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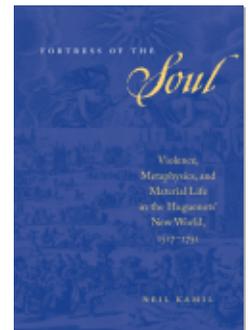
Fortress of the Soul

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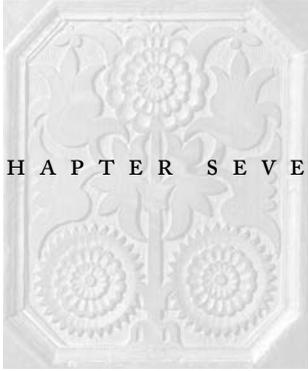


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C H A P T E R S E V E N

The River and Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

War, Separation, "the Sound," and the Materiality of Time

Animated by a refugee's impulses to escape and separate, and apocalyptic notions of an aging earth, Palissy took a musical walk along the Charente River, where he was moved to reinterpret the biblical King Nebuchadnezzar's Dream from Daniel (2–5), in language that a potter could understand. In so doing, the artisan separated himself from the aspiring religious enthusiast, whom the Cambridge Platonist John Smith admired yet said had a soul that would "heave and swell with the sense of [its] own virtue and knowledge," puffed up "with pride, arrogance and self-conceit," and began to transform himself, like a butterfly that had finally emerged metamorphosed from a secure cocoon, into "the true metaphysical and contemplative man."¹

A metaphysical artisan transcended the scholastic definition of manual operator and, by "running and shooting up above his own logical or self-rational life, pierceth into the highest life," in effect, "by universal love and holy affection, abstracting himself from himself." Experience of this arduous transcendental process, "endeavors the nearest union with the Divine essence that may be," like Winthrop in his physician's chair, "knitting his own centre, if he have any, into the centre of the Divine being."² Artisanal experience became godlike in itself. Connected universally, the metaphysical artisan's work led simultaneously to the redemption of the corrupt, aging earth. This was particularly true of a Paracelsian potter, like Palissy, whose "art" was "of the

earth.” Hence, “the socioreligious implications of Paracelsus’s concept of alchemy were profound and revolutionary,” Owen Hannaway writes:

Not only was the peasant-artisan elevated to the status of the alchemist, he was allotted a positive role in a great cosmic drama which was nothing less than the redemption of the world. Just as Christ redeemed man the microcosm, who had fallen from grace through the sin of Adam, so man in his turn would redeem the whole of nature, which had fallen with him, by separating the pure from the impure and refocusing the virtues and spiritual powers of nature on himself. . . . Thus the whole of nature would be redeemed—nature through man and man through Christ. This theology of the priesthood of the laborer was at the center of Paracelsus’s social and religious challenge to his times.³

The martyrs in Palissy’s history of the primitive Church of Saintonge had separated themselves and joined the priesthood of the laborer. Now Palissy reconstructed the experience in a form in which he joined them. Like the outcast Ishmael, he alone returned to tell the tale. His story was about the materiality of time.

❖ The River ❖

I have thus far used simple language, and I cannot boast of any rhetoric or subtleties; I speak in the language of my birth and my country, for I am from Einsiedeln, of Swiss nationality. My writings must not be judged by my language but by my art and experience, which I offer the whole world, and which I hope will be useful to the whole world.

—PARACELUS, *Astronomia magna* (1537–38)

In truth, there are things in my book that it will be hard for ignorant people to believe. Notwithstanding all these considerations, I have not ceased to pursue my undertaking and to counter all calumnies and snares. I have set up a cabinet in which I have placed many and strange things that I have drawn from the bowels of the earth, and that give reliable evidence of what I say, and no one will be found who will not be forced to admit them true after he has seen the things that I have prepared in my cabinet in order to convince all those who otherwise would not wish to believe my writings.

—BERNARD PALISSY, *Discours admirables* (1580)

Consider the Paracelsian credos quoted above to suggest a hierarchy of educational “experience” open to the initiate physician. Roughly analogous to Palissy’s move from writings to things, this heralded the inversion of the linguistic orders dominated by scholasticism, the scrivener, and the written text:

For many years I studied at the universities of Germany, Italy and France, seeking to discover the foundations of medicine. However, I did not content myself with their teachings and writings and books, but continued my travels to Grenada and Lisbon, through Spain and England, through Brandenburg, Prussia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Wallachia, Transylvania, Croatia, the Wendian Mark, and yet other countries which there is no need to mention here, and wherever I went I eagerly and diligently investigated and sought after the tested and reliable arts of medicine. I went not only to the doctors, but also to the barbers, bathkeepers, learned physicians, women, and magicians who pursue the art of healing; I went to alchemists, to monasteries, to nobles and common folk, to the experts and the simple. . . . I have been criticized for being a wayfarer as though this made me the less worthy; let no one hold it against me if I defend myself against such allegations. The journeys I have made up until now have been very useful to me because no man's master grows in his own home, nor has anyone found his teacher behind his stove. . . . Is there no physician to reveal the lies of the scribes, to denounce their errors and abuses, to bring them to an end? Will you turn to ridicule the experience that I have acquired with so much diligence. . . . Let me tell you this: every little hair on my neck knows more than you and all your scribes, and my shoebuckles are more learned than your Galen and Avicenna, and my beard has more experience than all your high colleges.⁴

Once having arrived at university, the Paracelsian critique argued that the crucial leap to greater understanding then consisted in a new beginning, an intellectual and spiritual rebirth from written to oral culture, from the scholastic to the folkloric. These discursive levels were not mutually exclusive (indeed Paracelsus argued for integration ["I went to . . . the experts and the simple"]), as long as medicine is "tested and reliable"). Paracelsus's earliest work suggests that he presented himself as embarking upon a journey of intellectual *devolution*, in which he passed, over the course of his personal history, from a detached philosophical stance to a primordial, experiential one. This physical separation from the centers of learning through journeying enabled him to refute the scholasticism that identified the Galenic medical tradition with self-purification. At the same time, it would permit him to proclaim that the most ephemeral bits of his body ("every little hair on my neck . . . and my beard") had, through communion with strangers, his personal experience as a healer, and the very animation of travel itself, regained a sensitivity to the outside world lost in the academy.

Paracelsus did not wish his passage from scholasticism to the intuitive to be understood as a mystical retreat from reason. Indeed, the journey was thoroughly reasonable, the result of "many years" of research into the basic *foundations* of medicine, an undertaking *defined* in the sixteenth century by strict moral and intellectual discipline. Paracelsian discourse cannot be relegated merely to the category of "survivals, archaisms, the emotional, the irrational." The philosophy of both Paracelsus and

Palissy was strongly rational, although it was not necessarily the same post-Enlightenment secular rationalism with which modern historians identify most easily.⁵

Just as Paracelsus undertook his personal journey in order to construct the foundations of a new medicine, Palissy, who had spent years traveling before settling in Saintonge, made a short pilgrimage away from the tumult of war-torn Saintes to walk along the banks of the Charente River. There he invoked awesome powers of spiritual separation hidden deep in “the bowels of the earth” in order to construct anew the foundations of his innovative and secure Huguenot artisanry. This effort was to be directed toward the erection of a prototypical refuge within a “delectable garden,” the central artisanal conception on the model of the snail in the *Recepte*, “where I could *recoil*, and recreate my spirit in times of [violent] separations, plagues, epidemics, and other tribulations, which we are greatly troubled by today.”⁶

The Charente was the principal river of commerce in Saintonge, particularly for the many Huguenot potters who worked in and around the river town of La Chapelle-des-Pots. When accused of iconoclasm at Saintes, Palissy testified that he had been at “la Chapelle,” where “he usually went to obtain the potter’s clay he needed to work at his trade.” To conjure the shape of the Charente River, imagine a gigantic shell-less snail, unraveled to meander in a serpentine line down from town to town along the flat grasslands of Saintonge and up through Aunis, ending its long slow journey at La Rochelle. The Charente’s form was repeated in Palissy’s reptilian rustic basins, and also in his critique of the overt use of straight lines in Calvin’s attack on Nicodemites. What better place for Palissy to experience an epiphany?

The river was navigable in wooden, low-riding (and so easily overlooked), locally built pirogues. These canoes built of hollowed-out logs were linked with the coastal Huguenots and New World exploration and they attracted the notice of Theodore de Bry for many illustrations in his *Les Grands Voyages*, although his image of the Charente River shows a gabarot or courpet, also small traditional watercraft (fig. 7.1). Pirogues were thus the main means of commerce as well as of escape for many refugees, who used them to reach Dutch and English ships anchored in the Bay of Biscay with trade goods and refugees.⁷ The Charente was, therefore, a lifeline west and north away from religious strife toward La Rochelle and beyond the entrepôt to the larger Protestant world of its trading partners in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and the New World.

Palissy’s quest to discover the Neoplatonic origins of the macrocosm and the microcosm and to activate the effects of that doctrine among local artisans began here. It was revealed to his readers in a philosophical dialogue (“to make understanding of the present discourse easier”), which took place between “two Persons”: Question, a green apprentice, and Answer, an experienced artisan and natural philosopher infused with God’s universal knowledge. Thus we return again to relationships between artisanal

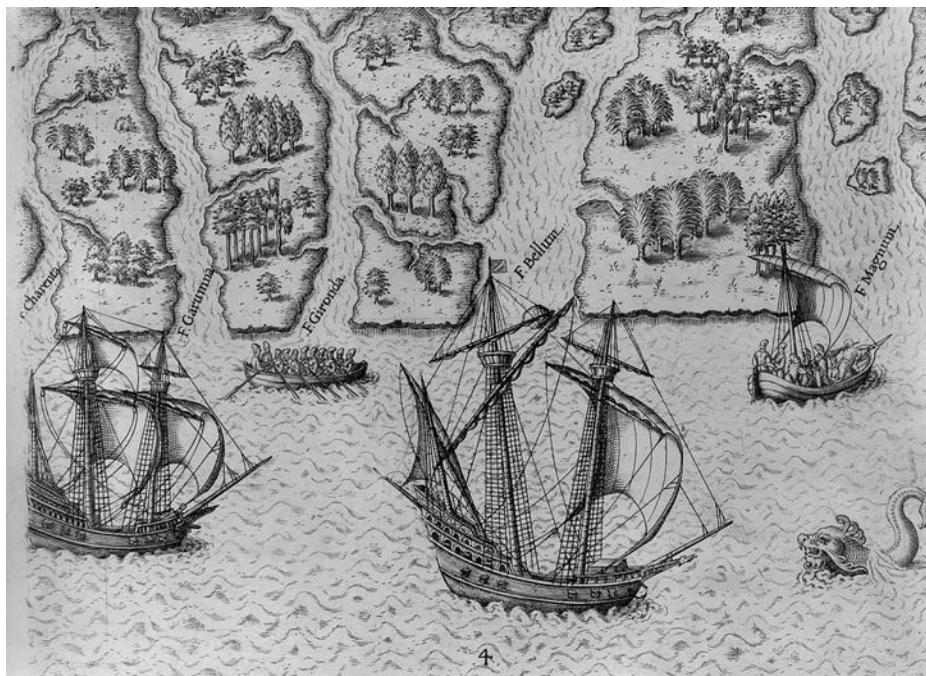


FIGURE 7.1. Theodore de Bry (1528–98), *Sex alia flumina a Gallis observata*, engraving, pl. 3 of Theodore de Bry and Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues (d. 1588), *Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida Americae provincia Gallis acciderunt . . .* (Frankfurt, 1591). Courtesy Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Volume 2 of de Bry's series on the Americas contains accounts of the early Huguenot expedition to Florida under Jean Ribaut. Rivers in southwestern France are shown carrying Huguenots in small boats—often mere pirogues—to deep-sea vessels waiting in the Bay of Biscay to transport them to both Protestant Europe and the New World. The Charente appears on the left as one of “six other rivers observed by the French man” that served as primary sources of the migration of refugees from river valleys that flowed west into the Atlantic between the great rival ports of La Rochelle and Bordeaux.

security (serpentine dissimulation) and protection, linked to revelation of the Holy Spirit (“by direct lines”). How does this compare with Palissy’s critique of Calvin’s straight line?

ANSWER: Some days after all these emotions and the civil wars abated, and it pleased God to send us His peace, I took a stroll one day along the meadow of this town of Saintes, near the Charente River: and while contemplating the horrible dangers from which God had protected me during these past times of horrible tumult, I heard the voices of certain virgins, who were sitting in a grove of trees, singing Psalm 104. And because their voices were soft and well harmonized, I forgot my first thoughts, and stopped to listen to the psalm; setting aside the pleasure of their voices, I began to contemplate the meaning of the psalm,

and noted its points; I was in awe [*tout confus en admiration*], of the wisdom of the royal prophet [i.e., David], and said to myself, Oh, divine and admirable goodness of God! That we might have the will to emulate the work of your hands, as the prophet teaches us in his psalm! And then I thought of painting an enormous picture of the beautiful landscapes that the prophet writes about in the psalm: but soon after, I had a change of heart, as paintings do not endure and then I thought of finding a fitting spot to build, if only in part, a garden according to the design, ornament, and excellent beauty, described by the prophet in his psalm, and having created this garden in my spirit, I found that in the same way, I could construct a palace, or amphitheater of refuge next to the garden, to take Christians exiled in times of persecution, which would be a holy pleasure, and an honest occupation of body and spirit.

QUESTION: you say that you would also like to construct an amphitheater of refuge for exiled Christians. This doesn't make sense, considering that we have the peace. Also we hope that soon one will have the liberty to preach throughout France, and not only in France, but also throughout the world: for it is written in Saint Matthew, chapter 24, in which the Lord says that the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the world, to be witnessed by all mankind. This makes me say with certainty that it is no longer necessary to seek cities of refuge for Christians.

ANSWER: You have badly misread these passages of the New Testament: for it is written that the children and chosen of God will be persecuted until the end, and hunted and mocked, banished and exiled; and as to that sentence you brought up from Saint Matthew, true it is written, that the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the world; but it doesn't say that it will be received by all, but rather that it will be witnessed by all, justify believers, and justly condemn the infidels . . . in conclusion, the perverse and unjust, [the] simoniacs, [the] avaricious, and all sorts of vicious people will always be ready to persecute those who by direct lines would follow the statutes and ordinances of our Lord.⁸

Palissy followed his contemporaries by attributing the musical and magical qualities of Neoplatonism to the Charente River Valley. Twelve years before the publication of the *Recepte*, Jean-Antoine de Baïf—who led a Neoplatonic academy in competition with Gohory's—in his enormously influential *Amours*, a poem in two books dedicated to “Meline” (Paris, 1552), sang the Charente's praises as Nature's incontrovertible witness to his love: “More than me, just as I was / The whole was / On the banks of the Charente. / The Saintongeais bushes / And streams / Bore witness to my song.” Here, a crucial transition occurs in the simultaneous coexistence of “I was” and “The whole was”; the Neoplatonic poet becomes part of the All; the monistic universe

is activated in de Baïf's metaphorical union of macrocosm and microcosm, just as the union takes place on the banks of a river that is itself metamorphosed to project a voice and a rhetoric beyond mere geographical presence.

Palissy and de Baïf exploited a millennia-old metaphor that became a topos almost with the advent of writing and certainly as early as the Greeks and the epoch of the book of Genesis. By the mid sixteenth century, a rhetoric of rivers had emerged, in which the river, because of the eternal motion of its waters and the specificity of its location, became associated with the *quest* for knowledge and first causes. "A decorum regulates each river's voice," writes W. H. Herendeen, "suiting it to its landscape and local society . . . its language is true, undissembling, and right . . . because, as a unique geographical phenomenon, the river embraces the essential mysteries of nature, and so the rhetoric carried in its current relates first of all to the pursuit of wisdom, and as such it passes freely from the realm of geography into that of language."¹⁰ The language of a river, its particular "rhetoric," must necessarily be local; it is a trope for the flow of a region's history, from its source, the origin. The river is also the centerpiece of regional folklore and topographical literature, hence the obvious site for recovering the secret of man's place in the order of things.

All of the early (and especially pagan) religious traditions associated flowing water—the Egyptian Nile; the Euphrates and the Red Sea (which Moses parts to create an escape route for the Israelites); and the element water and its role in the rivers of the creation myths for the Greeks—with a deity and first creative causes.¹¹ For Huguenots of the *désert*, Moses was an immensely important figure. Closer to Palissy's Charente, however, was the Stoic tradition inherited by Christianizing Neoplatonists, which held rivers to be the limitless principle element in creation and found its Judeo-Christian counterpart in Genesis 1: parting the waters marked the first act of division separating heaven and earth, the macrocosm and microcosm. Seneca's *Quaestiones naturales*, which was widely read by the humanists, pursued the riverscape as the ideal setting for inquiries into the enigmas of history and humanity and for eloquent expression of ontological insight. Self-knowledge was the Stoic ideal. To know oneself, one sought first causes. But to succeed in the quest, the mind must be freed from the profane weight of the physical body; a key to the classical Christian synthesis. Thus the Senecan river, bisecting two banks, its beginning and end ambiguous, was the earthly place of mind/body bifurcation. And when the mind was freed from the constraints of bodily vices, it could investigate the origin of the river itself. When origins were discovered, so too would absolute knowledge of first causes. Paradoxically, then, bifurcation led to unity.

But perhaps the most crucial aspect of this topos, from Plato to Seneca, Cicero, Pliny, and Palissy, was the synthesis of its metaphoric and metonymic languages. Rivers "speak" simultaneously in the discourses of geography, philosophy, linguistics,

eloquence, and, with the advent of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, magic and, particularly, religion. That was why exegetes, especially natural scientists from Paracelsus to Bacon, regarded the river as the site of the confluence of sacred and profane discourse. Here Scripture and geography were read together and compared. Just as Seneca compared geography with what he read in writings passed down to him from Greek antecedents, Renaissance Paracelsians such as Palissy studied the physical world through an adaptable scheme provided by the Word. Exegetical rivers could be read as tropes for the origins of Genesis, the golden age of Eden, or the fall of Adam, depending on historical context or the experience of the reader. Thus, at its most extreme metaphoric pole, a river might signify an opening or space wherein the desire for the return to prelapsarian unity of spirit and matter might be located. Hence, “the whole was,” for de Baïf, where he walked along “the shores of the Charente.” Writing his rustic poetry of the river seemed to de Baïf, as Palissy’s artisanry did to him, an act of mystical recreation in fallen Nature.

Palissy, too, conceptualized the Charente as the location for the union of macrocosm and microcosm. The river embodied millennia of folklore and mythology, transformed by his spiritual imagination into a metaphorical wilderness; part Eden, part *désert*, to reflect the condition of man after the Fall. Divisions separating sacred and profane were temporarily bridged in his moment of lucidity and now the artisan alone was granted a reprieve from the limitations of sublunar time, the very beginning of which was stigmatized by the failure of humanity to commune with divine knowledge. The reversal of this failure was to become Palissy’s alchemical quest—the core of his work—both literary *and* artisanal. More than that, it was his task to achieve communion while still part of the stuff of profane Nature.

The transcendence of corruption by reformed man was to undo what Adam had done, indeed, to neutralize the Adamic act altogether. To negate the Fall was to deny linear history as mere dross: only the light of Nature was direct evidence of God’s will. And if, as Plotinus had established, God’s reality was in itself a labyrinth with no beginning and no end (and Nature was the ultimate metaphor for that reality), then the act of reading and writing (and artisanry) must follow the form of the centripetal maze—so common in Renaissance gardens—one that attempted to conjoin macrocosm and microcosm so that they coordinated interdependently. This enabled adepts to encompass multiple universes, including the contingencies of everyday life. Analogous to the pilgrim’s progress, where every step forward was metaphorically a step backward toward prelapsarian origins, man’s cosmological unification was already encompassed in the anatomy of the walker, a “celestial center,” and so it remained dormant, awaiting the pilgrim’s journey of self-discovery.¹²

In this sense, a powerful symbiosis existed between moral and natural philosophy, and it was clear that a river journey signified the *process* of questing after essence. Thus,

natural-philosophical research per se was essential, an act of self-realization or coming into being; the ultimate answers acknowledged by the researcher a priori for process to begin in the first place. The point, then, was less to finish than to endure: to *sustain* the energy of journeying. Historical events became interchangeable, or nearly so, framed and reframed by the actor's own imagination and his experience of the Word. Paracelsian artisans, especially autodidactic Paracelsians, accommodated everything they encountered in the natural world—and rivers in particular—to their own spiritual and material discourse.

Plural classical, Christian, folkloric, and historical languages thus converged at the river. Neoplatonic transformation began at the very moment when the potter, now in the midst of his stroll, was moved to “contemplate” the “horrible dangers” of civil war. Palissy suffered extreme anxiety over the seeming absence of God, and present dangers took precedence. For Palissy, though, the transcendence of history could not proceed without the contingency of violent crisis—that is to say, of tumultuous historical event. This authenticated and thus preceded his insights, as crucifixion preceded the transcendence of Jesus and warfare between love and wrath anchored Jakob Böhme's natural philosophy.

War instigated Palissy's walk and led to contemplation. His stroll separated him physically from society; it spontaneously animated a quasi-sacred space that was removed yet connected to the earth's profane space. Here, Palissy revealed the double consciousness of separation yet contiguity of experience between inner and outer vision. Removal from society into the wilderness coincided with the separation of purity from corruption. Separation was purification from the violent degeneration Palissy associated with the history, past and present, of Saintes. Unlike the communitarian Anabaptists, however, Palissy went alone to the river, and he subsequently returned and rejoined a mixed society with newfound knowledge to further innovation and improve security. Even while the Charente meandered into isolated woods in places, for Palissy, the river remained connected to Saintes, and also to La Chapelle-des-Pots, La Rochelle, and the New World. When he rejoined the milieu of warring Huguenots and Catholics (the sacred and the profane), Palissy returned from a place where he broke through Ficino's deception of the senses, because he stood in the nexus of “the whole” where the macrocosm and microcosm overlapped.

As Palissy contemplated the “times of horrible tumult” of the near-historical past, he “heard the voices of certain virgins, who were sitting in a grove of trees, singing Psalm 104.” Thus Palissy documented unity with the macrocosm as his passage through violent chaos, bodily separation, soulful purification, and communion with Nature through the harmonic sound of sacred music. He experienced the inner absorption of contemplation of unity materialized by his mystical sense of nearness to harmonic resonance in Nature, in the pure voices of virgins, which filtered through the corrup-

tion of the fallen earth and into an opening in his desiring soul. This grove of trees was Palissy's church in the *désert*; the virgins his choir. In Calvinist sacred music, the soul of the auditor had to be animated "by the pleasure of their voices" in order to transcend the "dead letter" of the text on the page and "contemplate the meaning of the psalm." The pleasure was transitory—and in any event emerged from pain—but much more than the Protestant musical tradition was at work here.¹³

By sixteenth-century convention, the virgins of the glade were a standard trope for the muses. Palissy's Flora (see fig. 5.2) made his spiritual convergence with such figures material. De Baïf's lover heard "les Nymphes Mignonettes" singing along the banks of the Charente, and he ended his *Amours* with a short poem, "To the Muses and to Venus," in which he addressed his devotion to the "Precious Goddesses, [and] Sacred Virgins," in whom he explicitly sublimated his love for the mortal Meline.¹⁴ Pontus de Tyard, like de Baïf a member of the Pléiade, defined the virgins and muses for his academic community, while codifying their use as a metaphor for the universal encyclopedia of knowledge. The Pléiade may have been inspired by Ramon Llull (1232?–1316). If Palissy's walk in the woods invited comparison to the experience of de Baïf's lover in the *Amours*, it also closely resembled a tale from the adventures of Llull's protagonist Felix in his encyclopedia *Libre de meravelles*. The *Libre* remained unpublished until 1750, but it was widely diffused in manuscript form in the sixteenth century.¹⁵

Felix is also compelled to take a fateful walk. This seems at first to be aimless wandering, until he enters the presence, not of singing virgins, but of a natural philosopher reading in a grove of trees. The philosopher sits beside a beautiful fountain, here the river metaphor of separation and first causes. Felix is still an impressionable novice searching for knowledge, and Palissy had already ascended to the role played by Llull's philosopher. So Palissy locates the muse to spur an already heightened imagination, while Felix discovers a philosopher with whom to play the part of Question. When asked his purpose, the philosopher responds that he is secluded like a recluse in the forest to contemplate the natural order of things and through them understand the mind of their maker. Subsequent explanations initiate Felix (and by extension the reader) into the philosopher's art. Reading in the midst of Nature alludes not only to the "Book of Nature" of which God is the author but also to the rigorous intellectual and moral training Felix undergoes in quest of a unified philosophy of the macrocosm and microcosm.

Most influential of all for Palissy and the French alchemical community on the Neoplatonic sublimation of mortal love into love of God and completion of "the work" was *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: The Strife of Love in a Dream*, written by the Venetian Dominican monk Francesco Colonna and first published by Aldus Manutius in Venice in 1499. Palissy grapples openly with this text in the *Recepte*, where he chastises critics who think that his design for a "garden is only a dream, and would like to compare it

with the dream of Poliphilo.”¹⁶ The potter protests that this dream has materialized. An artisan of the earth did not trade in mere fantasies. Still, Palissy depended on the *Hypnerotomachia* for the broad structural outlines of the *Recepte*, and even certain passages in the *Discours*, and was influenced by Colonna more than by any other writer except Paracelsus.

Colonna's text was central to the Venetian Renaissance and was, moreover, profoundly informed by the hermetic, psychic, and Neoplatonic influences of Marsilio Ficino. The Ficinian influence also extended to Colonna's use of nearly inaccessible forms of neolatin Italian, difficult even for literate Italians to understand. Palissy would have known the *Hypnerotomachia* through his youthful ties with the Pons family and the French Calvinist court in Ferrara. Yet special knowledge was unnecessary in view of the immense popularity and influence of Colonna's dream in early modern France, especially among the artistic and literary communities of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Paris, which delighted in cryptic images and eroticism and believed they held the key to the philosopher's stone.

Palissy also knew the work through his network of associations. A French translation appeared in Paris under the name of Jean Martin in 1546, but the actual translator was Jacques Gohory, who took enough liberties with its complex Italian to call his translation a paraphrase.¹⁷ Not only the elite but artists and artisans as well were attracted to Colonna's tale. Many of the 174 mystical and quasi-religious woodcuts of classicizing architectural monuments to Poliphilo's dead lovers were copied by craftsmen in various media. Colonna was documented as having been a practicing artisan, as well as a Dominican monk—like the martyred monks in Palissy's history of *Saintes*. Indeed, some thought he had been as unlearned as the “pauvre artisan sans lettres.”¹⁸

Compare Palissy's walk near the river with the opening of the *Hypnerotomachia*, where the melancholic Poliphilo, a victim of the “strife” of unrequited love, falls into a fitful sleep and dreams that he has wandered onto “a large, plaine, and champion place, all greene and diversely spotted with many sorted flowers.” No ordinary plain this, but one absent all signs of faunal life, natural and material: “Here appeareth no humaine creature to my sight, nor sylva beast, flying bird, country house, field tent, or shepherds cote.” There are no sounds to be heard, even a “rustikeherdman with Otenpipe making pastorall melodie.” Here was a strange Eden before Adam and the naming of the creatures. This plain lacks traces of humanity but also the hellish language of strife and discord that disrupted Palissy's *Saintes*. It is this silence that draws Poliphilo deeper into the plain, a land of inanimate Nature, stilled by inertia and stagnation until his entrance: “taking the benefit of the place, and quietnesse of the plaine, which assured me to be without feare, I directed my course still forward, regarding on eyttther Side the tender leaves and thick grasse, which *rested unstirred, without the beholding of any motion.*”¹⁹

Polyphilus's aimless wandering animates this stagnant plain. Finally, his "ignorant steppes," which seem to reduce his wandering to movement for its own sake, bring him to an "obscured wood." Terrified because he can locate no path, "eyther to direct me forward, or lead me back againe," Polyphilus sets out to escape the forest. Wandering "now this way, now that way," he circles back on himself. At length, exhausted by his futile attempts to escape and desiring a clue that might "conduct him foorth of the intricate laborinth," Polyphilus finds himself in a sylvan purgatory, caught between the "wish for hated death, or in so dreadful a place to hope for desired life." Nearing the end of his physical resources, our lover, now likening his trials to those of obscure mythological heroes, falls to his knees in Neoplatonic prayer to overcome the blindness and corruption of his outer body. Instantly, a heavenly light appears to guide him from the forest: "glad I was to see the light: as one set at libertie, that had been chayned up in a deepe dungeon and obscure darknesse."²⁰

Trailing after the light even as his body is expiring from thirst and injury, he stumbles at last onto "a pleasant spring or head of water. . . from the same did flowe a cleare and chrystalline current streame . . . and trunkes of trees denyed any longer by their roots to be upholden, did cause a Stopping hindrance to their current and wheezing fall, which still augmented by other undissonant torrents, from high and fertlesse mountaines in the plaine, Shewed a beautiful brightnes and Soft passing course."²¹ Just as Poliphilo bends to take his first life-saving sip from his cupped hands, he hears "a doricall Songe,"

with so Sweete and delectable deliverie, with a voyce not terrestriall, with So great a harmonie and incredible a fayning Shrilnesse, and unusuall proportion, and is possible to bee inspired by no tounge Sufficiently to be commended. The Sweetness whereof So greatly delighted me, as thereby I was ravished of my remembrance, and my understanding so taken from me, as I let fall my desired water through the loosened ioynts of my feeble hands.²²

Having succumbed to a dream of forgetfulness under the spell of a macrocosmic song "with a voyce not terrestriall," Polyphilus loses touch with the reality of historical time. He also loses touch with his body—he forgets to drink the life-sustaining water—only to find himself running, death-driven, toward the siren call of "this inhumane harmony." The source of this harmony can never quite be found. Instead, Polyphilus finds protection under a mythic tree in the dark forest, the only one with roots still firm in the sacred ground: "my whole bodye trembling and languishinge under the broade and mightye Oke full of Acornes, Standing in the midst of a spacious and large green meade." Under "his thicke and leavie armes," racked by fatigue and the anxiety of "exceeding doubts," Polyphilus dreams that he has succumbed to sleep, only to dream again. His subsequent dream within a dream both animates the

rest of his encounters and becomes the structure for an allegory of mortal love stoically displaced into art. The reality of corporeal life is forgotten in sleep, along with history itself, both annihilated by the dream. From this process of sublimation of the physical self arises the pure transcendence of the heart's conjunction between the macrocosm and the microcosm.²³

The theme of the virgins of the glade maintained textual continuity from the Greeks to Colonna, to de Baïf's *Pléiade*, up to Gohory and Palissy, and yet there remains a distinct and important difference over time in the nature of their song. Colonna's "doricall Song" is purely harmonic, whereas Palissy's virgins (whose voices are "soft and well harmonized") sing Psalm 104. Transcription of poetry into measured verse and its ontological interpretation in the new medium was an important enterprise for the sixteenth-century French academies in general and Gohory's *Lycium* and de Baïf's *Académie de poesie et de musique* in particular. From 1565 onward, as a response to Calvin's edict of 1541 to introduce a corpus of Protestant hymns to Geneva, resulting in Clément Marot's ubiquitous reformed Psalter of 1562, de Baïf was occupied with the task of setting the psalms into French measured verse, the centerpiece of his Counter-Reformation efforts in the service of Catherine de Médicis. De Baïf argued that since Huguenots evoked such religious fervor, even political community, with their frequent, public chanting of hymns, then Catholics must also have recourse to their own musical arsenal.²⁴

In this early period, there was still hope among some humanists that moderation would close the schism opened up by the religious wars. Musical harmony thus became a prevailing metaphor and recipe for reunification. If heretical song was countered and overwhelmed by music of even greater sacred resonance sung by Catholics as an integral part of their everyday routine like the Huguenot "artisan in his workshop, / With a psalm or canticle, he is comforted in his labor," then discord would dissolve into peaceful harmony.²⁵ This solution to violent conflict surely seems the epitome of a logic of self-deception and naïve intellectual escapism. Yet in the sixteenth century, alchemists thought the union of measured songs and music to embody very powerful arcana indeed. Theirs was not only the tradition of Orpheus, Amphion, Timotheus, and David, who could reorder the natural world, even create great cities with their music, but the violence of Joshua and Gabriel was there too, and their apocalyptic songs. Combining classical and biblical mythologies was at the very core of the entire Renaissance Neoplatonic program. To induce personal mystical experience to further political and social agendas through Plato's dicta that "songs are spells for souls," the Renaissance Platonists competed to reactivate the power of ancient rhythmic song.

The magic of a "doctrine of effects," extending forward from Plato, captured the moment of perfect symmetry between poetry and music when, by the power of har-

monic balance, the auditor's body was arrested, his mind purified and thus cleansed or emptied, and his soul in resonance was lifted into the higher spheres from its profane torpor.²⁶ He was then initiated into the higher states of knowledge hidden in the meaning of the poetry. Ficino's vision was expressed in the poet Pontus de Tyard's *Solitaire second* (Lyon, 1555).²⁷ *Solitaire's* adoration of Pasithee, the mythical union of music and poetry, unfolds in a tale that functions both as an intellectual journey from scholastic reason to the experience of transcendental intuition and a return journey for the soul back to the divine clarity of the place whence it had originally fallen in the time of Adam, and out of the camouflage, discord, and chaos of profane matter.

This is also Polyphilus's task, as he journeys from monument to monument built in memory of his unfortunate lovers. Were these lost loves traces of the perfect unity of prelapsarian experience? Were the monuments' hieroglyphs alchemical clues to recovery of experience through the work? It was precisely the desire to engineer his soul's return from the chaos of personal history that animated Palissy's walk and invited the muses to induce a dreamlike state of forgetfulness of history after the Fall. "I forgot my first thoughts," he wrote, "and stopped to listen to the psalm; setting aside the pleasure of their voices, I began to contemplate the meaning."

Palissy's "response" to the measured verse was a programmatic example of the doctrine of effects, instantly recalling similar moments in the *Hypnerotomachia*, *Le Roman de la rose*, and *Solitaire second*. But again, unlike the harmonic song of Polyphilus, Palissy's muse encourages him to grasp meaning linked to a specific historical moment by his *personal* understanding of the word through a soulish inspiration by God. As the perfect harmony of the song signified the timelessness of divine authority, it allowed King David's text to enter contingent experience simultaneously, filling him with the sense of hearing. But pure sensations of "pleasure," where Palissy located the main effect, could only be obtained when the soulish heart was animated to form a conjunction between macrocosm and microcosm, becoming a bridge for the astral body. The *plaisir* of Palissy's animated heart granted his spirit a moment of divine insight into the negation of history—history here revealed in negative relation to pleasure—by the gift of forgetfulness. Still, this was a gift that could never completely negate the truth: in the same moment his being was still riveted *bodily* to a real place by the river in war-torn Saintes.

Only insofar as there existed the *external* disorder of man's existential history could Palissy unveil his intoxicating experience of timeless *internal* order. This specific reciprocal relation both framed and animated his Neoplatonic epiphany. Like the conceptual barriers separating macrocosm from microcosm, this relationship was now experienced as "awe" (*tout confus*, literally, "all disordered"), as the two cosmic spheres came together in his animated heart, which was invaded, breached, and interpenetrated by the anarchic violence of "the strife of love." Emerging from this "disorder,"

there was a sense, not of chaos, but of profound equilibrium: metamorphosis, a moment of historical transformation when the disruption of old categories left in its wake an aperture sufficient to release the energy of new creation. This energy inspired Palissy's quest for the metaphysical union of matter and spirit in his artisanry. In his colossal *Platonic Theology*, Ficino systematized the movement of the soul in matter through his paradigmatic formulation of the five ontological hypostases (or substances), namely, the One, Mind, Soul, Quality, and Body. This formulation enabled him to define, through the mediation of the soul, the ultimately universal relationship of the absolute to the apparently fragmented and pluralistic universe of fallen matter.

The hypostases divided reality into a hierarchy of ontological states, so, as a system, "the higher subsumes the lower and the lower emanates from the higher and ultimately from the absolutely prime hypostasis, the transcendent One."²⁸ The equilibrium of Palissy's epiphany may be graphed onto Ficino's continuum, with the Soul occupying the nexus integrating spirit and matter. As Ficino wrote in an often-quoted phrase, the soul served as "the universal countenance, the bond and knot of the world."²⁹

This provides a framework for interaction between macrocosm and microcosm inspired by the divine song of the muses, the sound by which the activation of the soul overcame the death of the body through an animated heart and effected a new, discrete harmonic order.

❧ "The Sound" ❧

In the seventeenth century, Böhme, following Palissy, merged this Ficinian musical model with the Protestant emphasis on the Word and Paracelsian alchemical principles in ways that clarified the redemptive qualities of reborn matter in the hands of physicians as well as rustic artisans. For Böhme, the harmonized voices of the glade were abstracted into the "Sound" of Nature, emerging from the soulish bowels of the earth. "The Heat, Light, Love, and the Sound or Tone, is hidden," Böhme wrote:

and maketh the outward *moveable*, so that the outward gathereth it self together, and generateth a Body . . . the Word is the Sound or Tone, which riseth up in the Light . . . [but] the *Sound* of Gods Word must rise up through the astringent bitter Death, and generate a Body in the half-dead water, thereupon that Body is Good and also Evill, dead and living; . . . as the Earth its Mother doth . . . the Life lyeth *hid* under and in the Death of the Earth, as also in the children of the Earth. . . . Behold! Man becometh weak faint and sick, and if *no remedy* is used, then he soon falls into Death. . . . Now if a Learned Physician inquireth from the sick Person from what his disease is *proceeded*, and taketh that which is the *cause* of the Disease . . . the Astral birth remaineth in its *Seat* . . . mingleth with this water or powder . . . it can *take away* the Disease from a Man: for the Astral Life

riseth up through Death . . . the power or *vertue* of the Word and eternal life in the Earth and its *children* lyeth hidden in the center in Death, and springeth up through Death . . . it hath Life in its Seat, and that *cannot* be taken from it . . . the Spirit speaketh to *thee*, and not to the dead spirit of the flesh.³⁰

From his many attacks on writing and eloquent speech, Palissy implied a failure of language to come to grips with the disruption of old categories and the accompanying ephemeral flash of essence. In the end it was his artifacts, transformed from dead matter into quality, that documented Palissy's moment of conjunction and unity with the whole, because craft infused with soul's truth carried by the astral spirit was the material of Palissy's spiritual experience. From the realm of disorder—local history, war, and violent language—arose a visionary order, the dulcet garden modeled after Psalm 104. This psalm attained critical importance in the Huguenot Psalter during the war period and beyond into the refuge during the seventeenth century precisely because it was the Genesis psalm (its temporal and narrative structure derive from Genesis 1), a hymn in praise of creation. The semantic importance of this celebration of the presence of God in Nature was as clear for Palissy as an artisan and natural philosopher as it was for Böhme.³¹

Moving past the effect of the sound on bodies and, by extension, Paracelsian chemical medicine, Böhme's Neoplatonic analysis linked these earth spirits (or, "children") to God's artisanal work in the creation, in Genesis, of "curious . . . Ideas forms or Images": shadows of macrocosmic perfection out of the bowels of the earth: "Now the purpose of God was, to make a curious excellent Angelical Hoast or Army out of the *Earth*, and all manner of Ideas forms or Images. For, in and upon that all should Spring, and generate themselves *anew*, as we see in mineral Oares, Stones, Trees, Herbs and Grasse, and all manner of Beasts; after a *heavenly* Image or Form."³² In this context, Palissy's unlearned rustic artisans were the children of God and Mother Earth, and hearing her song, they, too, were moved, with the astral spirit's assistance, to help make an "Angelical Hoast or Army out of the Earth." Thus, his rustic "figulines" became disguised figures of Christian soldiers, intended to endure and rise up at the end of time. This was also one purpose of Palissy's garden and amphitheater of refuge made in the rustic style, which was decided upon when Palissy thought that "paintings do not endure." Ceramics had endured buried underground since beyond memory and kept their form, "and though those Imagings were *transitory*, being they were not pure before God," a chiliastic Böhme pointed to the apocalyptic future: "yet God would at the End of this time, *extract* and draw forth the Heart and the kernel, out of the new Birth or Geniture, and *separate* it from Death and Wrath, and the new Birth should Eternally spring up in God, without, *distinct* from this place, and bear Heavenly fruits *again*."³³

First, Palissy's Huguenots *qua* overlooked creatures were reborn an army of rustic images; last, with patience and endurance, they would hear the sound, be extracted from death, and experience the "new Birth . . . Eternally." This was the crucial task of Paracelsian artisanry. Palissy's desire was to construct an exact parallel of God's creation of Nature in a microcosm made of the earth itself, harnessing artisanal *sûreté* to patience. He confronted the pious artisan's problem of building endurance, if not permanence, in history. The garden, with an amphitheater of refuge next to it, was built to the specifications of God's word carried by harmonic sound. Raised out of the half-dead matter of the aging earth, it was still granted the endurance of sacred authority, because Palissy's hands followed his animated heart and "created this garden in my spirit."

❧ Psalm 104 ❧

David's poem began by praising God ("Bless the Lord, O my Soul!") only—in a move standard in the Hebrew poetic tradition—to circle back to its beginning again in the end (35:2) ("Bless thou the Lord, O my soul!") as the ultimate artisan taking pleasure in the construction of his masterpiece. "Clothed with light as with a garment" (*Amictus lumine*), his kingly (1:4) "glory and majesty" was embodied in the very act and form of creation as the light of creation. Just as God possessed the power to will creation, so too providence provided, at his discretion, sustenance, and renewal (the spirit here was the breath of life):

29. Hidest thou thy face, they are terrified:
Withdrawest thou their breath, they expire,
And return to their dust:
30. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created,
And thou renewest the face of the earth.³⁴

Palissy emerged from his epiphany in "awe," praising the skill of God the artisan ("the works of your hands"). Simultaneously, he possessed the will to materialize as artisanry the insight provided by his moment of astral conjunction. But the delectable garden of Psalm 104, though full of edenic imagery, was no Eden. It was at most a rustic landscape located in time *after* the Fall, where man feared real threats and had to labor for his subsistence:

20. Thou makest darkness, and it is night:
Wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth.
21. The young lions roar after their prey,
And seek their meat from God.

22. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together,
And lay them down in their dens.

23. Man goeth forth unto his work
And to his labour until the evening.

Thus the garden, like Palissy himself, occupied a space in history between the Creation and the return. Although no longer protected by God—indeed, He could take away the breath of life at any moment and return its creatures “to dust”—the garden remained an open space for creation. There is safety for man in labor, for only after toil ends in the evening do the lions come out of their dens and “seek their meat from God.” This was space for waiting; a trope for the refugee artisan’s escape into the private refuge for the self and others. Like Palissy’s dreamy walk, the garden, anchored by its (*limace*-shaped?) amphitheater of refuge, became a fixed arena; a hidden fortress, natural-philosophical laboratory, and alchemical matrix that processed natural matter into artisanry and the artisans themselves. The separation and solitude of the refuge was cultivated and displaced into work toward Paracelsus’s material-holiness synthesis: “which would be a holy pleasure, and an honest occupation of body and spirit.” But, despite Palissy’s expectation that his garden, wrought in the image of Psalm 104, would endure longer and more usefully than paint on panel or glass, his creation was a temporarily ordered personal space. It merely offered refuge from violent sequence. Yet even if it was not the final stopping point and the permanent, universal resolution of dualities (which was not the domain of human artisanry), here was a place where bits of the earth were redeemed and converted alchemically; evidence that the aging earth was moving toward final things.

Misunderstanding the amphitheater of refuge for “exiled Christians” to be yet another “city of refuge,” Question dismisses the concept as no longer useful and naïvely turns to historical event—the “present peace”—as proof that refuge is unnecessary. Citing Matthew, he argues that Huguenots can now resume their evangelical role as preachers of the gospel in France and beyond. But Question is not a philosopher. He uses Scripture to support historical discourse but is unable to escape its limitations. Unlike Answer, who penetrates the meaning of Psalm 104 because it enters him on an “astral chariot” of harmonic sound, he cannot link macrocosm and microcosm through communion with God. Hence Question has little hope of penetrating the hidden truth of the divine message, which he “badly misread.” But Answer, the philosopher, is able to assert with conviction that “the children and chosen of God” will have no peace in history. Everyone will *see* God’s truth, but few will perceive it. The many will try to destroy what they cannot possess. The few will endure persecution “until the end,” exiled until the return; an existence of mythological torment within a history that is not theirs, even while they labor in refuge and wait.

In the end, these Neoplatonic components of Bernard Palissy's Paracelsian discourse provided an available language to address the Saintongeais Huguenot artisan's materio-spiritual preoccupations, if such difficult language was set in "narrative" terms he understood. Hence Palissy asked his patron Catherine de Médicis to overlook his rustic discourse, at the same time that he asked: "I implore you to instruct those laborers who are illiterate that they should study natural philosophy industriously, following my counsel."³⁵ Despite Palissy's obvious identification with certain written traditions, a suspicion of language remains in his writing, a tension between the oral culture of an enthusiastic artisan with intimate connections to God and a natural philosopher and martyrologist who knew that print culture was necessary for his "counsel" to "endure" and be useful to other refugee artisans after his death.

When Palissy took his walk by the Charente River, he expressed his motivations emotionally in a language of the senses, a language that proceeded like a "dialogue" from hearing to feeling to seeing to prelapsarian remembering (through forgetfulness) and, finally, to artisanry.³⁶ Palissy's "simple" artisanal "language," although it survived in both pottery and writing, was crafted cautiously out of a Faustian bargain between converging oral and literary traditions. As such, it contained an intractable irony intended to meet the challenge of writing and thus maintain the primacy of the culture of sound in the very domain in which it would be destroyed.

❧ Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and the Materiality of Time ❧

The sound resonated from the outer rim of the macrocosm down into the microcosm, all the way to the bowels of the earth, before it emerged cleansed as virginal harmonies to Palissy's ears. So it seems appropriate here to join Question and Answer in the midst of a heated dialogue about geology. By the time the dialogue finally turns the *Recepte* to the subject of "stones," Answer has already alluded to a central problem in sixteenth-century natural science—what geologists subsequently came to call "subaerial denudation"³⁷—the erosion of the surface of Planet Earth. In early modern times, this was referred to eschatologically as the "decay" of the sublunar world. Answer is thus rejoined pro forma by Question, who extends his role as defender of the inviolable authority of the written text to include biblical wisdom on geomorphology:

QUESTION: The opinion that you have told me now is the biggest lie that I have ever heard: for you say that the stone that has recently been made is subject to decomposition, because of the damage of time, but I know that from the beginning God made heaven and earth, and he also made all the stones and hasn't made any since. And even the Psalm [104] on which you want to build your garden gives testimony that all was made in the beginning of the Creation of the world.³⁸

Palissy thus began to search the bowels of the earth to unravel the scientific and scriptural problems that attended the excavation of “proofs” of a historical body undergoing the aging process. This task forced him to account for a logical discrepancy—or even, as Question’s accusation implies, willful misreading—when compared with the authorities already cited: Genesis and Psalm 104.

Both state, as Question attests, that heaven and earth were created in their totality in the beginning (“all was made in the beginning of the Creation of the world”). Therefore, according to a literal reading of Scripture, all geological structures (“all the stones”) were also brought into being by fiat “in the beginning of the Creation.” But if stones were subject “to breaking up” because of “the injuries of time,” then Genesis was suspect as history, because other rocks had to replace those lost or else earth would dissolve into nothingness. The heretical implications of this observation were clearly not lost on Question. And so his argument follows, according to the logic of the biblical scientific tradition, that the earth’s geology retains precisely the same structures now as then.³⁹

Question’s bibliolatry is understandable if taken in the context of Renaissance science and its veneration of the Genesis as “containing God’s own impeccable account of the Earth’s creation and early history.”⁴⁰ A Genesis cult emerged, on one level, because it was commonly assumed that Genesis and the other books of the Pentateuch had been transcribed directly from words dictated by God, heard and presumably written down verbatim by Moses. The five books of the Pentateuch were believed to be the most ancient of all artifacts containing the Word and, as such, were regarded as chronologically closest to God’s presence. Its divine provenance guaranteed the infallibility of Genesis as scientific discourse. As late as 1709, a British polemical tract hailed “the Mosaick System of the Creation; [with Moses,] the greatest Natural Philosopher that ever lived upon this earth.”⁴¹

From the early Christian era until at least the Enlightenment and beyond, Genesis functioned as the West’s universal textbook of geomorphology. In Palissy’s time, discrepancies between text and Nature were assumed by authority to be the result of human error in any number of interpretive categories. Included among these were exegetical misreading; sensual misperception resulting from the devil’s mischief; or, as Question charges against Answer with respect to the dogma that “all was made in the beginning of the Creation of the world,” outright lies.⁴² But we have seen how Question personifies a half-blind “literal” reading of Scripture, especially when confronted with the natural philosopher Answer’s access to the primacy of experiential authority, validated by communion with God in conjunction with the light of Nature. Question’s literalness and catechistic reliance on the written word make the *potentially* living text—and, by extension his unimaginative discourse—a dead letter.

Palissy thus began to address the eschatological component of Paracelsist artisanry

during his walk by the river, when he decided to base his garden on Psalm 104, the Genesis psalm. In Palissy's Paracelsian geomorphology, the eschatological antitype of Genesis is typically Revelation's "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). Northrup Frye argues in his typological reading of the Bible that with Revelation "we reach the antitype of all antitypes, the real beginning of light and sound of which the first word of the Bible is the type."⁴³ The Bible was interpreted in its original form as one huge codex in which each book existed in reciprocal relation to each of the others. This sort of textual reciprocity was probably very similar to the way in which enthusiastic Huguenot theologians encouraged disciples to read the books, with constant reference back from the New Testament to the Old for "authority" as type. Indeed, *désert* Huguenots such as Palissy quoted as much from the Old Testament as from the New.

Answer replies to Question's rigidity from the perspective, not only of the enthusiastic interaction of Genesis and Revelation, but also of his geological understanding of the Paracelsian chemical millennium. This encouraged the simultaneous reading of material signifiers of first and final causes in geological specimens taken from the "bowels" of the earth:

ANSWER: I have never seen a man as dense as you are: I know very well that it is written in the Book of Genesis that God created all things in six days, and that He rested on the seventh day: but nevertheless, God did not create these things to leave them idle, thus each does its own duty, according to the commandment that it was given by God. The stars and planets are not idle, the ocean shifts from one coast to another and labors to produce beneficial things; similarly, the earth is *never* idle: that which is naturally worn out, she reforms immediately, if not in one way then in another. [And that is why you ought to manure the earth so that it immediately takes up the sustenance that it has been given.] Therefore, it is necessary to note here, that just as the outside of the earth labors to give birth to something: so too the inside and matrix of the earth also labors to produce [*produire* suggests a triple meaning here, including "to create" and "to give birth"].

Just as there was perpetual motion toward the industrious production of "beneficial things" in the macrocosm ("the stars and planets are not idle"), so too in the microcosm ("similarly, the earth is *never* idle"). As it was for Böhme, for Palissy, the earth was feminine—a mother who "labors to give birth to something"—and an alchemical "matrix" for the "refinement" of matter gestated over the fullness of time. Knowledge of the means by which perpetual industrious labor to separate purity from impurity in the bowels of the earth takes place would be especially useful to farmers. "That is why you ought to manure the earth," Palissy admonished. He believed that manure, like the farmer's philosopher's stone, replicated the earth's hidden treasures, leading to agricultural fecundity. So too artisans would benefit. If the earth's matrix took raw

matter and returned “beneficial things” from her labor, and if the artisan could somehow replicate the action of that matrix in his shop, then, conceptually speaking, he could replicate the process of production. Purification of self was also implied; the question then became, how did the artisan attain to the labor of the matrix? How could he return to the “mother” for rebirth without destroying himself in the process?

The intermingling of Genesis and Revelation was also apparent in Palissy’s understanding of the Paracelsian concept of the *quinta essentia*, the “potential” or “seed,” that, over time, moved slowly, *observably* (like living organisms), toward ripeness or perfection. Perfection, “inasmuch as he is perfect,” could only be achieved in full at the end of time:

Although the land and sea daily produce new creatures and various plants, metals and minerals, nevertheless, as early as the Creation of the world, God put into the earth all the seeds that are in it and ever will be: inasmuch as he is perfect, He has left nothing imperfect . . . [and] . . . even as God has commanded the surface of the earth to busy itself producing and germinating things that are necessary to man and beast, it is certain that the interior of the earth does likewise, producing many kinds of rocks, metals and other necessary minerals.⁴⁴

“The seeds” put into everything on earth were at the core of the chemical millennium; they contained both the beginning and end, impurities and purification simultaneously. It followed there was a reciprocal relation of growth toward purification between the history of the microcosm (the “bowels of the earth,” its geological history) and the macrocosm (whence the seeds came). Paracelsians believed each element in Nature (including geological formations) was connected to the macrocosm by the astral spirit, which also gave it identity and form: “as the astral spirit penetrated matter it became specified and gave form and function to the objects which it generated,” Hannaway observes. “The spirit is thus best comprehended, not as a continuous, homogeneous spirituous entity, but as the vehicle which contained and transmitted the totality of discrete specifying individual powers of nature.”⁴⁵

For Palissy, the astral spirit was vitally materialized in form. He conceived of it as part of an ordering “fifth element”: “although all philosophers have concluded that there are only four elements, there is a fifth, without which nothing could say I am . . . there is in human things a beginning of form held up by the fifth element, and otherwise all natural things would remain jumbled up together without any form.”⁴⁶ Böhme called it the “*fifth* fountain-spirit; . . . the *hidden* source fountain or Quality, which, the corporeal being *cannot* comprehend or apprehend.” “This fountain-spirit,” while hidden, did take on elemental properties, for it “taketh its original at *first* out of the *sweet* Quality of the water.”⁴⁷ But this was water unlike any other.

Likewise the potter was also convinced from experiments that the astral spirit—

and hence the “fifth element”—must materialize as *water* mixed with seminal salt from the earth, because salt seemed always to be what remained behind after raw materials were reduced by burning or boiling during alchemical distillation:

I have proven to you that in all species of trees, herbs, and plants there was salt. . . . and where do you think that the trees, herbs, and plants get their salt if it isn't from the earth . . . there is also salt in all kinds of stones . . . and not only in all kinds of stones but I tell you also, in all kinds of metals: for if it had none, nothing could be; and therefore would be suddenly reduced to ashes.⁴⁸

If salt in the fifth element was fundamental to gathering earthly matter together and to giving it form, then it followed that it was fundamental to the birth, aging, dissolution, and death of the earth as well. Animated by the astral spirit and combined with the sweet water of the fifth element, salt was the principal congealing agent in the microcosm. As such, it helped give each specific thing on earth its own form, identity, life, and death, which all came from God but nevertheless had a basis in these materials as well.

Hence, all natural things in the microcosm were born of seeds and had encoded in them through discrete materials and elements a specific identity and fate. All were subject to the exigencies of historical and eschatological time, which was also encoded in them by the macrocosm. Every substance, whether visible or invisible, above or below the earth's surface, had to reveal to the Paracelsian artisan material evidence of its age, history, and life course in the macrocosm and the microcosm that would enable him to judge the appropriate alchemical process by which the material's impure life would be ended in fire (or on the turner's lathe) and reformed in its purified state. Because each thing on (and in) the earth was animated by individual astral spirits—hence it could “say I am”—there were no guarantees that purifying one species of the earth would cause all other “earths” to follow simultaneously. Still, Paracelsians believed that although the aging process was slow and staggered, in the end, the entire earth would die together. Although every stone had its own identity and life cycle in history, like fallen man, they were simultaneously linked by the universal experience of final things. According to Böhme and most Neoplatonists, at that moment, half-dead Nature, hitherto merely a shadow of prelapsarian perfection, would be fully perfect again.

This Paracelsian revival of the medieval notion of the aging earth gave rise to Palissy's conceptual framework. Paracelsus had been influenced by Joachim of Flora, and Palissy may well have acquired his understanding of the aging earth not only by reading Paracelsus but by coming into contact with another branch of the same large tradition of which Joachim was a part, one that was perhaps more appealing to potters.

The medievalist James Dean suggests that the discourse of aging earth entered the Renaissance via a circuitous route. Plato had refuted the notion that the world could

age like worldly creatures. Aristotle and Plato both thought that the world was eternal. Many sixteenth-century Neoplatonists, however, inherited the discourse of aging earth from Augustine and the medieval scholastics, who themselves ultimately derived it from the Jewish apocalyptic: “The conception of an aged, decaying world was formulated . . . in late Jewish apocalyptic—in Isaiah and 2 Esdras. From Iranian (Magian-Chaldean) sources, the author of the Book of Daniel inherited the degeneration of world empires from gold to silver to brass to iron to iron mixed with clay.”⁴⁹

Historical and geological decline, devolving from gold to iron mixed with clay, was a pattern of degeneration conceptualized by the scholastics in terms of six world ages of Christianity. The first, or golden age, declined into the sixth age, or present time, which signified the world’s old age. Geological materials thus possessed relative optical and other intrinsic values as indicators of purity or loss thereof. Gold signified man’s origins in innocence and righteousness, while clay conveyed weakness, chaos, the confusion of history. Iron, the hard ore of labor and war, suggested the brutality of the present time.⁵⁰

Conceptualizing eras as a sequence of metals declining in value from first to last is at least as old as Hesiod. But the crucial shift of this classic temporal metaphor in subsequent historiography occurred with the Old Testament Daniel (2:1–49) and the great dream-vision of Nebuchadnezzar.⁵¹

The story of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream told in Daniel 2 is well known. It ranks second in importance among apocalyptic biblical dream-prophesies only to the New Testament Revelation of St. John, to which it is related as a type. “During the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams, and his mind was so troubled that he could not sleep” (Dan. 2:1–2). Calling together his wise men at court, the king “gave orders, to . . . the magicians, exorcists, sorcerers, and Chaldeans to tell him what he had dreamt” (Dan. 2:2). Unable to get a response from his metaphysicians except for their sensible request to hear the dream in order to interpret it, Nebuchadnezzar falls into a murderous rage and orders “the death of all the wise men of Babylon” (Dan. 2:12, 13). One of these, the Jew Daniel, prays to discover the king’s secret, and God reveals it to him. Daniel recounts Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its significance to the king, leading to his recognition as the favored instrument of “he that revealeth secrets” (Dan. 2:29):

[T]here is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. . . . Thou, O king, sawest, and, behold, a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out [of a mountain] without hands, which smote the image

upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away . . . and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. (Dan. 2:28, 31–36)

Daniel interprets the dream as predicting the rise and fall of a succession of kingdoms. The feet and toes of the statue are most vulnerable to the shattering stone, yet also the fissured seedbed of the mountain:

And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things, . . . shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes *part of potter's clay* and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; . . . partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men [by intermarriage]; but they shall not cleave one to another [such alliances will not be stable], even as iron is not mixed with clay. (Dan. 2:40–44)

As he read this passage, Palissy must have remembered ways that potters routinely glazed common clay with iron (iron-based mineral glazes), and indeed how brittle this mixture was on the finished product. Moreover, Christian historiographers quickly accommodated the fall of the Roman empire to Daniel's metaphoric scheme. St. Jerome suggested diplomatically that Babylon could be "compared" to gold. He envisioned Medes and the Persians as silver and Greece as brass. The Romans were iron, which, like the empire, "breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things." So it followed that the feet of iron mixed with potter's clay signified the decline and fall of Rome's empire by internal strife, war, impiety, and barbarian contamination.⁵²

The second-century author of Daniel, who suffered under the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, sought comfort in a prophecy that guaranteed that earthly tyranny would ultimately succumb to the transience of history. Other parallels between this author and Palissy's Saintongeais Huguenots run deep. In the fourth chapter of Daniel, the tyrannical Nebuchadnezzar himself experiences exile after "a voice from heaven" tells him: "The kingdom has departed from thee," transforming him into an archetype of medieval and early modern wild men.⁵³ Nebuchadnezzar is "driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." In the end, however, "I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me; and I blessed the Most High. . . . the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me . . . and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. . . . those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Dan. 4:31–37).

The author of Daniel represented the temporal tension between history and prophecy in material form for the first time. James Dean writes:

The Daniel author . . . intends to offer consolation . . . through understanding; the Providential historical perspective—whereby the flux of events is seen as subordinate to the divine will and finally beyond the control of the imperialist persecutors—is in itself a consolation. The Daniel author here puts forward an important interpretation of temporality. So far as I know, he is the first historian to give time a definite *shape*. History is comprehended, as it were, in the limbs of the dream-statue, which takes the form of a man. By visualizing the statue, we can in effect visualize time itself—at least as much of it as the Daniel author chooses to show us. By portraying time *sub specie hominis*, the Daniel author inaugurates a tradition, the history of the world (the macrocosm) with the life of each man (the microcosm). Daniel does not use the terms “microcosm” and “macrocosm.” These come up only later. The world, like a man, enjoys its best periods at the beginning of its history; afterward, there is only a decline and ultimately death.⁵⁴

The path of Nebuchadnezzar’s powerful dream imagery can be traced through the popular apocalyptic genre and Christian historiography that it evoked until Philippe de Harvengt (d. 1183), abbot of the Premonstratensian Abbey of Bonne-Esperance, Cambrai, Belgium, a contemporary of Joachim of Flora’s whose work was of seminal influence. Philippe’s great importance lay in the resonance his work created when read with other medieval and subsequent eschatological historiography. Philippe chose to concentrate on the Hebraic tradition encompassed by the six ages of the world (as opposed to Jerome’s three) and the dream sequence in Daniel.

Philippe’s *De somnis regis Nabochodonosor* made plain the statue’s status as a figure of the materiality of time. Because Philippe’s was Christian historiography, his discourse focused on Daniel 2:34–35 and the *lapis* “cut out of a mountain without hands” as a figure of Christ immaculately conceived. The stone, according to the author of Daniel, would finally break the statue and “become a great mountain [that] filled the whole earth.” Philippe rejected the series of empires traditionally associated with Nebuchadnezzar’s dream—Babylonians, Medes, Greeks, Romans, and even the Frankish, or Holy Roman, empire—and substituted his own interpretation of the statue based on materials and anatomical features. His material analysis broke its body down into six world ages:

1. Gold (Adam-Noah): head
2. Silver (Noah-Abraham): breast
3. Brass (Abraham-Moses): arms
4. Iron (Moses-David): belly

5. Iron and Clay (David-Christ): thighs
6. Stone: *lapis* (time of Christ): legs

Ages one through four generally repeated the theme of decline from pure to impure materials, though in an often unclear or contradictory manner in Philippe's schema.⁵⁵

By the fifth age, Philippe's stake in the new interpretation becomes clearer. Just as iron and clay cannot combine successfully, so too Jews and Gentiles. In a variant that would not have been lost on sixteenth-century readers of *De somnis*, Philippe interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's statue with feet of iron mixed with clay as a time "that is future." Jews were not mentioned. The prophesy read only that "the man of this last age will not be able to be contained in the one bosom of holy Church." By the sixth age of stone, Philippe's apocalyptic vision is focused:

Christ, the stone cut from the mountain without hands . . . smashes the whole statue, which Philippe now glosses as "the glory of this world that is base and contemptible." Christ destroys the statue by replacing the world's glory with spiritual poverty. "For when He told His disciples: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven'" (Matt 5:3), He placed spiritual poverty before gold, silver, brass, iron, and all the wealth of this world."

The age of stone, or Christ, thus replaced all the preceding eras of more sensuous and splendid materials devoid of spirit. Philippe would only regret the passing of the golden age, an age of natural law when man could still know God through the light of Nature: "For as gold has no color except its natural hue, so the men of the first age had no law by which they might know God except the natural law."⁵⁶

There is no direct evidence that Palissy knew *De somnis*, but the potter would have been most sympathetic to the leveling of the statue with the stone of Christ and "replacing the world's glory with spiritual poverty." There can be no doubt, however, that Palissy knew the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and reformulated it to fit the purifying eschatological program of Paracelsian artisanry:

All earths can become clays. . . . All clays are the beginning of rock. . . . If rocks did not exist, there would be no mountains. . . . The material of all rocks, both the common and the rare and precious ones, is crystalline and diaphanous. . . . If the main material of all rocks were not a pure and transparent water, diamond, crystal, emeralds, rubies and garnet could never exist, nor could any diaphanous rocks. . . . There are very few things in this world which cannot be made transparent by art.⁵⁷

Palissy thus assumed the chiliastic role of "Elias Artista" and worked to wrest an artisan's millennium from the decline of the aging earth, *incrementally* separating pure from impure matter "by art." The move here was from "earth" and "clay" to the high-

est form of matter with “crystalline . . . diaphanous . . . transparent” attributes, suggesting the artisanal conjunction of the macrocosm (glaze) and microcosm (clay) formed as a ceramic pot. It followed that such a process could be realized prematurely in history, both by potters in their kilns and through alchemic distillation. According to Paracelsus:

Nothing has been created as *ultima materia*—in its final state. Everything is at first created in its *prima materia*, its original stuff; whereupon Vulcan comes, and by the art of alchemy develops it to its final substance. . . . For alchemy means: *to carry to its end something that has not yet been completed* [emphasis added]. To obtain the lead from the ore and to transform it into what it is made for. . . . Accordingly, you should understand that *alchemy is nothing but the art which makes the impure into the pure through fire*. It can separate the useful from the useless, transmute it into its final substance and its ultimate essence.⁵⁸

Palissy cautioned, regarding the purification of matter by fire, that “all those who seek to generate metals by fire, wish to build with the destroyer.”⁵⁹ Yet he knew also that the history of Saintonge was a trial by fire ordained by Providence, which to purify ultimately required the violence and “esmotions” from which he separated himself and hid in terror. Just as Palissy’s concept of artisanal *sûreté* allowed him to survive by inhabiting the disguise of the last humble creature of the earth moving imperceptibly among the blasted limestone ruins of his culture, so too the purification of humble “rocks” and “potter’s clay”—the last, quintessentially *Christic* remnants of the “aging earth”—would also require that he “build with the destroyer.”

❁ Disinterment ❁

And there he told the whole history; but especially how the water-spirits had brought back those stones that I had cast into the lake, in the midst of the thunderstorm, and had lain them where they came from, but in exchange had taken me down with them. So some believed him but most accounted it a fable. —H. J. C. VON GRIMMELSHAUSEN,
The Adventurous Simplicissimus, “How Simplicissimus Journeyed
with the Sylphs to the Center of the Earth”

How did Paracelsians practice a geology in which the pursuit and disinterment of diaphanous stones, and understanding of their growth in Saintonge, was a precondition for Huguenot millennial artisanry?⁶⁰ Like the Charente River, which had its own local “diction,” Palissy argued, geology was completely site-specific. The geology of Saintonge, therefore, was specific only to what was hidden beneath the ground in Saintonge and its peculiar earth history: “in some places she [the earth] produces Coal

which is very useful, in other places it conceives and gives birth to iron, silver, lead, pewter, gold, marble, jasper, and all kinds of minerals, and kinds of clays, and in many places it will engender and produce bitumen, which is a kind of oleaginous gum that burns like resin." While each particular region produced varied "species" of stones, the embryonic growing process was universal "within the matrix of the earth," where all were "built up by heat from the fire."⁶¹

Palissy carefully documents this fecund process of insemination, change, and growth in Mother Earth to repudiate the Mosaic philosophers for whom she had remained unchanged (Palissy uses the word "ossified") since the Creation. His most compelling argument against this ossification concerned his close observation of fossilized shells:

Many times I have found stones, which can be broken anywhere; similarly there are shells that are hard as rocks. . . .

. . . For a few days I admired and contemplated them, but my spirit was tormented and debated the process and cause of this. And on a day that I was on the island of Xaintonge, on my way from Marennes to La Rochelle, I caught sight of a freshly cut pit from which had been dug over 100 carts of stones, which, anywhere you broke them, were full of shells, so near to each other that you could not have put the edge of a knife between them without touching them: . . .

. . . from then on I lowered my head as I walked down the road so that I could not see anything that would have prevented me from imagining what could be the cause of this: and while my mind was working on this, I thought, and I still believe it now, and I'm sure that it's true, that near the pit, there once were houses, and that those who lived there, after having eaten the fish that were in the shells, threw the shells away in this valley where the pit was located, and as time went by, these shells dissolved into the earth, and also the earth of this quagmire was modified, the dirt rotted and reduced into fine earth like a clay: that is how these shells were dissolved and liquefied and the substance and virtue of their salt was attracted by the earth around it and reduced it into a stone with itself and in itself, every time, because these shells contained more salt in themselves than they give up to the earth, this [new] stone jelled even harder than the earth: but one and the other became a stone without these shells losing their form. This is the cause that since then has led me to imagine and nourish my spirit with many secrets of Nature.⁶²

Palissy's discourse on fossilized shells discovered on a walk between Marennes and La Rochelle exemplifies his ability to combine (in fieldwork and natural observation) the Neoplatonic structures revealed at the river with Paracelsian eschatological structures of gradual organic growth toward separation and purification. Palissy often found stones that were a "bit broken" (*peu rompre*), with little shells "reduced . . . into a stone with itself and in itself" inside them. How had this transmutation come about? As at

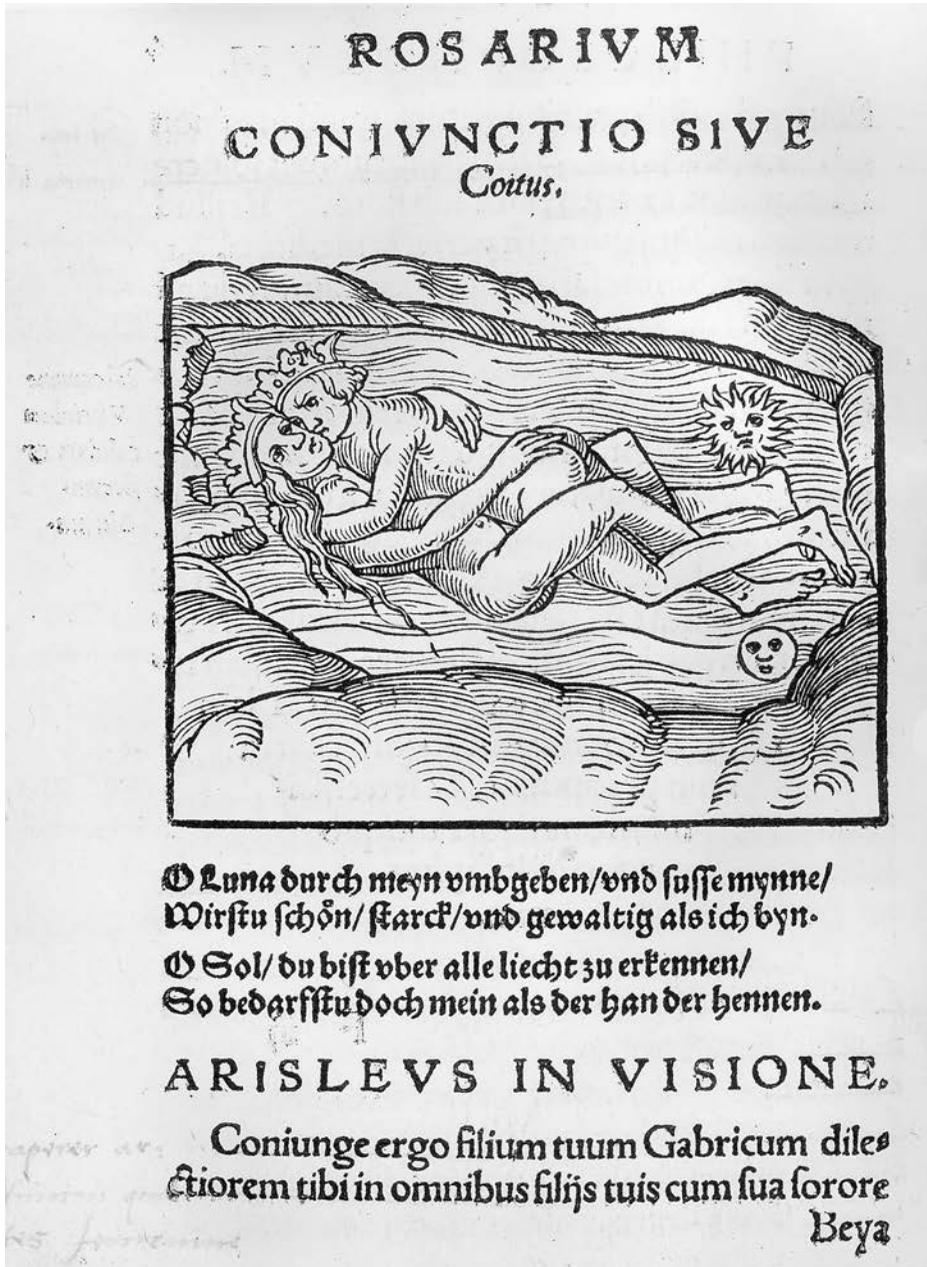


FIGURE 7.2. *Coniunctio sive coitus*, in *Rosarium philosophorum* (Frankfurt: Ex officina Cyriaci Iacobi, 1550). Courtesy Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. The conjunction of astral opposites (sun and moon) as the sexual union of monarchs.

the river, he says, "my spirit was tormented and debated the process and cause of this." Then, on the way to La Rochelle, in the "freshly cut pit," he discovered a kind of incision into the matrix of the earth in the process of growing embryonic stones, analogous to a telluric cesarean section. Peering down into the hole, he found that digging had disinterred numerous stones that also contained shells. This discovery sent him off on another walk, lowering his head and turning inside himself to look into his soul, "so that I could not see anything that would have prevented me from imagining what could be the cause of this."

By purification in the earth's matrix, he reasoned, impurities were separated out and returned to the earth, which absorbed them as potter's clay, a process analogous to the alchemical operation called putrefaction. Matter had to be putrefied (made "rotten") before it could be purified. Earth's matrix functioned as a pottery kiln to harden the clay into a more perfect (or millennially advanced) material (stone), just as a potter fired glazed ceramics.

At this point in the process, "these shells were dissolved and liquefied and the substance and virtue of their salt was attracted by the earth around it." Thus the salt's astral properties served to congeal new earth to the now distilled shell in a liquid state "and reduced it into a stone." "This new stone jelled even harder than the earth: but one and the other became a stone without these shells losing their form." The "new stones" had congealed from the interaction of distilled liquid and surrounding earth in the matrix because they "contained more salt in themselves, than they give up" in their marriage (*conjunctio*) to the earth and thus retained more of the astral spirit's "secrets" of form production. The more salt earth matter contained, the harder (and purer) its properties.

By his discovery that these artisanal processes in the matrix worked by spiritual and alchemic means, Palissy established that God had intended the earth to change (and grow old) since Genesis, because the shells must have fossilized and been embedded in the stones in the pit *after* creation. Questions of how Palissy's purified shells may be related conceptually to shells of *sûreté* are inevitable, as is the relation of the tiny shelled creatures who were consumed and discarded "near this valley," only to be remade while hidden in the Saintonge earth as permanent versions of their former selves. This posture of hiding in the rocks was also revealed as waiting without "losing their form."

Conjunctio meant that the earth possessed masculine qualities in combination with its maternal ones. In effect, it could, in this way assume both feminine (moon) and masculine (sun) attributes simultaneously. The androgynous qualities of the hermaphrodite were ubiquitous in the alchemic literature on *conjunctio* (see, e.g., fig. 7.2), and both masculine and feminine readings are fundamental to the verb *travailler*.⁶³ If Palissy met resistance to his observation that the birth given by the earth to "these stones was natural," not artificial, it came from men "of letters." A "lawyer by the name

of Babaud, . . . a famous man,” was “really astonished,” and maintained “that these stones were carved by the hand of some Artisan.” Yet in response to such scholastic skepticism, Palissy simply replied that he had “found” not only shells but also “the bones of men sealed in the stones. . . . Isn’t that fine proof that the stones grew in the earth?”⁶⁴ The earth “sealed” and “grew” new “bodies” around the bones of dead men.

Palissy’s geology of diaphanous stones began with his notion that water as well as salt was a principal element of separation in the alchemical chart of materials, and that this combination was also a principal element in the generation of stones: “all of the water that passes through earths converts into stone, but only in part.” As in the case of fossilized shells, salt acted as the main agent of congelation between water and earth, such that the resulting stones contained “no water inside.” “The water that was joined with the salt of the earth,” Palissy argued, and by using a phrase associated with God’s chosen people, he gave new meaning to his conclusion that this “was evaporated by the violence of the fire, and the other parts were permanently dried up.”⁶⁵

As a result of this process, some stones became harder than others and separated out, while the rest were congealed into dense, amorphous, and soft lime, or limestone. The most important variable affecting these differences in hardness was duration of time in the fire and compression of the matrix: “in stones that were made for a very long time, the water and the other parts are so well united that it is impossible to make lime out of them, because their state of congelation is more perfect . . . but stones that are good for lime, they have not congealed and firmed up for very long.”⁶⁶

Other determining factors were the quality of the water, earths, and salts used in the formation of stones, if their shape allowed water to pool in them, and the depth at which raw materials entered the earth’s matrix. Palissy’s analysis of water and rocks occurring in and around natural springs and fountains made this point, while suggesting the relation between rock vessels and rustic pottery:

Rocks were used as vessels and receptacles for those waters: for otherwise, the waters would descend to the abyss or the center of the earth . . . from the rocks and mountainous places many beautiful fountains give forth: and the most beautiful ones come from the furthest places, as they go in and out of good earth, these waters will be made healthy and purified and of good taste. At the beginning, the waters that come from these rocks are more salty and taste better than the others, because each day they attract a bit of the salt of these rocks.⁶⁷

Having established the principles behind the growth of common rocks in the bowels of the earth, Palissy then turned to the cause of diaphanous stones, applying evidence from the observation of craft processes to his observations of the cause of diaphanous materials grown in the natural matrix. He drew upon his experience as a painter in glasshouses. The artificial matrix was the glassmaker’s furnace and the cru-

cial agent of congelation was again salt. However, here, stones already grown in the earth were processed further and transformed; in effect, grown again by human hands through the process of liquefaction and congelation: "Have you ever seen glass being made in which there is no salt? Have you ever seen anybody who knows how to melt or liquify stones without salt?" Palissy then proceeded to reveal the process by which salt was used to make glass:

It is necessary in order to liquefy stones that one put some kind of salt [in with them]: the best one for this is salicor [*salicorne (christe-marine)*] and the next best is salt of tartar [cream of tartar (potassium tartrate)] . . . when it is put in a very hot furnace, like the furnaces in which you make lime of glass or any other such furnaces, in which the fire is extremely violent, these stones become vitrified by themselves, without any mixing, which proves notably that the stones carry in themselves a great quantity of salt, which causes them to vitrify, seeing that the salt that is inside them holds tight together the other matters . . . which in stones are fixed and inseparable . . . the moisture of the lime will evaporate in the fire, but when there is salt in that stone, I wouldn't say it evaporates, but that it dissolves . . . that is why the most beautiful glass is made of salt and stones: Now then it is fixed as much as the matter of this world, as I told you: however, it is transparent, which is an evident sign and appearance that there is little earth [in it] . . . we can say that there is not much else than water and salt and very little earth: for the earth is not diaphanous by itself, and if there was a quantity of it, the glass could not be transparent.⁶⁸

Exactly replicating Palissy's vision of the growth taking place in the earth underfoot, the glassmaker transformed and purified matter for use in homes and churches. For Palissy, the production of glass in an "extremely violent" furnace was thus a prime example of Paracelsian artisanry.⁶⁹ The practical function of glass could not be separated from its spiritual material, even in domestic settings.

Protestant artisans and alchemists possessed the "industriousness" to speed the growth of stones, in the violence of a fiery furnace, to a much later stage in their eschatological and material progression toward ultimate purification. Palissy's example, the glassmaker, liquefied stones and combined them with salt in a furnace. Though all stones possessed salts, or else their watery generating element would not congeal with elements in nearby earths, these would also be "exhaled" during the firing process. So it became necessary for the artisan to extract and then provide "salicor" or "sel de tartar" to serve as the active agent of congelation. The principal function of the artisan then, was to intervene as God's intermediary with the earth to effect congelation between materials.

"The most beautiful glass," resulted from a sort of martyrdom of earth matter in the most violent separating and purifying action of the furnace. When finally congealed, the purest liquids were crystallized and "made transparent, which," for Palissy,

“is sign and clear appearance that there remains not a bit of earth . . . of *this world*.” This notion of the diaphanous was shared by Böhme, who imagined that transparency was manifested in the microcosm by a material akin to ceramic glaze: “the sweet quality is a thin or transparent lovely *pleasant* sweet fountain or spring-water.” The water survived the furnace, as “it allayeth the heat, and *quenbeth* the fire, . . . so there remaineth, only the *joyful* light.” This glaze of water and light originated in God before the Fall, before there were earth and stones: “Before the Times of the Creation He sate [sat] in the *Salitter* of the Earth, when it was yet Thin or Transparent, and stood in a heavenly holy Birth or Geniture, and was in the *whole* Kingdom of this world, therein it was neither Earth nor Stones, but a heavenly *Seed*, which was generated out of the . . . fountain spirits of Nature.”⁷⁰

The glassmaker’s craft, as well as the production of ceramic glaze—because these artisanal materials were the least “of this world”—were understood to be most advanced in the direction of a chemical millennium. Macrocosm and microcosm were here conjoined such that transparency preponderated and there was “little else but water and salt, and very little earth. “For earth,” Palissy wrote, was full of fallen matter, so “is not diaphanous in itself, and if there is any quantity in it, glass cannot be transparent.” Transparency and diaphanousness, then, were prelapsarian unity materialized by work.

The earth also labored to separate diaphanous material in its matrix, and Palissy searched both above and below the Saintongeais landscape to find geological evidence of evolution of the microcosm toward separation and purification. Palissy’s research into the formation and generation of geodes became, for him, a crucial type of historical research and an indirect commentary on the historical relationship between outer and inner bodies: “In this country of Xaintonge, we have a great quantity of marshland, in which one can find a number of stones, which are newly formed every year in the earth, and they are well-horned and knotty, and unsightly on the outside, but inside they are white and crystalline, very pleasant, and right for making glass and artificial stones.”⁷¹ One can extend this clear analogy between these geodes and Palissy’s language, which though inelegant (*mal orné*) conveyed truths, to the southwestern Huguenot artisan’s history of disguise as *sûreté* and Palissy’s social and scientific program. In all facets of southwestern Huguenot artisanal culture, a naturalistic exterior that reflected the violent assaults of war masked the growth of internal purification, which augmented daily, almost in dialectical relation to scarring on the surface. Only “extreme violence” produced diaphanousness.

The growth of these crystalline structures inside the matrix of the geode was explained sexually as well, beginning with Palissy’s understanding of the earth’s insemination by a solution of salt and rain water: “there will be a certain kind of rain that will take away the salt of the earth and of the herbs that had rotted in the fields: and

so the water will run along the furrows of the field, [where] it will find the hole of a mole or mouse, or [some] other animal, and the water will enter in that hole." A seminal liquid penetrated the earth's corpuscular surface through an animal hole; that part of the landscape was impregnated, and an embryonic "rock" was conceived and grown: "The salt that it will have brought will take what it needs from the earth and from the water, and according to the size of the hole and of the matter, it will congeal into a stone, or pebble as I have told you . . . which will be knobbly and knotty, and unsightly, according to the form of the place where it was congealed."⁷²

Once again, Palissy was "tormented and debated the process and cause of this." He discovered that if he dissolved a quantity of saltpeter—potassium nitrate (KNO_3), which occurred naturally and was commonly used in gunpowder and fireworks—in water and boiled the water away in a huge caldron, "cubes of saltpeter. . . formed into a most pleasing [pattern of] grids and points" once the caldron had cooled down. Distilled saltpeter was well known to alchemists, and Böhme, among many other Paracelsians, later speculated that saltpeter was the principal material manifestation of the astral spirit in the microcosm.⁷³ Palissy was a proponent of this alchemical thesis, as he made clear in his conclusions about the cause of the crystals "like little diamond points" that appeared in the interiors of rocks found near the salt marshes:

What did I consider in my spirit then, I saw that the pebbles of which I spoke to you were also congealed: but those that were massive were a sign and evident proof that there was enough matter to fill up the pit, and that those that were hollow showed that there was a superfluity of water, which had dried out while the congelation happened in the other parts: and when the central humidity dried out, the matter proper to the pebble stayed firm and congealed from the inside like little diamond points.⁷⁴

Palissy's description of the geode remains the quintessential geological representation of the Paracelsian Huguenot artisan's understanding of the chemical millennium. In slow, incremental progress toward the culmination of the natural history of Saintonge, as the light of Palissy's soul augmented inside his persecuted and corruptible body, the light of nature sparkled clandestinely, emitting "little diamond points," which lay waiting sealed in the stones of Saintonge. Palissy's millennium could not be quantified, prophesied to arrive in an exact number of days. His was a *subterranean* millennium in every sense of the term, wherein Protestant artisans could understand the passage of time materially. For "signs and proofs" of material history, Huguenot artisans would be forced to turn inward, away from exposed surfaces and the artificiality of calendrical time and toward the inner sight of millennial experience. Only after intense introspection could an artisan hope to construct what he had seen.

Palissy's signs and proofs were given a very specific optical language. That language was encapsulated in his description of a "crystal ball" once in his laboratory:

Once I had a crystal ball, which was neat, round and well-polished: when I held it up to the light, I perceived certain sparks, within this crystal, afterward, I would take a vial full of clear water, and would also see little sparks similar to that of the crystal. I also took a piece of ice, and held it up to the light, and similarly, I perceived little and big sparks.⁷⁵

It was now possible to add “little flashes and sparks” to the “grid and points” and “diamond points” to complete Palissy’s small but precise vocabulary of descriptions for the spirit’s appearance in the rustic artisan’s soul as the light of Nature. This language communicated that the material-mind and material-holiness synthesis hidden in these stones was also grounded in refugee history: “this gave me occasion to understand and know that all transparent stones are for the most part airy, and the more airy they are, the more valiantly they resist the fire.”⁷⁶

That was another reason why the twelve oldest, hardest, and most diaphanous stones grown in the earth’s matrix—above all, “Jasper . . . Topaz . . . Emerald . . . Turquoise . . . Sapphire . . . [and] Diamond”—were “figures” for the twelve “foundations” of the “everlasting” city of New Jerusalem in Revelation (15–22); a city so enormous that once it emerged, it would fill the whole world.

QUESTION asked: Since you have been looking for a way to understand stones and pebbles, and the effect of their essence, could you give me some reason, for the twelve rare stones, which Saint John in his Apocalypse uses as a figure of the twelve foundations of the Holy City of Jerusalem? For one must understand that the twelve stones are hard and insoluble since Saint John takes them to represent an everlasting building.⁷⁷

In response, Palissy repeated his understanding of the cause of such diaphanous stones. They were derived from the congelation of purified ancient earths, salts, and waters and subjected to heat of “extreme violence” for long periods of time. To account for the colors, Palissy, in effect, offered his recipes for ceramic glazes:

Topaz is a water, which also has passed through an iron mine, in which it took its yellow color, and from this comes the metallic substance that gives it more hardness . . . the Emerald is a very neat water, which has passed through brass mines or *coupe-rose* from which brass is made, and that is where it took its color of glass, and the salt that caused its congelation: for the said *coupe-rose* is nothing else than salt. . . . The diamond is as much a water as a crystal; but it is congealed by some rare kind of salt, pure and clean. . . . Thus jewelers say: “There is a diamond that has a beautiful water.”⁷⁸

Hence, the transparent stones in the foundation of the colossal “everlasting building” of New Jerusalem were merged with Palissy’s glazes as he set his millennial vision of the tiny, hidden, and overlooked to work.

Subterranean matter dug up from the Saintonge *désert* fought “valiantly” against the

violent flames to find its reward in pure transparency and was not far removed from Palissy's personal history and from his history of the Church of Saintes. Just as each rock recorded its own history in gradations of light and color, so, too, Palissy's progression toward the artisan's millennium was materialized as pottery glazes disinterred from the Saintongeais earth: "Sometimes I searched for pebbles to make enamel glazes and artificial stones: now then, after having assembled a great number of pebbles and wanting to pound them up, I would find many that were hollow inside; there were certain points like those of a diamond, glistening, transparent, and very beautiful."⁷⁹

Palissy's millennial glazes showed a profound continuity between the histories of subterranean Saintonge and its "rotting" outer shell beset by demonic forces. His task as a potter became to shatter the barriers between these exterior and interior bodies, disinter Nature's light from below, and set it perpetually into his work.

What better way to subvert and overcome written history than from below, with an *artisanal* history of the earth where, as the millennium approached, oral traditions and natural sounds could not be "choked" by absolutism; natural language retained primacy and endured as an "everlasting building"; and historical truth became ever more visible over time as it crystallized to surround artifacts of the history of the millennium in progress, left behind by long-dead artisans as evidence of their faith and hope. Thus we can return to Palissy's rustic basins with new understanding.

Viewed in cross section, as in figure 8.8, the most frequently used shape of these basins suggests a geode split in two. A slice of the living earth beneath Palissy's feet has been excavated. All the elements of Palissy's artisanal consciousness are present: earth (clay); salts (in the tiny creatures, stones, and plants); and the standing and running water—the principal element of separation and regeneration. His colors followed the spectrum of the stones of New Jerusalem, and they often proceed from astral white (shellfish and water) in the middle toward the outer edge, where green generally predominates. Fire was implicit, hidden in the firing of the dish and the Saintongeais ground. The uneven surface of the interior, split with rocks and eddies for water, sparkled and glittered in the light. Here is the natural spring whence pure waters sink back into the matrix of the earth to congeal with salt and generate diaphanous stones.

What of the tiny "industrious" creatures crawling or swimming among the flora: snails, snakes, lizards, tortoises, crabs, insects, crayfish, amphibians? All were capable of metamorphosis, like the *désert* Huguenots or, indeed, like earths in the ceramic process. All were by nature small, secretive, ambiguous, dualistic creatures, and most were at home in more than one element. Although exposed, they were capable of quickly returning to the safety of their alternate element, be it water, air, a hole in the earth, or, in the case of the salamander, fire. There they could hide in safety from larger creatures and each tend to their inner lives.

But these tiny creatures perpetually at work on (and in) the marshes also once lived

in reality. Palissy pioneered the use of direct casting techniques in France. Like the ideas of Luther and Paracelsus, this knowledge was diffused to rural France from similar sixteenth-century German bronze-casting traditions.⁸⁰ The direct cast substituted the body of a plant or animal to be cast in a mold for the traditional wax, which was then “burned out” and replaced by molten metal, an exact positive image of the disintegrated body left after cooling. Adapting this process for ceramics, Palissy pulled his molds from the dead bodies of his tiny creatures, making them permanent. Their former bodies endured in clay, their spirits worn inside out on their backs. The little creatures were perpetually glazed with “little flashes and sparks” as they appeared to push their way up from the matrix of the earth to emerge on its surface inseparable from—or intermediary *between* the elements of—its matrix-surface continuum.

Turning the basin so that its sparkling “inside” is down to follow the topographical “horns” and “knots” of its underside (the “unattractive” surface), it is clear from the negative space articulated between them that this was precisely what Palissy had in mind. Palissy’s ceramic earths thus communicated the credo of the Saintongeais Huguenot artisan after the first war of religion had decimated the region. There were permanent possibilities lying latent in each tiny, vulnerable, transitory life on earth. These secret possibilities were the ultimate *sûreté*.

Yet within the scope of Palissy’s materiality of time, the universal synthesis of the millennium would be a long time coming. At that moment of ultimate distillation, the difference between macrocosm and microcosm would dissolve, the artisan’s shells of *sûreté* would disappear, and the “sparks” of Palissy’s glazes would be transformed into an intense, uninterrupted light. Until that moment, however, the southwestern Huguenot artisan had to labor inwardly and “industriously” to separate and perfect himself and his world, leaving traces of his inner salvation in his work. He needed to cultivate the habit of waiting. For each artisan, however, the Paracelsian chemical (or artisanal) millennium personalized and made intimate his own eschatology of waiting.

Hillel Schwartz observes that the southeastern Huguenot community of Cévenol prophets exiled in London did not become disillusioned with their theatrical millennial tradition until as late as 1730, when they were guided in the Continental roots of the southwestern tradition by Hannah Wharton and Ann Lee:

In the 1730s [the French Prophets] had given up this desire for a public sign of victory and sought instead to renew the group internally. . . . In the 1730s, influenced by quietist and pietist ideas, they knew that waiting was the root metaphor for all religious experience. Continental religious forces had guided the French prophets to a new understanding of the millennial timetable. Accustomed to a ritual waiting in worship, to a slow internship through the stages of illumination, to images of growth rather than cataclysm, they coordinate the millennium with internal rather than external events.⁸¹

These same “Continental religious forces” had taught southwestern Huguenot artisans the eschatology of waiting as early as the 1540s. The southeastern prophetic tradition disintegrated in London in the 1730s, the victim of its program of frontal assault against forces that were too powerful to subdue with arms or the bombastic language of imminent apocalypse. By that time, however, southwestern Huguenot artisans, in places as far from Saintes and La Rochelle as New York Colony, were employing strategies of waiting that had been implemented successfully against dominant cultures in their home region for almost two centuries.