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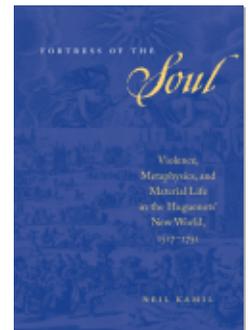
Fortress of the Soul

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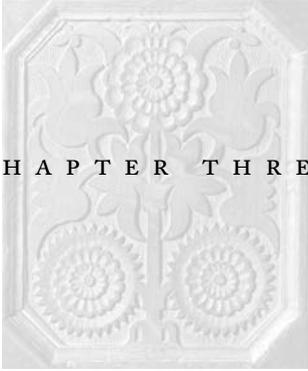


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C H A P T E R T H R E E

Personal History and “Spiritual Honor”

Philibert Hamelin’s Consideration of Straight Lines
and the Rehabilitation of the Nicodemite
as Huguenot Artisan of Security

❖ Perspectives on Nicodemism ❖

Concealed faith was anathema to Calvin, who condemned it as “Nicodemism,” a name derived from Nicodemus, a Pharisee depicted as a hypocrite in the Gospel of John (3:1–21; 7:50–52; 19:39). Those who hid their Protestant convictions, dissimulating what was concealed in their hearts and outwardly adhering to the rituals and social behavior of religious orthodoxy, were branded “Nicodemites.”

Calvin assailed Nicodemism in 1544 in a publication entitled *Excuse de Jehan Calvin, à messieurs les Nicodemites, sur la complainte qu’ilz font de sa trop grand’ rigueur* (John Calvin’s Justification in Response to the Nicodemites’ Complaint About His Excessive Rigor).¹ His unforgiving polemical essay focused on French Nicodemism. Diffused widely in France, it was published twice more in French during Calvin’s lifetime, in 1551 and 1558. All three editions were in print long before publication of Palissy’s *Recepte véritable* (1563), and they were widely diffused during the French civil wars of religion, a time when Nicodemism was practiced as a defense against confessional violence. Many passages in the *Recepte* make it quite clear that Palissy was completely familiar with Calvin’s text.²

From the 1550s through the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, Calvin's *Excuse . . . à messieurs les Nicodemites* gave rise to numerous propagandistic tracts, of which Jehan Crespin's martyrology, *Actes des martyrs* (1554, 1565, 1619), to which Palissy refers in the *Recepte*, was the most celebrated example on the Continent. Taking their lead from Calvin, martyrologies from Crespin's to the Englishman John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563), and, later, the Dutchman Tieleman Janszoon van Brachts's *Martyrer Spiegel* (*Martyr's Mirror*) (1660, 1748) codified the Protestant ideal of the martyr on the model of Christ, who openly confessed heresy to inquisitors. Martyrs in these books relished the pain of execution, to be witnessed by others as a pure, sanctified death and spiritual rebirth.³ To do otherwise was, for Calvin, to "hide under the robe of Nicodemus," who "came to Jesus Christ at night, in the time of his ignorance."⁴ Faith was not hidden under a dissimulating outer garment, but shone brightly from a transparent one, as "we serve God all together, purely." To dissimulate faith did "not follow the soul, but [was] for the good of the body."⁵

Calvin despised, above all other Nicodemites, Paracelsian "adepts," whom he regarded as depraved "half-Christians" who egregiously identified faith and spiritual aspiration with matter,

both to destroy the immortality of the soul and to deprive God of his right. For, since the soul has organic faculties, they by this pretext bind the soul to the body so that it may not subsist without it, and by praising nature they suppress God's name as far as they can. . . . Some persons, moreover, babble about a secret inspiration that gives life to the whole universe, but what they say is not only weak but completely profane; . . . of what value to beget and nourish godliness in men's hearts is that jejeune speculation about the universal mind which animates and quickens the world!⁶

Calvin acquiesced that man was "the loftiest proof of divine wisdom," inasmuch "as all acknowledge, the human body shows itself a composition so ingenious that its Artificer is rightly judged a wonder-worker." Thus, "Certain philosophers" (by this he probably meant Aristotle and, especially, Plato) "accordingly, long ago not ineptly called man a microcosm because he is a rare example of God's power, goodness, and wisdom, and contains within himself enough miracles to occupy our minds, if only we are not irked at paying attention to them."⁷

Yet if "the knowledge of God shines forth in the fashioning of the universe and the continuing governing of it," then the corruption engendered by Adam's fall from prelapsarian grace and purity had assured Calvin that "they entangle themselves in such a huge mass of errors that blind wickedness stifles and finally extinguishes those sparks which once flashed forth to show them God's glory."⁸ This mass of errors and blind wickedness willed them to "imagine Platonic ideas in their heads," propound "crazy superstitions," and "consider in private chambers how things were going . . . in secret,"

before unveiling their hidden belief. “For I would love best if all the human sciences were banished from the earth,” wrote Calvin, “if they were the cause of cooling thus the zeal of Christians, and turning them away from God.”⁹

The Nicodemites’ “hypocrisy and lies” were nothing less than self-idolatry. The perverse adornment of one’s own corrupt (albeit “ingenious”) “exterior” body to assume a false exterior and the persona of sinfulness for the sake of duplicitous self-protection bought the superficial perception of security at the unacceptable cost of “spiritual honor”:

I must insist upon this point with the greatest vehemence. . . . It is already a great crime to commit an exterior idolatry, to abandon your body, which is the temple of God, to a pollution which the scriptures condemn as much or more than debauchery. And it is not a light offense, to transfer the honor of God to an idol; I call for reverence for the exterior, because it is the sign and witness of spiritual honor.¹⁰

Luther was arguably more ambiguous on this subject. Pride and honor were common pejoratives in his theology. Yet, while Luther railed against doing the Lord’s work “deceitfully,” he thought the outer body too corrupt to signify the spirit *openly* (except as its opposite).¹¹ To drive home this point, however, Calvin began the 1544 edition by quoting from a particularly censorious text: Isaiah 30:9–11. This reappeared later as a coda in the 1551 edition: “For they [the Nicodemites] are a rebellious people, and they are hypocrites; people who will not hear God’s Law. Who say to those who see, See not; and to those who consider, Let us not consider things in a straight line, but speak of things that will humor us, and see deceptions.”¹²

Palissy’s critique of “straight lines” in the *Recepte* can be read in dialogue with Calvin’s citation of Isaiah. The potter’s canny manipulation of “the exterior” as the “sign and witness of spiritual honor” was linked to events in his own personal history. Thus, he substituted invisibility and artisanal security for the “honor” of frontal resistance ending in the operatic theater of martyrdom. Palissy’s mistrust of orthodoxies of all sorts—Roman Catholicism, scholasticism, and Calvinism—was focused by the martyrdom of the master printer and minister Philibert Hamelin, who had been sent by Calvin himself to bring Genevan discipline to Saintonge.

Palissy’s sympathy for the hidden style preceded Hamelin’s appearance in Saintes. Like the Cathar and Waldensian heretics of pre-Reformation France, Palissy allied himself in his writing with lowly agricultural laborers and country people. It was for their improvement, he said, that the *Recepte* and *Discours* were written. Palissy called his craft the “art of the earth” in part to validate this alliance, as did his “rustic figures.” Pottery, made from coarse earth materials by craftsmen one step above common laborers, ranked low in status in the hierarchy of skilled trades. Although he worked within their spheres of influence, Palissy possessed the persona of leveler-artisan-

philosopher, not guildsman or citified bourgeois. Palissy considered his art novel and innovative because his creative life developed in the fullest sense in the primitive world, outside of the ancient "scholastic" rules of guild masters. Like Paracelsus, who learned cures from "skilled women" and other unlearned folk healers, Palissy acquired the basics of his trade as an apprentice to the rustic potters of La Chapelle-des-Pots (literally, "Little Church of Pots"), a small artisanal hamlet four kilometers northeast of Saintes. His self-created persona of "paysan de Xaintonge" did not appear in print until after his influential friendship with Hamelin, however.

Though he openly courted wealthy Roman Catholic aristocrats for patronage, he also used heated rhetoric "from below," antithetical to the noble culture he desired to serve. Gerrard Winstanley (b. 1609)—another earth-obsessed Paracelsian natural and political philosopher, with whom Palissy is usefully compared—would have thought him a kindred spirit.¹³ Although he worked in Saintes, beginning around 1536–37, and represented himself unambiguously as a "paysan de Xaintonge," Palissy was "a native of Agen in the Agenais," probably born about 1510 (1499 and 1520 are also possible). Agen was a source of refugees to La Rochelle, the isolated coastal island regions of Saintonge during the civil wars, and the Americas as well. Located on the Gironde River in southwestern France, Agen is about seventy-five kilometers southeast of La Rochelle's hinterlands by *pirogue*, or dugout canoe. These long, narrow boats, which reached a length of thirteen meters or more and could be fitted with sails, were the commonest form of river transport in the southwest of France from the early Middle Ages until near the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Palissy had traveled extensively throughout the southwest years earlier, but it was not until 1536 that he appears in Saintes's town records as an established resident and working artisan.¹⁵ Assuming the public role and professional identity of "paysan de Xaintonge" was thus significant on a number of levels. While Palissy tells us much about his life starting with his arrival at Saintes, he reveals nothing of his early years in Agen and elsewhere. His birthplace is never mentioned; it was learned posthumously (Agen was noted as Palissy's place of birth by his jailers in the Bastille).¹⁶ Willful forgetfulness and elision of his personal history conformed with Palissy's spiritual and artisanal rebirth in Saintonge as a "new man," Reformed natural philosopher, and master potter. While this "new man" identity authenticated Palissy's religious credentials for rusticity, reinventing his personal history would add value to his "rustique figures," books, and laboratory demonstrations. His scientific performances were paid for by Parisian patrons amused by Nature's "rough," exotic qualities, and were attended by competitors from the international scientific community. Palissy's new identity also had strong religious and political connotations for a large audience of literate coreligionists across France, who identified rural Saintonge with the *rustique* "New World" style of Huguenot culture.

Palissy's artisanal career began in Agen. He worked there as a glass painter, primarily for churches. Palissy hints that he changed trades for economic reasons. Pottery was in demand in Saintonge: there was a growing need for ceramic containers owing to the popularity at home and abroad of eau-de-vie distilled in Cognac.¹⁷ Meanwhile, church construction declined dramatically in the provinces, so demand for stained windows had diminished.

As a glass painter, Palissy spent much of his working life on the road, as did the eighteenth-century glazier Jacques-Louis Ménétra, who worked side by side with the painters to materialize designs into glass. Palissy wrote that demand for traditional glassmaking and painting had diminished in his customary markets in "Périgord, Limousin, Saintonge, Angoulême, Gascony, Bearn, and Bigorre, where glass[making] became so mechanized that it was sold by street-criers in all the villages, even by street-criers selling drapery and scrap metal, so much so that maker and seller alike had a hard time earning a living."¹⁸ Palissy clearly objected to the "modernization" of his craft.

As an enthusiastic newly converted Protestant, recently accused of iconoclasm, Palissy no longer wished to produce liturgical ornamentation to adorn the same Roman Catholic churches he now sought to destroy. The cross-fertilization of skills also gave him a practical advantage over his competitors in ceramics. Palissy's understanding of the optics of glass and enamel glazes and the construction and operation of highly specialized wood-fired kilns and alchemic crucibles facilitated the innovation of new pottery glazes, the subject of his essay in the *Discours* "On the art of the Earth, its Usefulness, on Enamels and Fire." This was the technical impetus behind his shift to production of new glazes discovered in natural-philosophical experimentation.

Beginning in Agen, before becoming fully engaged in pottery experiments and production at Saintes, Palissy applied his glass-painting skills to survey maps. He called this practice drawing landscape *pourtraits*; hence, maps were related to the fortress *pourtrait*. Like fortress drawings, these geometric renderings were drawn to scale, worked with "my compass and ruler." These two basic drafting tools, emblemata of artisanal competence and control, were very commonly depicted on the maps themselves.¹⁹ Palissy's *pourtraiture* proved a lucrative supplement for glass painting prior to 1536. It also supported him while he learned to make pottery in Saintonge, where he sought patronage for his innovative lead glazes. "People thought I was more skilled in painting than I actually was," he wrote; "this led to my being called upon to make diagrams for litigations. Now, when I had such commissions, I was very well paid, and I also kept up with my glassmaking for a long time, until I was sure I could make a living in the art of clay."²⁰

Most commissions for these precise, geometric renderings came from the legal community, one of the few groups in early modern France able to pay in cash. In 1543,

Palissy worked as a court draftsman on litigation involving real estate, when he was chosen by bureaucrats representing François I to serve the state as an official *portraitist*, surveyor, and mapmaker. Palissy drew maps for administration of the *gabelle*, the hotly contested tax on the sea salt cultivated and exported through La Rochelle after it was extracted from the *marais* of coastal Saintonge.²¹

Palissy's maps focused on assigning taxable boundaries to the vast cell structure that honeycombed the great salt flats of Marennes, which had been cultivated on a large scale since the Middle Ages. Palissy's connection with the *gabelle* was a source of personal conflict. By 1543, the marshlands contiguous to Saujon and the Île d'Arvert were quickly becoming centers of Reformed evangelism and conversion, and the inhabitants, already angered by the new tax, added religion to economics as clear reasons they preferred to remain unmapped by the state. Obscurity had always been the key to security for the coastal communities of Saintonge, never more so than now. Yet it was Palissy's task, and that of the tax official and scribe who accompanied him, to map territories along the coast. Palissy's maps were instrumental in instituting the *gabelle*, which led to violent revolts throughout the coastal region. This galvanized coastal inhabitants politically, making them even more sympathetic to evangelical preaching against the official state religion. The *gabelle* changed Palissy indirectly as well. Tax rebellions brought Montmorency to Saintonge. In 1548, the Constable suppressed a revolt over the *gabelle* on the coast, and Palissy met the future patron who changed his life.

At the same time as he mapped their geography, Palissy came into extended contact with inhabitants from the hinterlands outside of Saintes. Many islanders were also skilled artisans who had recently undergone (or were undergoing) their conversion to the embryonic Saintongeais Reformation. When Palissy converted from glassmaker to potter between 1536 and 1543, he simultaneously set out on the path to religious conversion. Following Palissy's conversion experience, adherence to rural Huguenot culture, and return to Saintes from the islands, he was unable to find further employment in the Catholic and royalist courts. He was reduced to poverty and began the search for new patrons, a process that linked him with both Antoine de Pons and Montmorency. At this complex moment of artisanal and religious conversion, and economic reversal, Palissy turned his attention with renewed vigor to research into enamel glazes and pottery production based on what he had learned from folk potters in La-Chapelle-des-Pots. Not only did he learn the basics of his trade from local potters, but also the formula and firing process for translucent lead- (as opposed to the more opaque tin-) glazed earthenware.

Lead was key to Palissy's experiments to perfect translucent glazes from 1536 through the 1550s.²² Innovative work in his new craft helped Palissy acquire influential local Huguenot *noblesse d'épée* (Pons) and Catholic royal (Montmorency) patronage. This was protection of a much higher order than that of the bourgeois *avocats* and *no-*

blesse de robe judges who rejected him on religious grounds. Ascent in status, both as a rustic artisan and “paysan de Xaintonge” and as a royal *créature* would later save his life when he was arrested by the *parlement* of Bordeaux in 1562 and finally charged with heresy. Catherine made sure her talented Huguenot *paysan*’s life was spared in 1572 as well. He was warned beforehand of the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre and was able to escape.

Having carefully cultivated rusticity, it was logical for the potter to adopt the “medieval custom” of the countryside, as Euan Cameron has described the heretical practice of the rural Waldensians. The custom of the countryside was pragmatic: “to deny heresy as far as possible to save one’s skin, if one had not first succeeded in escaping capture. In the late sixteenth century, defense and not martyrdom was still the norm.”²³ Consider, also, the impressive lineage of Palissy’s patrons among the great Protestant nobility of Saintonge. We have seen the network of association of the court of Antoine de Pons and Anne de Parthenay, which reached back through marriage, religious, and patronage ties to Marguerite of Angoulême, sister of François I, queen of Navarre in France, and Renée of Ferrara’s court in Italy. These nobles were Protestant sympathizers. Yet they pursued careful, often secret strategies, especially in Italy during the Roman Inquisition, where the spread of Nicodemism found both sympathy and learned theorists. Although Calvin and de Bèze found refuge in Ferrara, after France, Calvin’s anti-Nicodemite propaganda targeted Venice in particular, and northern Italy in general.²⁴

Palissy focused on Philibert Hamelin’s role in the potter’s personal history in “my town” of Saintes and “my country” of Saintonge when he recounted how local artisans organized in the earliest years of the Saintonguais Reformation and maintained the faith in Saintonge from 1540 to 1562. Hamelin’s story was central to Palissy’s “little narration,” his “History . . . not of all, but a part of the beginning of the [Reformed] church of Saintes.” This chapter was placed just before “De la ville de forteresse” in the *Recepte*. As the only text called overtly a “History” in the *Recepte* or *Discours*, it merits close reading, especially in relation to the final chapter. The word “overtly” is chosen carefully. All Palissy’s oeuvre—written and material—is, in effect, a composite of natural, political, and religious history. Unlike his other writing, however, the “little narrative” was specifically intended to contribute to a new Huguenot historiography of the civil wars.

The history of Saintes was to be “put into writing,” by Palissy, who actually *experienced* it, “so that it will live in perpetual memory to help those who come after us.”²⁵ Calvin laid the groundwork for Palissy’s sentiments in the *Institutes*. He argued that the pure doctrine must be written for posterity and with exactitude, so that “it should neither perish through forgetfulness nor vanish through error nor be corrupted by the audacity of men.”²⁶ Explicit reference to the relation between the act of writing history (*mettre par escrit*) as experienced—following the Paracelsian critique of scho-

lasticism’s distancing project—and the fate of individual and collective memory (*perpetuelle memoire*) underscored discursive tensions inherent in Palissy’s artisanal project.²⁷

This was complicated by the need to write artisanal history simultaneously as family and *oral* history. Here, memory was diffused from master to apprentice, by example and word of mouth, in domestic contexts of familial, face-to-face interaction. But Palissy’s compulsion to *write* history was also informed by two competing influences. First, his was a culture in which the widespread diffusion of printed and written materials already began to subvert the authority of traditional memory systems surviving since classical times.²⁸ Second, Palissy and his artisan *compagnons* had every reason to believe that they would not survive long enough to guarantee dissemination of their stories by word of mouth. The “little narration,” then, was intended as a “perpetual” safeguard against the state’s demonstrated ability to extinguish local sectarian memory by violence. Palissy was hopeful, however, that his written history of the early beginnings of the Saintongeais Reformation would survive to be disseminated internationally by Protestantism’s underground book publishing and distribution network.

Palissy hints that he might have written the “little narration” expecting that it would be included in Crespin’s martyrology, a “living,” local prosopography of the progress of the Reformation in provincial France during the civil wars. It did not appear in Crespin, however. Given his unorthodox interpretation of the martyrdom of Philibert Hamelin, the tacit support for Nicodemism embodied in his critique of the straight line, and his contentious relationship with the Calvinist hierarchy, the decision to exclude Palissy’s text from Crespin’s orthodox Genevan martyrology is understandable. Ultimately, Crespin wrote a short biography of Hamelin, which Calvin himself was pleased to recommend to the faithful in a pastoral letter to Saintonge. Hamelin’s story also warranted inclusion in de Bèze’s *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées au royaume de France*.²⁹ Did Palissy’s implicit critique of Calvin’s ideal of martyrdom in the *Recepte* reflect, in part, bitterness at being ignored as the official historian of his great friend and mentor’s martyrology? Did he perceive his famously “inelegant, rustic” writing style as the reason for the decision to overlook his authority?

❧ Hamelin’s Story ❧

Philibert Hamelin was a native of Chinon, Touraine, who first appeared in Saintonge as early as 1545. Nothing is known of him before that time. Hamelin’s story is the second of four contiguous narratives in the “petit narré,” which are arranged chronologically, with Hamelin’s following the story of the three “Lutheran monks” who evangelized the coastal islands systematically during the 1540s. The three former monastics were the Franciscan René Mace of Gemozac; the shadowy Dominican Hubert Robert

(known to Palissy as “frère Robin”, “the preacher” of Saint-Denis-d’Oléron); and the Celestine Nicolle Maurel.³⁰ Chapter 4 will show how the heretical monks evangelized in secret, and carried the charismatic, interior, pietistic style of Germanic Protestant religiosity to the artisans of the coastal islands. This hidden style of worship was reestablished by Palissy as a lay practice after Hamelin’s death, and it endured among poor Huguenot artisans in the southwest. The “petit narré” also recorded the captivity and symbolically loaded torture of the three monks and “frère Robin’s” mysterious escape from prison in 1546. Robin thus escaped the torture and execution suffered by his colleagues Mace and Maurel.

Philibert Hamelin was ordained a Roman Catholic priest when he arrived in Saintes in the year the three monks were arrested for heresy in the coastal islands, suggesting he may have belonged to the tradition of heretical priests or monks who fled to secluded parts of the region for refuge. Hamelin converted to Protestantism almost immediately, which supports this theory, and he was ordained a Protestant minister in 1545. The hotbed of Reformation activity was then in the islands, and Hamelin soon left the small cadre of Calvinists in Saintes to help evangelize the Île d’Oléron. In 1546, he was arrested for heresy for the first time, with another heretical priest from Arvert and a group of recent converts. Hamelin was taken back to Saintes where he was imprisoned at the *siège épiscopal* and threatened with torture. Fearful, he publicly denied having been converted to Protestantism and the crime of heresy, and he was soon set free. By Calvin’s definition, Hamelin was thus a failure and a Nicodemite.³¹

By 1547, Hamelin had set up shop as a master printer in Geneva, a status suggesting that he had been trained in this notoriously heretical trade in his native Touraine before arriving in Saintes. Going first to Saintes and then the islands made sense for a master printer under the noble patronage and protection of Antoine de Pons, who sought to fill a need in Saintonge. Hamelin’s immediate successor in the trade, Barthélemy Berton, followed the same geographical path under Pons.

In Geneva, Hamelin published four important titles under his own imprint, and probably several more in collaboration with other theological publishers, including Crespin. The most significant of these books was Hamelin’s French translation of the Old and New Testaments, which was published in five volumes in 1552, followed by a two-volume edition in 1556.³² He also published an edition of Calvin’s *Commentaires*, as well as the 1554 edition of *L’Institution chrétienne*. If survival is any indication, Hamelin’s edition of Clément Marot’s psalter, the *Oraisons saintes*, was his most widely disseminated title.³³ The output of Hamelin’s press was distinctive in three ways: first, his titles were published only in French, not in Latin, indicative of his interest in converting the country people of Saintonge, and in popular evangelism generally; second, the books were printed in the smallest practical formats (“petit in-12^o” or “petit in-quarto”), to facilitate distribution in rural areas through colportage, which

Hamelin pioneered in Saintonge; and third, Palissy undoubtedly received his copies of these basic texts of Genevan Calvinist orthodoxy directly from Hamelin's hands.³⁴

Hamelin had not left Saintes in 1546 to settle in Geneva for the sole purpose of establishing a Calvinist publishing house. Guilty of dissembling his faith to save his skin while under arrest in Saintes, Hamelin sought ideological reindoctrination and re-purification in the ways of Calvin's "straight line." He could then return to Saintonge and redeem himself. After the destruction of the Lutheran monastic cell in 1546, Protestants in the islands appealed for Geneva to install a new minister. In 1555, Hamelin returned to take up the ministry and work as an itinerant colporteur of his tiny books. Hamelin and Palissy have been documented as being together in 1555, when the two worked as surveyors on the private estate of Anne de Parthenay's sister, Antoinette d'Aubeterre, the wife of Jean de Parthenay-l'Archevêque, seigneur de Soubise.

Palissy played an essential role in Hamelin's return, augmenting his distinctive status and personal religious authority at every level of local Huguenot society. On the one hand, Palissy functioned as a middleman between Hamelin and local Huguenot noble patrons (with whom the printer had had little direct contact since 1546); and on the other, he was Hamelin's sponsor and organizer among the rural poor, and especially the skilled artisans, who together comprised the vast majority of Hamelin's congregation in Saintonge. This demonstrates the scope of Palissy's networking structure and the strength of his commitment to this fellow Huguenot artisan—like himself an itinerant and a lover of books and of the countryfolk—whom he had met ten years earlier. Palissy walked Saintonge with Hamelin as his close personal friend, protector, fellow artisan, and religious confidant. He was keenly aware of the intense feelings of guilt and desire for self-sacrifice that accompanied Hamelin on his return from Geneva in 1555. He also had a foreboding sense of Hamelin's plans to relinquish the spiral line that had saved his life the first time around. "Because he lived in Geneva for a good long time after his imprisonment," Palissy wrote in the "petit narré":

and had his faith and doctrine augmented in Geneva, he always had a guilty conscience for having dissimulated in the confession he made in this town [of Saintes], and wanting to make up for his mistake, he strove everywhere he went to incite the people to get ministers and raise some form of church, and he went thus to the country of France, having some servants, who sold Bibles, and other books printed at his printing press, for he . . . was a printer. In doing this, he came sometimes to this town, and went also to Arvert. Now he was so righteous and of such great zeal that, even though he was not a healthy man, he would never ride a horse . . . and . . . he carried no sword in his belt, but only a simple staff in his hand, and he went all alone, without fear.³⁵

From 1555 until 1557, Hamelin traveled back and forth between Geneva, Saintes, and Arvert, with a few excursions to Royan and Mornac. He returned to Geneva to restock

the books that he and his “servants” carried on their shoulders in colporteur’s sacks into La Rochelle’s Protestant hinterlands. As printer, minister, and colporteur, Hamelin began to rebuild a Reformed church in “some form” in the islands after the bloodletting of 1546. Hamelin’s success was based on his ability to leave the walled enceinte of the town and integrate his preaching into the work rhythms of country artisans and farm laborers. Rather than adopting a tone of sacerdotal distance, Hamelin evangelized in a low-key conversational style, arriving in the fields or workshops during breaks for meals. Palissy followed Hamelin closely in his evangelical style, and he echoes his mentor in the *Recepte* in chiding immobile Huguenot pastors who avoided the countryfolk and stayed in town near their churches. For Hamelin and Palissy, their church was not some specific building but anywhere the Word was heard or read.³⁶

From Geneva’s perspective, although “the Lutheran heresy” had been flourishing in Saintonge since the 1540s, Hamelin’s was the first authentic Reformed church in the region, built on the transparent foundation of the ideological “straight line” of Church discipline by a minister indoctrinated by Calvin himself. De Bèze, writing an official version of Hamelin’s experience in his *Histoire ecclésiastique*, proclaimed that the coastal islands of Saintonge were places where neither religion nor culture had ever existed before. Hamelin’s task, de Bèze wrote, was to subdue Saintonge’s “people of the sea,” who were “nearly savage.”³⁷ Yet these people and places created a form of culture and religion that the opportunistic Palissy emulated and further expanded. There, he developed his rustic style of artisanry, writing on security, and natural philosophy. De Bèze’s personal distance and cultural alienation from the rural Huguenots of Saintonge was shared in La Rochelle, where corporate identity turned on a different kind of emulation, namely, becoming the little Geneva of France. Conversely, a sense of distance and alienation from the Calvinist orthodoxy of Geneva and La Rochelle pervaded Palissy’s “savage and rustic” writings. The dead and exiled Lutheran monks had been his friends, mentors, and fellow artisans. Palissy was careful to include them in his history as Hamelin’s predecessors, the revered founders and martyrs of the “primitive” Church of Saintonge, but Crespin and de Bèze did not accord their conventicles the status of Protestant churches, contending that they had operated in secret and their members were “savage.”

Hamelin was arrested a second time in 1557. The authorities discovered that he had baptized a child at Arvert, after openly preaching heresy to a large assembly of coastal Huguenots. The official account of Hamelin’s arrest in de Bèze’s *Histoire* is notably theatrical; in effect, this passion play was represented as an inversion and erasure of Hamelin’s “mistaken” dissimulation of 1546.

The inhabitants of Arvert had hurried to hide the minister at the home of a local “gentleman” when the police came to make the arrest. According to de Bèze’s story, although well hidden and impossible to find, Hamelin emerged from his hiding place,

went out openly "before those who searched for him, and saluted them all in a joyous fashion." Palissy's "little narrative" recalls no such heroic action or speech, only that the "gens-d'armes" trailed Hamelin and captured him at the gentleman's house in Arvert.³⁸ The two accounts agree that Hamelin was returned to the same prison in Saintes where, eleven years before, he had lamented dissimulating and committing the crime of Nicodemism.

Hamelin did not dissimulate this time. The tribunal at Saintes was composed of six principal judges. They determined that inasmuch as Hamelin was an ordained priest, his prosecution fell under the higher jurisdiction of the *parlement* of Bordeaux. On April 12, 1557, Hamelin was therefore transferred to Bordeaux under an arrest warrant. Once there, he underwent the rigorous tortures reserved for heretical ministers. According to all accounts, Hamelin refused to recant. Finally, Hamelin was marched to the courtyard fronting Bordeaux Cathedral, where he was strangled by an executioner to conclude the public spectacle. His remains were then burned on a pyre.³⁹

Palissy was traumatized. The "petit narré" is unsparing in the raw intensity of its author's emotional distress, spiritual confusion, frustration, and anger. Palissy was so distraught that he openly defied his own secretive rules of stoicism at the core of artisanal security. Just before Hamelin was transferred from Saintes to Bordeaux, the potter took the grave risk of bringing his personal association with Hamelin's heretical activities to the attention of the local courts. Thus, Palissy himself stood before the same judges and magistrates at Saintes who brought Palissy to trial five years later to plead Hamelin's case and, in a very real sense, his own:

I was completely astonished how the men could have sat in judgment of death over him, seeing how they knew him well and had heard his holy conversation; because I was certain, after the truth was told, that he would be released from the prisons of Xaintes, I took the bold step (inasmuch as those were perilous days) to go and remonstrate with six of the principal judges and magistrates of this town of Xaintes that they had imprisoned a prophet, an angel of God, sent to announce his word and pronounce his judgment of condemnation to men at the end times, [and] to assure them that in the eleven years I had known Philibert Hamelin he had lived such a holy life that it seemed to me that other men were devils when viewed next to him. . . . Finally . . . while it is true that they did not actually kill him, no more than Pilate and Judas [did] Jesus Christ, they delivered him into the hands of those who they knew perfectly well would put him to death. And, to better succeed in washing their hands of their burden, they contended that he was a priest of the Roman Church, and for that reason he would be sent to Bordeaux under the good and sure guard of a provost marshal.⁴⁰

Hamelin had returned to Saintes with the intention of taking "the straight road" that Calvin himself commanded he "consider" during Hamelin's ideological rehabili-

tation in Geneva between 1547 and 1555. Palissy thus witnessed the murder of his dearest friend and mentor; a visible saint whose “works were certain witness that he was a child of God and directly elect.”⁴¹ Geneva’s command that he make himself visible had thus literally squandered the time on earth of a divine messenger, and the death of this “angel of God” was certain to forestall final judgment. When captured, Philibert Hamelin was caught in the act of preaching “end times” from Revelation. For Palissy, God’s “prophet” who returned to open the seals of the apocalypse that “these evil days” of religious war had initiated had been martyred. Now Hamelin’s artisan followers in Saintonge waited patiently for another divine messenger, and to find other ways to initiate the cleansing of earthly matter in final things. Indirectly accusing Calvin, de Bèze, and Crespin of complicity in Hamelin’s murder, Palissy ends “The Essence of the Mind of Man”—a chapter that precedes the “History of the Church of Saintes”—with lines that lead into, and can be read as his epigram for, the “petit narré” and “De la ville de forteresse” to follow:

Be warned that if you return to your original simplicity, you can be assured that you will have enemies and be persecuted all the days of your life if, *by direct lines*, you would follow and stand up for the quarrel of God; because these are the promises written originally in the Old and New Testaments. Take refuge therefore in your chief, protector and captain, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his own time and place will know very well how to avenge all the injuries that he has suffered, and yours too.⁴²

Following the capture, trial, torture, and execution of Philibert Hamelin in 1557, it seems unclear whom Palissy and other unnamed Saintongeais artisan followers of the “angel of God” loathed and feared more: the Roman Catholic clergy, police, and judges, at both Saintes and Bordeaux, who had carried out the execution, or Calvin, who had set up the guilt-ridden Hamelin to die a martyr’s death. For the devastated Palissy, Geneva sacrificed Hamelin’s artisanal ingenuity and industriousness in exchange for a show of ideological force that led to an operatic and wasteful death (pre-saging the fall of La Rochelle seventy years later). This dynamic of ambiguous *emotions* was directed at both Catholic and Protestant orthodoxies and inscribed in the potter’s renderings of the serpentine line in material form.

Palissy failed, “after the truth was told,” to return his master’s life to the people. “Holy conversation” was strangled. In its place, the pious potter constructed silent martyrologies on crooked paths running throughout everyday life.

❖ The “end times” ❖

Hamelin’s death ushered in an artisans’ “interregnum” in which Palissy, now acting as Hamelin’s apostle, took up the complex role of lay *artisan-prédicateur* in the absence

of a formally ordained Genevan minister. The "interregnum" did not genuinely terminate for Hamelin's (now his "apprentice" Palissy's) artisan assembly, when Hamelin's replacement, André de Mazières (also "de la Place") was sent to the region by the Paris Consistory.

Palissy's "narré" complained that Mazières—his competitor from Geneva and not a craftsman—was concerned primarily with the spiritual life of the local Protestant *noblesse*. He was charged with spending far too much time in châteaux and not enough time in Hamelin's preferred places to evangelize: impoverished peasant farmsteads and artisan workshops. The root of the problem with Mazières lay in the poverty of the Reformed church of Saintonge. "It was a pitiful thing," wrote Palissy, "but the power to maintain the ministers was not there; in respect to de La Place, during his time here, he was maintained on the side, paid for by those gentlemen who summoned him often."⁴³ Palissy was unwilling to relinquish the life-threatening mantle of lay ministerial authority passed down to him by Hamelin, even *after* the *parlement* of Bordeaux executed Mazières later in 1557. Palissy's mistrust of Mazières may have been owing in part to the Parisian's ambiguous role during Hamelin's imprisonment at Bordeaux. Although Mazières was credited with rushing directly to the prison to console and fortify the condemned Hamelin, it is probable that he had received instructions from Geneva to prevent Hamelin from recanting again.⁴⁴

Claude de La Boissière arrived in 1557 to take Mazières's place. Unlike his predecessor, La Boissière was cautiously accepted by Palissy and his followers as a shepherd of the *menu* people. Palissy had acquired a powerful hold on local religious life during the artisanal interregnum following Hamelin's death, however, and he projected his growing lay authority onto La Boissière, imposing a vow of poverty on the newcomer to ensure that he did not follow Mazières's elitist example. "Fearing that this was nothing but a means of corrupting our ministers," Palissy wrote, "*one* counseled Monsieur de La Boissière not to leave town without permission in order to serve the nobility." Claude was forced by his flock to become an anchoritelike ascetic, in Christ's (and Hamelin's) tradition of poverty and humility, to conform with the worldview of his congregation. Palissy distanced La Boissière from Mazières and asserted his control as a kind of spiritual jailer. "By this means," he wrote, "the poor man was shut in like a prisoner; he frequently ate potatoes and drank water for his dinner . . . because there were very few resources from our assembly . . . from which to pay him his wages."⁴⁵

La Boissière's ministry under Palissy's control (or so the potter would have us believe) ushered in a new and flourishing period of Protestant theological and social asceticism and Huguenot artisanal hegemony in Saintonge, extending ultimately to Saintes itself. This process was, as we shall see, roughly simultaneous with that taking place in La Rochelle, the effect of whose Protestant coup d'état resonated outward to the hinterlands, aided by a set of fortuitous political circumstances. At the same time,

there were certain personnel changes that weakened the intimidating local apparatus of religious repression. These changes ended by putting Protestantism in Saintes in the ascendant, concurrent with that already established in the islands.

First, two energetic local persecutors of rural Reformed assemblies, the bishop of Saintes, Tristan de Bizet, and the *sénéchal*, Charles Guitard des Brousses, were called to Toulouse, leaving a local power vacuum that the state bureaucracy moved slowly to fill, and that Saintongeais Huguenots quickly exploited. Second, the Édît d'Amboise was instituted in late 1559. This more "liberal" proclamation reversed harsh punishments instituted by the Édits de Compiègne (1557), under which Hamelin had been executed, and of Blois (1559), which specified the death penalty for the state crimes of heresy and illegal religious assembly. The Édît d'Amboise reduced regional tensions (at least from the Protestant perspective) while still allowing core rituals of Reformed theology—including those of assembly, communion, and especially psalmody—to be brought out into the open for the first time, in contact with Catholic-dominated public space. A new golden (or primitive) age was heralded for Saintes's Reformed Church. Palissy wrote that the town had now been largely converted, psalms were heard everywhere in the street, and "in those days, there was prayer in the town of Xaintes every day from one end to the other."⁴⁶

By March 1561, as a result of this confluence of events, the Reformation in Saintes had achieved unprecedented success in terms of numbers and social prestige, as well as military and political power. In recognition, a Huguenot Synod was held in Saintes that month, followed by a national assembly in April. Thirty-eight ministers now led Reformed congregations in the region, and La Boissière wrote Calvin asking for fifty more. Saintongeais divinity students were sent abroad to Geneva or to Protestant academies in La Rochelle and Saumur before returning to take up the many available pulpits.⁴⁷

Such evangelical success did not endure long, according to the dominant pattern presented by French Reformation history, which was distinguished by reversal and mimetic violence, not continuity. Parallel to the process that afflicted Rochelais confessional competition between 1517 and 1628, the Huguenots of Saintonge gratuitously abused their hard-won recent victories by savaging the remnants of the weakened Catholic opposition, making inevitable the state's devastating retaliation. Thus, the Huguenots' success and subsequent abuse of power did not signify victory but instead the beginning of the end. Unlike La Rochelle, where a great fortress and formidable fleet enabled the Rochelais by dint of sheer military power to extend their revolution for more than two generations after the Protestant coup d'état in 1568, Saintonge had no dominant or centralizing *place de sûreté*. Instead, the very success of the Saintongeais Reform made it vulnerable to counterattack and guaranteed its defeat as an overt force.

Protestant military forces completed the work the evangelists had started. By May 1562, they had overwhelmed the last of the Catholic resistance. Huguenot violence in

the southwest then began openly and in earnest, starting with acts of iconoclasm in Saintes. In June 1562, Protestant gangs sacked the churches of Saint-Pierre and Saint-Eutrope. Emboldened Huguenots in twenty other towns, including Marennes, Cognac, Agen, and even parts of Bordeaux, seat of the regional *parlement*, committed similar acts of aggression against symbols of Catholicism.

Arrogant attacks on the Roman Church, its ritual instruments, and its priests drove local Catholic officials to an apocalyptic chorus of their own, demanding assistance from Paris. Protestant evangelical and military successes had subverted the Catholic Church's ability to inspire awe and fear, and hence its ability to support itself. Saintongeais peasants and artisans simply ceased paying "the tithes and duties of the Church," without which the already wounded apparatus of Catholicism in Saintes and the countryside—especially the relatively prosperous local clerical hierarchy and monasteries—would be forced to fall back upon their own resources or cease to function altogether. Little did they know, or care, that local Reformed congregations such as Palissy's had also stopped paying their minister's salaries or limited them severely.

Here is a typical complaint to Paris from the regional official M. de Burie, lieutenant-general of Guyenne, in a letter dated June 10, 1561, to the newly crowned Charles IX:

For it is those from this new sect, Sire, who daily make themselves masters of the principal churches and in most of these places they have torn down the altars, holy-water fonts and baptismal fountains, burned the missals and church ornaments, and prevented, Sire, any services from taking place; they boast that they have already begun, in certain quarters, not to pay the *dixmes* [church tithes] and *droictz de l'Eglise* [church duties], and they boast openly, Sire, that they won't pay any more taxes, nor their debts to *seigneurs*,⁴⁸ they endeavor day after day to become the strongest in the towns, and they are determined to steal church bells to melt down for artillery, and the number of these people, Sire, increases every day, to the great sadness of the good and loyal subjects of Your Majesty.⁴⁹

It was during this riotous period that Palissy was accused of an act of iconoclasm, resulting in his arrest on March 24, 1563, after the Catholics finally returned to power. Palissy had come to the attention of the authorities in 1557 when he spoke in defense of Hamelin, and a warrant was issued for his arrest in 1558 for his activities as a lay preacher and organizer during the interregnum, but this was the first time his arrest and imprisonment are officially recorded.⁵⁰ In the trial transcript from the *parlement* of Bordeaux, Palissy testified:

that the day that the pillagers . . . were at the great altar of the church of Xaintes, where they broke and demolished the woodwork and facing, he had gone, [openly], to the place called la Chappelle [*sic*] [des Pots] where he commonly [went] to get his potter's clay, to work and labor at his trade.

That outside of the assemblies that gathered at Xaintes, he did not wish to leave nor did he venture outside of his house because some of the populace yelled at him to take up arms.⁵¹

After Palissy was captured in Saintes and taken to prison in Bordeaux, his workshop and laboratory were destroyed, by command, he said, of the numerous enemies whom he accused of persecuting him in his brief but profane testimony. With a record of heresy dating back to the 1540s, Palissy would have met Hamelin's fate had it not been for his appeal to Montmorency in a letter from prison. He wrote his patron that work on the Constable's grotto, begun in 1555, was not yet completed and that his workshop and laboratory had been sacked. Wanting his new grotto completed, Montmorency intervened with the help of Antoine de Pons and others to obtain Palissy's release. Palissy's letter shows that he almost certainly lied when he claimed in court that he was at La Chapelle-des-Pots when the acts of iconoclasm took place in Saintes. He refused to deny his involvement to Montmorency, claiming only that he had been justified. Palissy had become a victimizer, though he tried to dissimulate his involvement to save his own skin.⁵²

On June 19, 1561, the archbishop of Bordeaux wrote the king to raise an alarm far more likely to motivate a military response from Paris than iconoclasm and the still merely local nonpayment of Church *dixmes*. He reported a virtual military invasion led by the fifty "ministres de l'étranger" requested from Geneva by Claude de La Boissière. The shrewd archbishop threatened implicitly that if local beneficiaries were not paid, neither would Charles IX be:

The ministers are in great number. They come daily from Geneva and because of all their arms and ammunition, it is no longer within our power to stop them. Sire, most of the beneficiaries [*bénéficiers*] of your said dukedom are despairing that they will ever enjoy any of the benefits that rightly are theirs—because they are withheld for the said ministers and used to support them—which loss they would bear patiently were it not that with this loss they not only see the danger that would befall the monarchy but also the ruin and desolation of the Church of God, so long preserved in your kingdom, and they would be deprived of the means to make any subvention to you and so would be unable to show the obedience that they have in their hearts.⁵³

Palissy denounced the controversy surrounding the *dixmes* as an example of the hypocrisy and avariciousness of Roman Catholicism. In the "petit narré," he associated Catholicism with the rich and powerful. The courts were their primary instruments of hypocrisy, thievery, and repression of Palissy's "plowmen," his rustic yeoman of the spirit:

Would you like to really understand, how the Roman churchmen said their so-called prayers hypocritically and maliciously? . . . Most townspeople in those days asked for ministers—from their priests or *fermiers* [tax collectors], or others—or they wouldn't pay the *dixmes*: nothing made the priests more furious than that, and this was very strange. In those days, things happened that could really make you laugh and cry all at once: since some *fermiers* were enemies of the religion [i.e., anti-Protestant], when they saw the reports [of nonpayment], the *fermiers* went to the ministers to beg them to come and exhort the people, where there were *fermiers* [collecting taxes]: in order that the *dixmes* would be paid. When they couldn't get what they wanted from the ministers, they asked the church elders. I never laughed so hard while crying at the same time, as when I heard said that the *procureur* [prosecutor] who was [also] the criminal court clerk, even as he wrote down the charges against those of the religion [Protestant], had prayed just a short time before the church in the parish where he was *fermier* was ransacked: do we know whether, when he was praying, he was a better Christian, than when he wrote accusations against those of the religion [Protestant]: doubtless he was as good a Christian when he wrote out the charges as when he said his prayers, seeing that he did not say them except to mock God and possess the grains and fruits of the plowmen.⁵⁴

The reversal came in October 1562, when Louis II de Bourbon, the duc de Montpensier, was sent by Charles IX to end to the outbreak of heresy, rebellion, and repression of Catholicism. Montpensier defeated Protestant forces in Saintonge, returning the recently victorious sect to its accustomed subordinate status, thus setting the stage for mimetic acts of revenge by Catholics for Huguenot atrocities. Duras's and La Rochefoucault's armies were overwhelmed, and thousands of Protestant troops retreated north to La Rochelle. Saintes, where Palissy was in hiding, and where his home, shop, and laboratory were under the fragile protection of Montmorency, was overrun and looted by the invading Catholic forces. Troops and Catholic clergymen representing the duc de Montpensier entered Saintes to take control and perform the obligatory rituals of atrocity on the town's few remaining Huguenots.

The best account of the "end times" in Saintes is Palissy's "little narrative." Palissy did not blame the Catholic thirst for revenge on the earlier Huguenot atrocities in Saintes (which he elided from the text), but rather on the dissimulating Catholic "gens de bien." These "wicked" hypocrites had been "constrained to act like good men" when the Huguenots were on top. But these were the *true* dissimulators and victimizers of the pious, whose violence was motivated by profit alone, not sacred purification. Palissy's poor and industrious artisans, notwithstanding their participation in well-documented atrocities, were reinvented as innocent victims of demonic possession and murderous materialism, which reversed the process of purification begun in the town by the primitive Huguenots of Saintes's brief golden age:

The fruit of our little Church had grown so well that the wicked were constrained to act like good men [*gens de bien*]: however their hypocrisy has since become amply manifested and well known: for when they were free to do evil, they displayed outwardly what was hidden inside of their miserable breasts: they committed such miserable acts that I shudder at the memory of the times that they rose up to cause dispersion, destruction, loss, and ruin for those of the Reformed Church. To counter [*obvier*] their horrible and accursed tyrannies, I withdrew myself secretly into my house, so as not to see the murders, disavowals, and ransackings that they committed in the countryside: and as I was hidden in my house for about two months, it seemed to me that hell had been split open [*défoncé*] and that all of its diabolical spirits were set loose and entered into the town of Xaintes: whereas in place of the psalms, hymns, and all the decent words of edification and good example that I had heard a short time before, I heard nothing but blasphemies, tirades, threats, tumults, all [sorts of] horrible and dissolute words, [and] wanton and detestable songs, in such a manner that it seemed to me that all the virtue and sanctity of the earth were choked [*estouffée*] and extinguished: for certain young devils emerged from the Château de Taillebourg, who committed more havoc than the devils of old.

They entered into the town, accompanied by certain priests, having drawn swords in their hands, yelling, where are they? They wanted to cut everyone's throat with their own hands, and so they attacked with swords raised, though there was no resistance: because those of the Reformed Church were all gone: however, just to do evil, they found a Parisian in the street, who was thought to have money: they killed him, without resistance, and as was their custom, they stripped him down to his shirt before he was even dead. After that, they went from house to house, stealing, ravaging, taunting, laughing, mocking, and making lascivious merriment and [saying] blasphemous words against God and man . . . they mocked God. . . . In those days, there were certain esteemed people in prison [i.e., the local Huguenot leaders], that when the [church] canons passed by the prison they called out mockingly, the Lord will assist you, and told them, or said to their faces, [Lord] come and get me, take up this quarrel: and many others struck them with a cudgel, saying, the Lord bless you.⁵⁵

This lurid passage is particularly interesting for the subterranean perspective Palissy adopted in recording for posterity the reversal of Saintes's former Edenic place in providential history. How did the "inventor" of "the art of the earth" imagine the end of the earth? Peering out surreptitiously from inside Saintes's hollow stone town walls, which enclosed his workshop and hiding place, Palissy wrote that war's malefactors had split open the earth's exterior shell, unearthing "l'enfer." This violent process unleashed the diabolical evil barely contained underneath ("hidden inside their miserable chests"), disturbingly close to the fragile skin of the town, so "all of its diabolical spirits were set loose and entered into the town of Xaintes." Genesis and Revelation—the

story of rustic Adamic virtue corrupted by the Fall and the final battle between virtue and the Beast—were shuffled like a deck of cards. "[I]n the place of the psalms," Palissy "heard nothing but blasphemies." So "it seemed to me that all the virtue and sanctity of the earth," the fundamental element of the microcosm and living material of the potter's art, "were choked and extinguished."

The earth's natural language of virtue, the sounds of which were elemental, mastered, and harmonic ("psalms, hymns, and decent words"), was perverted. Pious sound was overwhelmed and transformed into its infernal opposite, *esmotion* ("blasphemies, tirades, threats, tumults, all [sorts of] horrible and dissolute words"). A corrupt babble drowned out "holy conversation" in the place Palissy called "my country." The natural, harmonic language of Palissy's earth, indeed, "*all* the virtue and sanctity of *the* earth were *choked* and *extinguished* [emphasis added]." The framework of soulish Neoplatonic universals that convinced Paracelsian natural philosophers that difference and plurality were connected to form the harmonies of a monistic cosmos was fragmented. The earth—natural and material "mother" of the potter's art of the earth—was strangled and then burned; martyred in precisely the same way as Philibert Hamelin, Palissy's spiritual and intellectual father.

Harmony, then, was violently displaced by dissonance. But the replacement of "paroles honnestes" by "paroles miserables" did not mean the end of cosmological symmetries. The "little narrative" hinted darkly that such oppositions should be understood as doubles or mirrors of one another. As such, heaven and hell—the spiritual and material essence of light and dark in the macrocosm and microcosm—were intertwined. The nature of purity on (and in) earth, made it subject to corruption, just as the alchemic process could redeem fallen matter.

❧ "Little children" and Their "inheritance" ❧

Palissy's history ended with this atomized representation of man and nature without God. Would irreconcilable dissonance and fragmentation in postlapsarian time remain the only historical outcome possible from Adam's original legacy of difference, which created the "split open" cosmic opposition between the corrupted earth and its divine artisan?

I was greatly terrified during a respite of two months, seeing how peddlers and base beggars had become lords at the expense of those of the Reformed Church. There wasn't a day that passed that I didn't hear reports [of what went on outside Palissy's studio and hiding place]; the most grievous of which concerned certain little children from the town [of Saintes], who came daily to assemble at a square near the place where I was hiding (meanwhile, I exerted myself every day to make some works of my art), they divided up

into two gangs, and then threw rocks at each other, [at the same time] they swore and blasphemed more execrably than I had ever heard man utter: for they said by the blood of Christ, die, and go to hell, piss-head, double piss-head, triple piss-head, and some blasphemies so horrible, that I am almost too horrified to write them down: and this lasted quite a long time with neither the fathers nor the mothers intervening to bring them under control. This often made me wish to risk my own life, to [go out and] punish them myself; but I said the seventy-ninth psalm in my heart, the one that begins “[O God] the heathen are come into thine inheritance; [thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps].”

I know many Historians will discourse on these things at much greater length, however, I have wanted to speak of this matter en passant, because during these evil days, there were precious few people of the Reformed Church in this town.⁵⁶

Geological metaphors are ubiquitous. Having been caught in a wasteland between two bands of implacable enemies, joined on an ambiguous battlefield that the violence of war has wrenched up from a millennia-old subterranean world (the camouflaged location of both natural and historical truths in the “narre”), Palissy peered furtively from the “place where I was hiding,” keeping under cover, although “there wasn’t a day that passed by that I didn’t hear reports.” Inside his subterranean hiding place, a small open space created by the fortress walls surrounding his workshop, Palissy discovered how the children of Saintes hurled rocks that had been disgorged from “l’enfer.” They hurled oaths at one another at the same time, until words and weapons became interchangeable.

Even as Saintes turned itself inside out, disintegrating into Huguenot apocalyptic historiography, Palissy built himself, *parenthetically*, into the interstices of dissonance. “Meanwhile,” as hidden witness to the self-immolating violence of oppositional forces, “I exerted myself every day to make some works of my art.” The “walls” of his parenthesis may be likened to the walls of his tower and, inside, to the walls of his potter’s kiln and alchemic crucible. The significance of the tiny, pious artisan locating himself in this “recipe” for posterity, in a superficially powerless, silenced, but still creative liminal space cannot be overlooked. Here, Palissy was buffeted between violent binary opposites, exposing himself to action in the matrix at great personal risk (“this often made me wish to risk my own life”). To practice his craft, creating an art of the earth out of its ruins, was the ultimate act of artisanal sacrifice, reform, and alchemic rebirth.

Palissy was reborn as well, baptized as a hybrid of the Calvinist new man and the alchemist’s homunculus. He recreated himself spiritually and materially in the historical crucible of war and the scientific crucible of his laboratory. This process was a direct result of the silencing and violent deaths of his spiritual father, Philibert Hamelin, and of the earth of Saintes, his natural-philosophical mother. From these deaths, the

potter created a new synthesis. He took Hamelin's place to preach to his orphaned flock, not on the basis of Genevan discipline, but of artisanal security. Hence, the seventy-ninth psalm was recited "in my heart" as an artisan's prayer of self-mastery. "With neither the mothers nor the fathers intervening to bring them under control," Palissy lamented, "the heathen are come into thine inheritance." Yet the potter was comforted that, finally, so too had he. For this was the space Palissy reserved to fashion a secure social self-identity for Huguenot artisans in a world turned inside-out, with its insides atomized. The hidden artisan's task became to reveal and reconcile these dispersed atoms, fragments, and oppositions *materially*, through the labor of "industriousness." Palissy had thus supplemented Hamelin's and the earth's "choked" voices with the silent language of reformed matter.

In the *Recepte*, Palissy dwelled on metaphysical relationships that unified confessional violence and artisanal security with material life. Emulating the model of his tiny, industrious *limace*, Palissy seems less concerned with discovering precise geometric equivalence than with finding the metaphysical power to combine artisanry with the "language" of nature to *compensate* for physical and political limitations and maintain social and cultural equilibrium.

Max Weber has, of course, harnessed industriousness to both Reformation ideology and materialism in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.⁵⁷ Weber posits a paradigm shift in Palissy's time that instigated the disunity of faith and reason, the triumph of positivism, the devolution of spiritual experience into subjectivity, relativism, private acts of self-absorption, and, in the end, modern man's "disenchantment of the world." Fragmented communities without hope of moral reconciliation were permanently alienated from each other and from moribund nature. Modern man was as dead to the mysteries of primitive universal spirits as metaphysics was to viable scientific and philosophical inquiry.

I would suggest that Palissy's project takes precisely the opposite position. His task was to illuminate the underlying cosmological connections of soulish interiority in man and matter as a gateway to empirical reality. Metaphysical knowledge was essential to control of the primordial forces that connected man with Nature's universal soul and made available secret prophesies during end times of trauma and travail. Such primitive knowledge *reenchanted* the fallen world, reformed the primitive Church, reunited the dispersed Huguenots, and reversed the historical process of spiritual, social, and material fragmentation. So metaphysical unity between microcosm and macrocosm was reclaimed by artisanal industriousness. "[S]ecular powerlessness may be compensated for by a sacred power," Victor Turner says of liminality. "The power of the weak," he concludes, was "derived on the one hand from the resurgence of nature when structural power is removed, and on the other from the reception of sacred knowledge."⁵⁸

As Caroline Walker Bynum has reminded historians in her wise critique of Turner,

the “power of weakness” had a long tradition in the West, beginning with the primordial Christian concept of *reversal*: “we must never forget the emphasis on reversal which lay at the heart of the Christian tradition. According to Christ and to Paul, the first shall be last and the meek shall inherit the earth.” Bynum complicates subsequent readings by insisting weakness was spiritual and bodily—and so material—*practice*. The political practice of weakness lay in manipulation of spiritualized material toward the reconquest of structural power. “Inferiority,” Bynum concludes, “would—exactly because it was inferior—be made superior by God.”⁵⁹ The material of reversal was hidden in the small. That was why Luther warned Leo X of Isaiah’s prophesy: “The Lord will make a small and consuming word upon the land . . . [Isa. 10–22]. This is as though he said,” Luther continued, “Faith, which is a small and perfect fulfillment of the law, will fill believers with so great a righteousness that they will need nothing more to become righteous.” Therefore, “this means nothing else than that ‘power is made perfect in weakness.’”⁶⁰

❧ “The Island of Ceylon” in the East Indies ❧

For Palissy the artisan, it followed that the construction of Huguenot power was “made perfect” in its smallness and in the codes of hidden knowledge and perception animating artisanal security. In retrospect, Palissy provided the perfect clue to his agenda in the *Recepte*, en passant, at the beginning of the book, in this short poem that serves as its epigraph:

TO THE READER,

*salut.*⁶¹

In a small body great power is often couched,
 This will be learned, reader, by reading this book,
 Which is something novel, come into the open
 So no sots will make a living on error;
For it shows plainly to the eye what it must follow
Or reject [emphasis added], in these admirable sayings;
 In reciting many truthful speeches,
 Cleave to this end that Art, imitating Nature,
 Can accomplish what many esteem fables,
 People without reason and of unjust censure.⁶²

Palissy’s cryptic epigraph and his natural-philosophical book of “admirable sayings” and “truthful speeches,” on “Art, imitating Nature,” influenced the painter of a curious manuscript illumination, “The Island of Ceylon,” in *Secret de l’histoire naturelle contenant les merveilles et choses memorables du monde* (fig. 3.1).⁶³ “The Island of Ceylon,”

Car ilz se maittonēt cō bestes mues 2 nōt ne sen' ne raisō en cubo 2 ne font
 cōte de lamort. 2 sentretuēt de le' bone volūte. Et croiēt y ferme oppinō q' quāt
 ilz sōt mors q' le' ame' sōt pl' curusē aye lamort en lautre monde g'illes ne
 sōt en ce monde p'p. Itē quāt le' enfās sōt nouvellemēt nez de le' mēre ilz sōt
 grāt deul 2 demōstrēt quāt suzue de cōsouu 2 de tristesse 2 diēt q' le' enfās viētēt
 en ce mōde p' p'ime auon 2 malle meschāce. Itē quāt le' p'urē 2 amys sōnt
 mors ilz se'y resioissēt 2 en sōt molt grāt 2 excessiue feste. Et diēt q' quāt le' amys
 meurtēt q' le' ame' entretēt en la grāt loy de laut' mōde. Itē dit solm q'ls ont vne
 ordnāce entrouly q' celluy q' pl' aura eu de fēme' sa le' pl' honoure 2 p'se. Itē
 dit solm q' lee fēmes si marēt de le' p'rs t're 2 volūte a le' plaisir sās le' ascal 2 esen
 tenēt de le' p'urē 2 amys. Et gūt elle' sōt belles les maris q' le' veulēt auoir les
 adxētēt moult d'hermēt. Et se vendēt elle' mesme' au pl' offriāt 2 gūt elle' sōt laide'
 2 maladuenās ellē adxētēt le' maris 2 y aīsi il ayt q' la bōte 2 hōnestete de p'ualle'
 2 de fēme' de ceste t're ē moīs p'se 2 honoure q' nest le' beaulte 2 le' richesse



Unyonnee ē vne p'sle q' est situce bien pres de Inde la maīō deuers
 la p'te de mīdy de laquelle p'sle solm 2 dit q' auant q' alexandre

FIGURE 3.1. "The Island of Ceylon," in "Secret de l'histoire naturelle contenant les merveilles et choses memorable du monde" [Secret of Natural History Containing the Marvels and Memorable Things of the World] (Paris: Jehan Kerver, n.d., but probably ca. 1580–1600); Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Fr. 22791, fol. 60 verso. Given the context in which this "New World" text was published, its author was arguably influenced strongly by Palissy's rustic books and ceramics. The inhabitants of this community of snails are engaged simultaneously in the industrious pursuit of craft and security.

painted to illuminate an alchemical and natural-philosophical text on the exploration of the East Indies, was published later in the sixteenth century than the *Recepte*. The gaze of *Secret's* readers was dropped in this image from the axiometric perspective applied by the potter to his famous basins, to the terrestrial perspective of the *limace* that inhabited them. In so doing, the promise of Palissy's "De la ville de forteresse" was realized. Like the *limace*, refugees have grown a portable fortress, presumably from their inner juices, for domestic and military purposes. In one shell house and fortress, a refugee housewife prepares wool for spinning; in another, a soldier readies his shield and lance. Another woman peers through a secret window cut in her shell wall to communicate with others, since only the refugees can see one another. Are the two snails in the central foreground, hiding behind the giant rock in the center of a Palissian river basin, true mollusks or Huguenots in disguise? The natural philosophy of "Island of Ceylon," "shows plainly to the eye what it must follow," or so it would seem.

Having instructed refugees to build hidden fortresses from the inside out by imitating the industrious *limace*, Palissy conveyed a desire to internalize his analogy for artisanal security by collapsing it into Reformed being and experience. In so doing, he synthesized the essence of alchemy and artisanry contained in Paracelsus's crucial axiom, "[H]e who carries all things with him needs not the aid of others."⁶⁴ This play of independence, autodidacticism, and mobility is particularly appropriate to the final "secret" made available by the natural history of the "Island of Ceylon." The cloven rock rising out of the center of the island in the river basin replicates the famous promontory often used to represent La Rochelle during the wars of religion, particularly in images of its fall (see fig. 9.1).

Did the great fortress hovering high on the plateau in the background suggest the doomed grandeur of La Rochelle from the terrestrial perspective of Palissy's Sain-tonge? To answer this question we must turn to the centrality of La Rochelle's place in this regional and international dynamic of religiosity, war, and the culture of security.