heaven.¹⁰⁹ But Edwards also firmly believed that the minister had a duty to educate his congregation, to instruct them in doctrine as well as arouse their emotions. The combination of these two purposes makes a minister's words effective.

Edwards's 1744 sermon *The True Excellency of a Minister of the Gospel* offers an argument about the efficacy of ministry that explains how reason and passion work together in the sermon to make language productive for salvation. Edwards's text is John 5:35: "He was a burning and shining light," referring to John the Baptist, a "harbinger of the gospel day [who] excelled all the other prophets."¹¹⁰ Edwards uses John as an example of how all ministers should be both burning and shining lights. Ministers are, Edwards writes, like the moon and stars to the sun of Christ, and therefore their burning and shining lights are "the communications and reflections of something of his brightness."¹¹¹ A minister's burning light means "that his heart be filled with much of the holy ardor of a spirit of true piety," full of "power and energy." Thus, his preaching must be earnest and powerful, "declar[ing] to sinners their misery, and warn[ing] them to fly from the wrath to come," just as *Sinners and Warnings* do.¹¹² But the minister must also shine, or guide and direct: he must "be *pure, clear and full in his doctrine*," which for Edwards means "his instructions are *clear and plain*, accommodated to the capacity of his hearers, and tending to convey light to their understandings."¹¹³ This dual work of the sermon—to arouse the passions toward action and to direct the understanding—occurs in

language. As we have seen, Edwards relies on detailed descriptions and figurative images to speak to the heart, arousing terror. But those images also work on the understanding because they provide a kind of sensory experience.

Words, for Edwards, were material signs of divine substance. And as such, they acted as sensory evidence for spiritual things, always pointing toward and arousing love for true substance, or God. Diaries, Edwards's written accounts of religious experience in the case histories, and sermons all demonstrate the philosophy of language Edwards establishes throughout his writings. Material words, written or spoken, act as fire, clocks, and flowers; they are shadows of the divine.

Notes

¹ Sarah Pierpont of New Haven, Massachusetts is not to be confused with Sarah Pierpont Edwards of Northampton, Massachusetts, wife of Jonathan Edwards. Sarah Pierpont's husband sent the manuscript of her memoir to minister Ebenezer Parkman, who prepared it for publication but never published it. The full manuscript is housed at the American Antiquarian Society, and a partial manuscript can be found at the Huntington Library.

² While I cannot be certain Pierpont is referring to Jonathan Edwards, it seems likely. Harry Stout observes that Edwards had written a note on the manuscript pages of his sermon *Bringing the Ark to Zion a Second Time* (1740). The note reads: "Rev. and dear sir, Brother Pierpont of New Haven sometime since sent to me and my wife, to desire that we would come down the [...]." Stout adds that "in all probability, James Pierpont had invited his sister and brother-in-law down to New Haven for the Yale College commencement in September. Edwards' note, written to [James] Pierpont in that month, states that the couple would indeed come, weather permitting. The note also mentions that Edwards has 'sent word of it already to Mr. Russell,' i.e. the Rev. William Russell of Wethersfield, to whom this discarded letter may have been directed." *Sermons and Discourses: 1739-1742* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 247. It seems likely, then, that Edwards would have accepted this invitation and preached in New Haven just several months after the date on the letter Stout mentions here, so around April of 1740.

³ The New Lights supported and encouraged the revivals, while the Old Lights, a significant group of anti-revivalist ministers, were concerned with the dangers of enthusiasm encouraged by extemporaneity and itinerancy. The Old Lights, the most prominent among whom was Charles Chauncy, stood in vocal opposition to George Whitefield and his followers, the New Lights. Edwards was somewhat more moderate, as Ava Chamberlain has argued: "by the end of the revivals, some moderate New Lights (like Edwards) admitted that 'certain 'errors' had been committed in the early days of the Awakening." See Chamberlain, "The Grand Sower of the Seed: Jonathan Edwards's Critique of George Whitefield," *The New England Quarterly*, 70.3 (Sep 1997), 370.

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies no. 4," *The "Miscellanies:" Entry nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500*, ed. Harry S. Stout (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 201.

⁵ Edwards, *Heeding the Word, Sermons and Discourses, 1734-1738*, ed. M.X. Lesser (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 84.

⁹ The scholarly debate over the past decades about whether there was such a cohesive event as the "Great Awakening" is certainly important as we continue to strive to expand our analysis of early American experience beyond New England, beyond the elite orthodoxy, and beyond whiggish narratives of the Revolution. That said, people believed something was happening. See Frank Lambert, *Inventing the 'Great Awakening'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Though I agree with the impulse of questioning the value of making the Great Awakening too homogenous or too "actual," the characteristics I list did occur around the time Whitefield was touring the colonies and during Edwards' long tenure at the Northampton church. For more on the characteristics of the Great Awakening see Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966); Stout, *The New England Soul*; Rutenburg, *Democratic Personality*; and Thomas

S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 193.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 118-9. The religious affections Edwards discusses are not these sudden and temporary passions. See Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 98.

¹² Edwards, "The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth," *Sermons and discourses, 1739-1742*, ed. Harry S. Stout (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 89.

¹³ *Ibid*, 89.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 84.

¹⁵ Edwards, "Miscellanies no. 782," *The "Miscellanies:" Entry nos. 501-832*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 457. See Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Meridian Books, 1949), 52-68. Edwards's new sense is a "new sensation or perception of the mind, which is entirely of a new sort, and which could be produced by no exalting, varying or compounding of that kind of perceptions or sensations which the mind had before." In defining how the new sense works, Edwards relies on Locke: the new sense, he writes, is "what some metaphysicians call a new simple idea." The new spiritual sense works like other senses, discerning new ideas. Edwards likens the new sense to tasting the honey that has only been looked at or touched; it is not different from natural senses in the same way that "the ideas or perceptions of the same sense may differ one from another, but rather as the ideas and sensations of different senses do differ." Miller argues that "holiness" is the new sense, but I see holiness as the thing sensed by the new sense. Grace, Edwards says, is the new simple idea. The distinction between "grace" and "holiness" is one of agency and legibility. Edwards is clear that no individual gains this new sense through natural means. It is not a "new faculty of the will, but a foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of the will." The new sense, in other words, transforms the natural faculty of the will. The Spirit confers the new sense. And it is a matter of legibility because the new sense is not itself a thing that can be observed, as "holiness" might. See Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 205-6.

¹⁶ Edwards distinguishes between the ordinary and extraordinary work of the Spirit in Miscellanies no. 782, *The "Miscellanies,"* ed. Chamberlain, arguing that the ordinary works of the Spirit consists in an understanding via signs that comes naturally through sensory experience of objects and reflection, just as Locke describes the exciting of ideas in the mind. Unlike Locke, Edwards adds to this speculative knowledge a different kind of understanding or apprehension: the sense of the heart. The ordinary work "communicates only a sensible knowledge of those things, that the mind had a speculative knowledge of before," but the extraordinary work of the Spirit "imparts speculative knowledge to the soul" or the heart (461-2). Here Edwards seems to divide the workings of the heart and mind in a way he does not in the later *Religious Affections*.

¹⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957), 376.

¹⁸ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, 2V (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1894), III. X. 34.

¹⁹ Edwards's relationship to Locke has a long critical history, beginning with Emory P. Aldrich's 1879 "Report to the Council," which argues that Locke's influence spread throughout America through Edwards. Modern criticism of Edwards's use of Locke begins with Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart" *The Harvard Theological Review*, 41. 2 (Apr 1948), 123-145; "Edwards, Locke, and the

Rhetoric of Sensation,” *Critical essays on Jonathan Edwards*, ed. William J. Scheick (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980), and *Jonathan Edwards*. “Edwards, Locke, and the Rhetoric of Sensation” first appeared in Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 167-183. See also Paul Helm, “John Locke and Jonathan Edwards: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 7.1 (January 1969); Mason I. Lowance, “Images of Shadows of Divine Things: The Typology of Jonathan Edwards,” *Early American Literature* 5.1 (Spring 1970); Sang Hyun Lee, “Jonathan Edwards’s Theory of the Imagination,” *Michigan Academician* 5 (Fall 1972); Wallace E. Anderson, “Introduction,” *Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) and “Introduction,” *Typological Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Norman Fiering *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Clyde A. Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, the Valley and Nature* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1987); Janice Knight, “Learning the Language of God,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 48. 4 (Oct. 1991); Steven R. Yarbrough and Jon C. Adams, *Delightful Conviction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993); and Robert Eric Brown, “Edwards, Locke, and the Bible,” *The Journal of Religion* 79. 3 (Jul 1999).

²⁰ Miller, “Edwards, Locke, and the Rhetoric of Sensation,” 130.

²¹ Locke, *An Essay*, III.ii.8.

²² *Ibid*, III.ii.8.

²³ *Ibid*, III.x.20.

²⁴ Edwards, “The Mind” no 43, Anderson, 362.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 361.

²⁶ Miller, “Edwards, Locke, and the Rhetoric of Sensation,” 127.

²⁷ Edwards, “Types” *Typological Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, 152.

²⁸ On the communicative role of the Bible in Edwards see Steven J. Stein, “The Quest for the Spiritual Sense,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, 70.1/2 (1977), 107. See also Sang Hyun Lee, “Does History Matter to God?,” *Jonathan Edwards at 300*, ed. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Caleb J. D. Maskell (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 2005) and Amy Plantinga Paw, “Edwards as American Theologian,” *Jonathan Edwards at 300*.

²⁹ Edwards, “Miscellanies no. 332,” *The “Miscellanies,”* Stout, 410.

³⁰ Knight, “Learning the Language of God,” 543-4. As Knight notes, there has been much critical debate over Edwards’s typology since Perry Miller argued that Edwards’s application of typology to the natural world was “a daring innovation that coupled Newton’s claims of divine uniformity in nature with Locke’s principles of sensational psychology” that marked Edwards as moving beyond traditional Congregationalism (543). Knight rightly refocuses the conversation on Edwards himself, arguing that his “idealism was always balanced by a sense of the importance of nature as a vehicle for God’s progressive communications” and that this communicativeness did not “compromise God’s majesty but instead fulfills it” (536).

³¹ *Ibid*, 550-1.

³² Edwards, *Typological Writings* includes “Images of Divine Things,” “Types,” and “Types of the Messiah.” Many of the Images were included in Edwards’s *Miscellanies*. Anderson, Lowance and Watters date the writing of “Images” sometime around 1741-2 (35).

³³ Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” Anderson, Lowance, and Watters, 85.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 61.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 67.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 125.

³⁷ *Ibid*, qtd. 125.

³⁸ *Ibid*, qtd. 125-6. In the Yale edition of “Images,” Wallace E. Anderson and Mason I. Lowance, Jr. observe that Edwards’s had attacked Turnbull’s philosophy on other points, but that as a disciple of Newton and Locke, Turbull offered “many of the premises from which [Edwards’s] own arguments commenced.” See *Typological Writings*, 127, footnote 5.

³⁹ “Miscellanies no. 782,” *The “Miscellanies:” Entry nos. 501-832*, 455-6.

⁴⁰ Edwards, “The Mind,” *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, 354, 344.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 368.

⁴² Jasper Reid, “Jonathan Edwards on Space and God,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 41.3 (2003), 400. In making this distinction, Reid intends to revise what he thinks is the slightly misplaced labeling of Edwards as an idealist by focusing instead on the role of the divine will (as opposed to the divine mind) in the existence of the material universe. Reid proposes Edwards be read as an immaterialist, rather than idealist. In this article, Reid’s primary purpose is to make distinguish Edwards from Berkeley, who is often considered very influential for Edwards. For other considerations of Edwards in light of Berkeley, see Miller, “Edwards, Locke, and the Rhetoric of Sensation” and William J. Wainwright, “Jonathan Edwards and the Language of God,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 48.4 (1980).

⁴³ “The Mind,” Anderson, 344.

⁴⁴ *Religious Affections*, 245.

⁴⁵ Certainly Edward’s strange piece-meal digestion of Locke misreads Locke. Because words signify only ideas in the speaker’s mind, they cannot signify real essences or latch on to things. But Edwards merges some of Locke’s theory of language with his own cosmology to arrive at his own distinct theory of language.

⁴⁶ “Images,” Anderson, Lowance, and Watters, 152.

⁴⁷ See Anderson and Lowance, Introduction to *Typological Writings*, 8-11.

⁴⁸ Many have noted Edwards’s worry about his style and use of language, particularly in his sermons, but Edwards’s anxiety has led some to see his writings as flawed. See M. X. Lesser, “Introduction,” *Sermons and Discourses: 1734-1739*, 35. Of Edwards’s writing, Lesser comments: “Hardly elegant, the language is at once scriptural and logical and pastoral, in a word, Edwards.” Throughout the nineteenth-century, most readers and editors found Edwards’s prose insufferable. See Lesser’s “Introduction,” 33-36. For more on

critical perceptions of Edwards's linguistic anxiety see Wilson H. Kimnach, "General Introduction to the Sermons: Jonathan Edwards's Art of Prophesying," *Sermons and Discourses: 1720-1723* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1992), 21-24 and "Jonathan Edwards's Pursuit of Reality," *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University of Press, 1988), 110.

⁴⁹ Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival," *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 291.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 291.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 292.

⁵² For more on Edwards's gender-neutral presentation of Sarah Edwards see Gustafson, "Jonathan Edwards and the Reconstruction of 'Feminine' Speech," *American Literary History* 6.2 (1994), 185-212.

⁵³ Edwards, "Some Thoughts," Goen, 299.

⁵⁴ Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative," Goen, 201.

⁵⁵ "Some Thoughts," Goen, 301.

⁵⁶ *Religious Affections*, 98.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 98.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 98.

⁵⁹ "Some Thoughts," *The Great Awakening*, 301-2.

⁶⁰ By "subsumes" I do not mean to suggest that the material world becomes pure spirit. As Janice Knight argues, for Edwards the world "becomes infused with greater meaning. [...] His neoplatonism was always tempered by his keen interest in providential history." See Knight, "Learning the Language of God," 535.

⁶¹ "Some Thoughts," Goen, 332.

⁶² *Ibid*, 333, 334.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 336-338.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 336-7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 340.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 346.

⁶⁷ Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Petit (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 91.

⁶⁸ This is a standard interpretation of *The Life*. For example, Norman Petit argues that Edwards compiled the text because he believed Brainerd's diary to be a theological example and Brainerd himself "a virtuous man who exemplified the spiritual life." See Petit, "Introduction," *The Life of David Brainerd*, 22.

⁶⁹ *The Life of David Brainerd*, 90, 92.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 91.

⁷¹ Petit, "Introduction," *The Life of David Brainerd*, 42.

⁷² *The Life of David Brainerd*, 153.

⁷³ Ibid, 153.

⁷⁴ Petit, "Introduction," *The Life of David Brainerd*, 19.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 80. Petit offers an example of a redacted passage: "I felt something like a criminal at the bar waiting for his sentence, excepting this, I felt but little concern which way my case went, for the fear of hell was almost if not entirely taken from me ... And in this case I felt neither love to God or desire of heaven as I used to imagine I did. Neither fear of hell, or love to the present world." Edwards also left out visions, imaginative exploits, etc, and he often cut words like "amazed" and "amazing" and makes "a conscious effort to detach the experience from the speaker" (81).

⁷⁶ David L. Weddle, "The Melancholy Saint: Jonathan Edwards's Interpretation of David Brainerd as a Model of Evangelical Spirituality," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 81.3 (1988), 298.

⁷⁷ Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, 191.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 286.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 258.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 273.

⁸¹ Ibid, 92, 93.

⁸² Ibid, 124.

⁸³ Ibid, 282.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 169.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 225.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 92.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 100-1.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 90.

⁸⁹ For more on New England Puritan conceptions of external marks as effects rather than signs of grace see Elisa New, "Variety as Religious Experience: The Poetics of the Plain Style."

⁹⁰ For more on Stoddard's influence on Edwards see Kinnach, "General Introduction," *Sermons and Discourses: 1720-1723*, 11-20.

⁹¹ Kinnach, "General Introduction," 14-5.

⁹² Stoddard, *Presence of Christ*, 28.

⁹³ Solomon Stoddard, *The Defects of Preachers Reproved* (New London, 1724), 7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 16.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 15.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 15.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 19.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 24-5.

¹⁰² Jonathan Edwards, "Warnings of Future Punishment," *Sermons and Discourses: 1723-1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 201.

¹⁰³ For arguments against Edwards as relying on a rhetoric of persuasion see Yarbrough and Adams, *Delightful Conviction* and Christopher Grasso, "Images and Shadows of Jonathan Edwards," *American Literary History*, 8.4 (1996).

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, "Warnings of Future Punishment," *Sermons and Discourses: 1723-1729*, 206.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 206.

¹⁰⁷ Kinnach, "General Introduction," *Sermons and Discourses: 1720-1723*, 193.

¹⁰⁸ Edwards, "Warnings of Future Punishment," *Sermons and Discourses: 1723-1729*, 210.

¹⁰⁹ Kinnach, "General Introduction," *Sermons and Discourses: 1720-1723*, 293. See *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* in Stout, *Sermons and Discourses, 1739-1742*, 400-435.

¹¹⁰ Edwards, "The True Excellency of a Minister of the Gospel," Kinnach, *Sermons and Discourses: 1743-1758*, 86.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 89.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 92.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 92, 93.

Coda

After Edwards: The Bodily Language of George Whitefield

Most studies that trace sermonic or popular religious rhetoric through Edwards's lifetime argue that an important shift occurred during the Great Awakening. Most often, this shift is defined as a burgeoning American evangelicalism that emphasized experience over reason or the text. Many scholars see extemporaneous preaching, preaching without preparation and relying on the immediate inspiration of the Spirit, as the agent and embodiment of this shift. Sandra Gustafson, for example argues that "the extemporaneous ideal required the speaker to inhabit Scripture fully and personally experience its meaning"; extemporaneous sermons revealed "an unmediated access to truth."¹ Thomas Kidd's recent narrative of the Great Awakening also stresses the individual's experience of salvation. He opens *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* with these words: "To expect revival, one had to experience despair."²

These and related narratives assume that experience was a category not emphasized as adamantly in orthodox forms of colonial religion before the outbreak of revivals.³ Even if they locate the beginnings of evangelicalism in the late seventeenth-century, as Kidd does, they see the extemporaneity of the Great Awakening as inducing experiential faith in a novel way.⁴ But throughout this dissertation, I have argued that experience was always thought to be essential to early American religion. The Great Awakening did see a shift in the *nature* of that experience, but evangelicalism was not more experiential than the Congregationalism before it. Though experience had always

defined religious faith and had always been essential to the sermon, the character of sermon delivery did change in the Awakening.⁵ George Whitefield, the Grand Itinerant of the Great Awakening, introduced a sermonic style that would characterize American evangelicalism through the twentieth-century. Here I will briefly treat Whitefield's sermonic theory to suggest one of the ways in which the narrative of the sermon and religious experience I have traced changes after Edwards.

To set the scene: in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, The African*, Equiano chances by a church where “a number of people were even mounted on ladders, looking in at the windows.”⁶ The event he witnesses here is a sermon given by George Whitefield, the fiery revivalist and famous Great Awakening preacher. Equiano presses into the church, interested in witnessing for himself the performance of this man whom he had “wished to see and hear.” The one impression Equiano shares about Whitefield focuses on his bodily, physical presence and not on his sermon itself: “I saw this pious man exhorting the people with the greatest fervour and earnestness, and sweating as much as I ever did while in slavery at Montserrat beach.”⁷ Whitefield preached to crowds reaching numbers in the thousands. He often preached outdoors, and he preached itinerantly—in various locations without a home church. These characteristics distinguished Whitefield from previous preachers, yet the philosophy underlying these changes is usually characterized as one emphasizing the experiential. But this characteristic was not new to Whitefield. What was actually occurring in the very theatrical, bodily, and public space of Whitefield's pulpit that changed the nature of religious experience for the audience? The complicated rhetorical relationships between

minister, word, and lay listener were negotiated through the audience's act of witnessing and through Whitefield's body, not through words and rhetoric as it was for Cotton or Edwards.

By shifting agency away from the spoken words of the minister to the experience of hearing, Whitefield demanded a more active participation from his audience. His *Directions How to Hear Sermons* (1740) theorizes the purposes of sermons and the role of preacher, God, and audience within the particular rhetorical situation of the sermon. Whitefield asks his audience "not only to prepare your Hearts before you hear, but also to give diligent heed to the Things that are spoken" and to "lend an attentive Ear to [Christ's'] Ambassadors."⁸ Nothing Whitefield explicitly asks from his audience is substantially different than the work of preparation Shepard or Hooker asked of their congregants. Although Cotton, Shepard, Stoddard, and Edwards all asked their auditors to hear carefully, Whitefield's emphasis is different.

Whitefield's voice was thunderous, and it was the voice and not the words themselves that he thought brought God and auditor together. Whitefield locates agency within the audience's attentiveness and in his own performance. For example, in the closing words of *Directions* Whitefield describes two types of hearers and suggests an agency grounded in the act of hearing:

It does indeed sometimes happen that GOD to magnify his free Grace in CHRIST JESUS, is found of them that sought him not; a notorious Sinner is forcibly worked upon by a publick Sermon, and plucked as a Fire-brand out of the Fire. But this is not GOD'S ordinary Way of acting. No; for the

Generality, he only visits those with the Power of his Word, who humbly wait to know what he would have them to do. And sends unqualified Hearers not only empty, but hardened, away.⁹

Agency is located within the listener's willingness, and without this openness the Word has no power to persuade. Whitefield assumes and bodily performs an immediacy that his Puritan forebears tried to achieve rhetorically.

Whitefield located religious experience in the act of hearing the minister's voice, and he dictated and modeled the kind of experience he argued that hearing would induce. He accomplished this through the bodily, performative spectacle of his preaching style.¹⁰ His power proceeded not just from extemporaneity, because Whitefield's sermons were not always or truly spontaneous. As the Grand Itinerant, Whitefield repeated sermons over and over. In his *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin addresses Whitefield's practice of revisiting sermons:

By hearing him often I came to distinguish easily between Sermons newly compos'd, and those which he had often preach'd in the Course of his Travels. His Delivery of the latter was so improv'd by frequent Repetitions, that every Accent, every Emphasis, every Modulation of Voice, was so perfectly turn'd and well plac'd, that without being interested in the Subject, one could not help being pleas'd with the Discourse [...] This is an Advantage itinerant Preachers have over those who are stationary: as the latter cannot well improve their Delivery of a Sermon by so many Rehearsals.¹¹

Franklin hears not an unmediated access to truth but a performance that improves with practice. This is hardly surprising given Franklin's disposition, but it does reveal extemporaneous preaching as not truly extemporary.

Despite the repetition of sermons, the physical relationship between Whitefield and audience theoretically allowed for an authenticity and transparency in the rhetorical moment. Equiano focuses on the sweat pouring from Whitefield's body, not on the words of the sermon. And many have noted Whitefield's borrowings from the theatrical stage. The bodiliness of Whitefield's sermons mediates a new kind of relationship between speaker and audience; as a result of the theatrical spectacle, the distinction between speaker and audience collapses. Harry Stout comments on the physicality of Whitefield's preaching, arguing that "[t]he effect of all of Whitefield's innovations was to free his body for performance, erasing all intermediaries between him and his audience. [...] Oftentimes it was the *audience* who left emotionally drained and exhausted after a Whitefield revival."¹² The audience reacts to Whitefield's performance with a reenactment, an authentically felt imitation that seems to remove all mediators between God and convert.

Whitefield's contemporaries were aware of the singularity of Whitefield's preaching style. Josiah Smith, minister during the Great Awakening and defender of Whitefield, describes the "manner of [Whitefield's] preaching" as physical performance. Smith laments the inability of his pen to represent the "action and gesture" of the Grand Itinerant; Whitefield's performance cannot be translated onto the printed page. Smith describes the reaction he witnesses in Whitefield's audiences: "The *Awe*, the *Silence*, the

Attention, which sat upon the Face of so great an Audience, was an Argument, how he could reign over *all their Powers*.”¹³ The evidence for power of Whitefield’s preaching, Smith argues, is not in his listeners’ conversion, but on their faces. Whitefield’s “reign over all their powers” also translated to the fainting, groaning, tears, and other external manifestations his audiences enacted. They respond to Whitefield’s affective performance with their own bodily performance.¹⁴

Franklin addresses the differing agency between Whitefield’s writings and his spoken addresses: “His Writing and Printing from time to time gave great Advantage to his Enemies. Unguarded Expressions and even erroneous Opinions [delivered] in Preaching might have been afterwards explain’d, or qualify’d,” and Franklin concludes that if Whitefield “had never written any thing he would have left behind him a much more numerous and important Sect.”¹⁵ Franklin repeatedly expressed amazement at the sheer power of Whitefield’s voice to arouse fleeting emotions in the hearer, and he recognized the indelibility of the written word; Whitefield could never unsay what he printed. The printed word did not possess the power to disrupt the boundary between speaker and audience in the same manner as did Whitefield’s visceral and affective voice. It was the bodily nature and theatrical power of Whitefield’s sermons that disrupted the audience’s ability to locate agency in the speaker or the Word and to simultaneously imitate the experience Whitefield modeled in the pulpit.

In *Religious Affections* Jonathan Edwards establishes a philosophy of bodily affect: “Such seems to be our nature, and such the laws of the union of soul and body, that there never is any case whatsoever, any lively and vigorous exercise of the will or

inclination of the soul, without some effect on the body, in some alteration of the motion of its fluids, and especially of the animal spirits” (98). Whitefield would have agreed, and this philosophy became the practice of his preaching. His affective performances in the pulpit and his audiences’ bodily responses modeled Edwards’s philosophy. Edwards, then, is a bridge between Whitefield’s sermonic performance and earlier rhetorical efforts to narrow the distance between text and experience. While Edwards practiced a sermonic rhetoric that borrowed aspects from his Puritan predecessors, he diverged from them in his philosophy of religious affections. That philosophy, though, did not manifest itself in his preaching like it did in Whitefield’s, and Edwards warned his congregants not to confuse the preacher and the message. In a 1740 sermon series on the parable of the sower from Mathew 13, Edwards advised his auditors:

examine & try whether or no your Joy has only been that sort of Joy [that takes] more a delight in the manner of preaching than a Rejoicing in the thing Preached . was the pleasure you had principally in the Eloquence & aptness [...] fervency & becoming delivery of the speaker more than in the divine Excellency of the things that were spoken.¹⁶

Edwards implies that Whitefield’s success was due to the fervent manner of his preaching, not to the sermon’s message. Yet without Edwards’s philosophy, Whitefield’s performances in the pulpit would have had much less success, and would have received even more criticism than they did. If the preachers, laypeople, and thinkers traced throughout this dissertation were always worried that language would be an obstacle to an immediate experience of God, Whitefield was unconcerned about language as a

barrier to immediate divine experience. Language essentially disappeared in the body of the preacher.¹⁷

Language falls away as a mediator or vehicle in tension with the experience, because Whitefield's body performs a natural, not linguistic language.¹⁸ At some point in the conversion process language fails, and bodily, emotional response is the only possible response. Whitefield's bodily performance replaces language. This is an obvious shift away from the kind of physical presence William Perkins suggested in *The Art of Prophesying*, where he warned ministers to be grave in their gestures: "It is fit therefore, that the trunk or stalke of the bodie being erect and quiet, all the other parts, as the arme, the hand, the face and eyes have such motions, as may express and (as it were) utter the godly affections of the heart."¹⁹ Each small physical movement was calculated to correspond to the message but never to distract from it. But in Whitefield's sermons, the movement was the message.

Notes

¹ Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power*, 47, xvii.

² Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 1.

³ Donald Weber, in *Rhetoric and History in Revolutionary New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), similarly argues that the shift in sermonic rhetoric during the Great Awakening consists of emotional experience and affective preaching. Extemporaneous preaching, he argues, borrows from Ciceronian amplification that was meant to persuade through emotion and “compelled [the speaker] *beyond* the fragment of the written direction, beyond the prescribed text, into the realm of pure, extemporaneous preaching” (27). To amplify, he argues, means to “extend orally the theological argument; to *affect* the hearer; to *effect* an interchange between idea and emotion” (27). See also Nancy Ruttenburg, *Democratic Personality* for an implicit corrective to narratives in which the Great Awakening is described as a watershed moment. Gustafson constructs a narrative of the rise of popular voice beginning with the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692.

⁴ Thomas Kidd begins his narrative of American evangelicalism with the New England declension sermons of the 1660s and 1670s, and he sees the beginning of what he calls “the theology of revival” in the late 1660s. Kidd also, and in my mind rightly, identifies “an emphasis on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit” as a crucial characteristic of American evangelicalism. Yet he still sees Whitefield’s preaching style as innovative. See Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America*, 44.

⁵ Of course, transformations in sermonic rhetoric were always occurring. We see changes even from the Puritans through Edwards. Though Edwards relied on the four-part sermon of early Reformation preaching, his process of notation, preparation, and delivery was his own, and it changed throughout his career. See Kinnach, “General Introduction,” *Sermons and Discourses: 1720-1723* for more on how Edwards’s sermonic process changed over the course of his life.

⁶ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), 129.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁸ George Whitefield, *Directions How to Hear Sermons* (Boston, 1740), 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰ For more on Whitefield’s performative preaching style see Timothy Hall, *Contested Boundaries* and Ruttenburg, *Democratic Personality*.

¹¹ Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography and other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 111.

¹² Harry Stout, *The New England Soul*, 60.

¹³ Josiah Smith, *The Character, Rreaching, &c. of the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, Impartially Represented and Supported* (Boston, 1740), 11-12.

¹⁴ While Whitefield’s bodily performance transformed witnesses, he also printed and circulated his sermons throughout the colonies, believing they could instigate revival and conversion just as powerfully as his oral

performances. Whitefield seems to have valued not only the aural and visual experience of the sermon in the fields but also the power of texts peripheral to the Bible to bring enlightenment to the reader. What seems like a contradiction is resolved by the fact that Whitefield performed through the press just like he did in the fields. Timothy Hall's *Contested Boundaries* recognizes Whitefield's "manipulation of the press" as an important aspect in his success. Timothy Hall, *Contested Boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1994), 33. Whitefield treated his printed sermons as an extension of his bodily performance. The very appearance of his printed sermons confirms this: Christopher Looby describes Benjamin Franklin's printing of Whitefield's sermons as the work of making the written seem spoken. The typographical style, "foregrounding the graphic surface [...] of the utterance, was intended precisely to conjure the phonic image: to bring the 'written discourses...as near as possible to those spoken.'" Looby, *Voicing America*, 73.

¹⁵ Franklin, *Autobiography*, 112.

¹⁶ *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*. 576. Sermon on Matt. 13:5-6 (a) (1740).

¹⁷ Nancy Ruttenburg argues that when the difference between these two parties dissolves, "all 'discourse' of necessity comes to an end" (100).

¹⁸ Whitefield's bodily language mirrors philosophies of natural language emerging out of Scottish Common Sense philosophy in the early eighteenth-century, which argued for a naturally expressive language that relied on bodily, vocal, and facial modulations to convey meaning. In this scenario, affect is not a threat to genuine experience or linguistic clarity, nor is it merely ornamentation for language; affect is language.

¹⁹ Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 143.

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