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“Life Beyond Life”:

Reading Milton’s Areopagitica through Enlightenment Vitalism

During the eighteenth century, Areopagitica rose to preeminence among John Milton’s prose works, appearing in stand-alone editions in 1738, 1772, 1780 (with Of Education), 1791, and 1792. This study looks beyond attempts to accommodate Milton’s republican politics in order to explore how eighteenth-century responses to Areopagitica engaged its poetics, its use of figurative language to imply a literary theory. By reading responses to Milton’s prose on both sides of the English Channel as a body of literary criticism largely independent from discussions of Paradise Lost, I find that the preromantic reception of Areopagitica shows early attention to the materialist philosophy underlying Milton’s figurative language. These eighteenth-century responses, read and quoted by nineteenth-century critics, suggest that scientific attempts to define life, familiarly linked to Romanticism and to poetic form, had an earlier and broader impact on eighteenth-century reading practices. As this case study will illustrate, the widespread diffusion of a vitalist natural history in the latter half of the century provided a secular disciplinary model for interpreting and discussing the reception history of literary texts without reference to authorial intention. The eighteenth-century reception of Areopagitica, in other words, sheds light on the role that scientific discourse has played in shaping the practice of close reading.

The first systematically annotated edition of Milton's argument against prepublication censorship, edited by Thomas Holt White, parliamentary reformer and nephew of the naturalist Gilbert White, appeared in 1819 and testifies to the text's gradual institutionalization as a literary classic in the course of the preceding century. Holt White reprints commendatory testimonies that begin in 1712, prefaces from the editions of 1738 (by James Thomson) and 1772, and, most strikingly, the full text of a French-language adaptation by a prominent statesman and orator from the French Revolution's first phase, Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti, Count de Mirabeau. By consolidating a century of reappraisals, Holt White positioned Areopagitica, more strongly than any prior critic, as part of the vernacular literary canon and as a heuristic for reading Milton's poetry. His notes quote more than 35 passages from Paradise Lost, and his afterword summarizes Areopagitica as an argument for "an unobstructed circulation of Thought;—the life-blood to all social existence," mimicking Milton's own diction.¹

The vitalizing metaphor that Holt White echoes—the one stating that books contain "the pretious life-blood of a master spirit"—had become increasingly central to interpretations of Areopagitica over the eighteenth century, in a trajectory that climaxed on the eve of the French Revolution, with the one paratext that Holt White's edition advertised on its title page, the 1788 adaptation by Honoré de Mirabeau.² The younger Mirabeau's discourse on press freedom in imitation of Milton, Sur la liberté de la presse, imité de l'anglois de Milton, reissued at least twice between 1788 and 1792 and again in 1826, introduced into the national discourse a text that remained well-known in France throughout the nineteenth century.³ Mirabeau returned to the extended passage that endowed books with active life, "une vie active," quoting it in statements prepared during his tenure in the Estates General and in the National Assembly.⁴ I find the imprint of natural philosophy on Mirabeau's free adaptation. Mirabeau minimizes

Milton's republicanism and draws out, to an unprecedented degree, Areopagitica's tendency toward the rhetoric of vitalism, a material philosophy treating life and agency, defined as the capacity to initiate action or experience passion, as diffused throughout organic systems.

The concepts that rose to prominence in eighteenth-century vitalist discourse, including an understanding of sensitivity as a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of life, had parallels in discussions of the sensibilities of literary texts. Around the time of Mirabeau's adaptation, responses to Samuel Johnson's critical 1779 Life of Milton acted out political disagreements about Areopagitica through the close reading of its metaphors. William Hayley and other proponents defended Milton's neglect to distinguish between the agency of persons and non-persons in Areopagitica, even though confusion about agency in Paradise Lost had vexed critics of its allegorical passages since Addison. As a case study, Mirabeau's reception sheds light on these scattered British appreciations. It demonstrates most clearly how vitalism had evolved from a seventeenth-century materialist philosophy that might be evoked metaphorically to describe certain political or literary structures, to, by the late eighteenth century, a general interpretive protocol, a way of viewing systems that had implications not only for how organic systems generate action but also for how texts, thought of as systems, generate significance. In this context, granting books "life beyond life" implicitly advocated a way of reading that treated texts as having agencies and intentionalities other than those of their authors (493).

In the sections that follow, I examine, first, changes in the understanding of agency between seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century vitalism, and imagine vitalism as a curious eighteenth-century lay reader, Mirabeau himself, experienced it. I then compare Areopagitica to Sur la liberté de la presse, with particular attention to the ways both texts use figurative language to diffuse agency and to the coherence of Mirabeau's revisions with an Enlightenment version of

vitalism. I conclude by connecting Mirabeau to the reception of Areopagitica more broadly, in order to illustrate the difference between labeling specific texts vitalist and adopting vitalism as a mode of interpretation. The tropes of animation and reanimation used in vitalist scientific discourse are also used by such critics as Adam Smith and Henry Home, Lord Kames to describe imagined or hypothetical states of being that are neither life nor death, suggesting the usefulness of vitalist concepts in more general discussions of reading.

Sense and sensitivity: From vitalist discourse to vitalist hermeneutic

For the purposes of this essay, vitalism designates the belief that life is a form of power inherent in organic matter and produced by its systematic organization—a form of power, often referred to as a vital force or vital principle, that cannot be abstracted from bodies as thought or soul, but whose operation is also not strictly determined by external forces.⁵ Although the term vitalism originated in the history of medicine, Peter Hans Reill and Catherine Packham have established the presence of a broadly coherent vitalist discourse spanning multiple fields of scientific and social inquiry in the latter half of the eighteenth century.⁶ By the 1740s the University of Medicine in Montpellier, a leading medical school, had emerged as a center of vitalist activity and of opposition to Cartesian mechanism.⁷ Ménéuret de Chambaud, a representative who contributed more than 40 articles to the Encyclopédie, identified seventeenth-century British origins for the school's thought when he offered as evidence of the vital principle

une propriété singulière, la source du mouvement & du sentiment attachée à la nature organique des principes qui composent le corps, ou plutôt dépendante d'une union telle de ces molécules que [Francis] Glisson a le premier découverte, & appelée irritabilité, & qui n'est, dans le vrai, qu'un mode de sensibilité.⁸

a singular property, the source of movement and of feeling attached to the organic nature of principles that compose the body, or rather dependent on just such a union of these molecules as [Francis] Glisson first discovered, and named “irritability,” which is, in truth, only a mode of sensitivity.

For Ménuret, whose 1765 Encyclopédie article “Économie animale” Roselyne Rey described as the manifesto of French vitalist physiology, a host of functions, from digestion to irritability of the arteries to coughing, fell under the rubric of “sensibilité” (generally translated as sensitivity).⁹ The closely related concepts of sensitivity and irritability—conflated by Ménuret and other Montpellier vitalists but distinguished by the Swiss physiologist Albrecht von Haller—were properties of organic matter and were necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for life. Vital power became evident only in an arrangement of matter such that the diverse sensitive parts functioned in concert; through such an assemblage, individual lives, “vies particulières,” Ménuret writes, gave rise to the general life of an organism, “la vie générale de tout le corps.”¹⁰

The Montpellier vitalists’ definition of life responded to a central preoccupation of the prior century. Seventeenth-century vitalism had asked how action begins in organic systems—through the organization of the system’s material components (from the bottom up), or through the prompting of one discrete executive component (from the top down, or if you prefer, from the center out). British physiologists vacillated. William Harvey, for instance, revised his theory of circulation shortly after the execution of Charles I in 1649 so that it no longer described the heart as directive but as serviceable to the blood, which “instead of receiving, rather gives heat to the heart.”¹¹ In several treatises published from 1650 to 1677, his colleague Francis Glisson came to view the irritability of human tissue as evidence that vital spirit was infused throughout matter.

By 1672, Glisson pronounced decisively that “matter is not only capable of vital nature, but alive in act, that is to say, endowed with perceptive, appetitive, locomotive vital faculties.”¹²

The seventeenth-century search for agency within physiological systems gave rise to new ways of talking about systems generally. On John Rogers’ account, Harvey’s and Glisson’s publications fueled a Vitalist Moment that peaked in the 1650s, when infusing matter with life challenged scientific, political, and theological discourses in which “no action of any kind was possible but for the intervention of an outside power.”¹³ Vitalist discourse could destabilize both theological systems that treated human actions as a predetermined chain proceeding from a divine first cause and political systems that made all civic action dependent on a sovereign’s prior consent. Rogers argues that memories of this Vitalist Moment ultimately inform “the poetics of agency” that leave Adam and Eve subject to a non-deterministic Providence in the closing lines of Paradise Lost.¹⁴ For the Montpellier vitalists, Glisson’s observation of the body’s seemingly unconscious, but not entirely regular, local responses to disease and injury was a crucial counterexample to the deterministic physiology of René Descartes. Descartes had described the body as a sieve, an inert material construct through which vital liquid flowed, and whose responses to stimuli could be precisely calculated.¹⁵ The image of the sieve neatly conceptualized life as distinct and separable from the body’s solid structures.

Vitalist contributors to the Encyclopédie complicated the assignment of agency by resisting clear distinctions between concepts they believed interdependent and inherently fuzzy. Consistently, vitalists refused either to label matter as passive or to assimilate the body’s reactive responses to a familiar understanding of agency based on deliberate action. Although Paul-Joseph Barthez made the canonical distinction between animism and vitalism in his 1778 Nouveaux éléments de la science de l’homme [New Elements of the Science of Man], the

Montpellier school had by midcentury already come to regard with equal skepticism Cartesian mechanism and the animist reactions to Descartes that had initially helped to galvanize it. Sensitivity could not plausibly be attributed to the soul's constant regulatory oversight, as animist theories suggested, when the soul was so easily proved distractible in higher cognitive matters. It was instead, Ménuret insisted, a distinct motive faculty, "une faculté motrice . . . censée différente de l'ame."¹⁶ For Jean-Pierre Georges Cabanis, a student of Montpellier vitalism who became Mirabeau's personal physician and occasional collaborator after the fall of the Bastille in July 1789, the principle of sensitivity had psychiatric implications that prefigured later formulations of the subconscious. Sensitivity, Cabanis wrote in the 1790s, challenged attempts to conceive of the self as an "empire du moi," for through sensitivity the human organism perceived and responded to many sense impressions without the explicit notice of the conscious self, "le moi."¹⁷ Enlightenment vitalism ascribed life not by assigning speech or cognition to matter, but by conflating the power to act with the power to feel.

Besides elaborating on the diffusion of agency suggested by seventeenth-century thinkers, Enlightenment vitalism introduced a crucial emphasis on the passage of time. Due in large part to George-Louis Leclerc, Count de Buffon, whose Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière appeared serially in 36 volumes from 1749 to 1789, roughly contemporaneously with the Encyclopédie's publication from 1751 to 1772, the study of closed systems and individual specimens characteristic of physiology became, even for the Montpellier vitalists, historicized. Buffon shared the vitalist project of defining life and questioning deterministic systems that traced all agency to an initial, external cause. He drew on Harvey's reproductive writings and challenged the prevailing theory that God had, outside of history, enclosed in each organism the germ of all its descendants. On Buffon's account, life derived, as for earlier vitalists, from a

contingent organization of matter, but he added that as a result of its organization a living thing possessed the power of reproduction or, more precisely, the “power of producing its resemblance.” Speciation was, consequently, a result rather than a cause of the organization of matter, the product of particular arrangements that Buffon designated in 1749 “internal molds.”¹⁸ The agency implied by vital power was thus not only diffused throughout organic systems, but also only perceptible as it resonated across specimens.

By 1780, Buffon’s Histoire naturelle was, across its various forms, the third most commonly owned book in France, and its historicized conception of life had a shaping influence on Enlightenment vitalism as it might apply to literary interpretation.¹⁹ Without putting the same weight on reproduction, Ménéret’s article “Économie animale” echoed Buffon’s terminology and shared his insistence on the temporal basis of knowledge. Mechanist epistemologies, Ménéret insisted, only seemed to offer linear chains of cause and effect. Because mechanism presupposed a static point of observation that did not, in fact, exist, the knowledge it produced was a vicious circle, “un cercle vicieux,” a false substitute for primitive models of knowledge based in an unchanging eternity. He concluded by referring his reader to the discourse on carnivores, where Buffon defended his comparative method by asking what real knowledge one could have of objects considered in isolation.²⁰ As a mode of interpretation, vitalism saw significance, like agency, as the product of a larger system’s organization, discernible only by examining the relationships and resemblances between its parts.

Certainly, vitalism as shaped by Buffon was vitalism as Mirabeau came to know it. He alludes to the same discourse as Ménéret to different ends—for its advice against vegetarianism—in a letter to his mistress, Sophie de Monnier. Several such references appear in letters to Sophie between 1777 and 1780, during Mirabeau’s imprisonment in Vincennes, when

he claimed he studied Buffon daily to pass the time.²¹ He passed some of the rest composing Erotika biblion, a libertine text published in 1783 that justified reading the Bible as fragmentary and figurative, one source of information about natural history among many, by citing a motto from Buffon: “[R]ecueillir avec soin ces rayons échappés de la lumière céleste. Loin d’offusquer la vérité, ils ne peuvent qu’y ajouter un nouveau degré de splendeur” [Gather with care those rays of celestial light that have slipped loose; far from obscuring the truth, they can only add to it a new degree of splendor.]²² The motto may have opened Mirabeau’s eyes to the similarity between the allegory of Truth in Areopagitica and Buffon’s epistemology. Mirabeau’s interest in Buffon persisted following his release. Sometime between the naturalist’s death in April of 1788 and the end of 1790, Mirabeau bought a significant portion of Buffon’s library. The library catalogue of roughly 2,500 titles compiled after Mirabeau’s death in 1791 lists more than 570 books in the sciences, including not only several rare volumes of natural history laden with Buffon’s manuscript annotations but also sources foundational to Montpellier vitalism and to Buffon’s recharacterization of life. These included Harvey’s 1651 On Animal Generation, several major works by the chemist Georg-Ernst Stahl, and the two primary texts by Montpellier physicians cited as the basis for Ménéret’s article on “Œconomie animale,” Louis de Lacaze and Théophile de Bordeu’s Specimen novi Medicinae conspectus and Idée de l’homme physique et moral. Mirabeau proudly advertised his purchase of Buffon’s books, which his speechwriter Étienne Dumont considered an act of conspicuous consumption.²³

Vitalist rhetoric: from Areopagitica (1644) to Sur la liberté de la presse (1788)

Publicizing an interest in Buffon served Mirabeau politically, identifying him with a broad, estate-spanning readership while distancing him from both radical philosophes and from

his well-known father. In 1788, evoking Milton served much the same purpose. Honoré, the disfigured, thrice-imprisoned son of the unforgiving Physiocrat Victor de Riqueti, marquis de Mirabeau, had to position himself with care. Both Milton and Buffon appealed to moderately cultured honest folk, “honnêtes gens,” and reinforced a point that Mirabeau had stressed in the opening chapter of Erotika biblion and in the prefatory remarks to Sur la liberté de la presse—that he wrote for “le peuple” and not for rationalist philosophes.²⁴ Political positioning and fundraising were doubtless his immediate motives for adapting Areopagitica.²⁵ Mirabeau’s prefatory remarks looked ahead to the 1789 convocation of the Estates-General and complained of government interference with efforts to publish the proceedings of provincial assemblies. Moreover, Sur la liberté de la presse appeared in December of 1788, the month before Mirabeau returned to his native Provence to seek a seat in the Estates-General as, controversially, a deputy of the third estate. The brochure was quickly noticed and quickly reprinted, and its success lay at the root of a further association between Milton and Mirabeau—the appearance in 1789 of a compilation by a republican writer in Mirabeau’s circle, Jean-Baptiste Salaville, titled Théorie de la Royauté, d’après la doctrine de Milton, some copies of which carried Mirabeau’s name, that augmented the translation of Areopagitica with a brief biographical essay on Milton and translated extracts of the divorce tracts, followed by a partial translation of the first Defense of the English People.²⁶

Although Areopagitica may have been recommended to Mirabeau by his friend, the Whig jurist Samuel Romilly, the framework of Sur la liberté de la presse made clear that it was not an argument in favor of the British constitution.²⁷ In addition to the preface that situated the work in the context of 1788 and spoke tactfully of the king while censuring his overzealous ministers, Mirabeau added a conclusion collecting statements from a recent publication by the agronomist

Charles de Casaux to imply that for the last century the freedom of the press had comprised Britain's only essential constitutional advantage relative to France (61–62).²⁸ In between, Mirabeau roughly halved the length of Milton's text. Tony Davies has observed that Mirabeau's fine-tuning showed continual and sometimes excessive caution—a consistent, if not complete, tendency toward secularization; paring away allusions to British history and culture and to events like the seventeenth-century Arminian controversy; and, so as not to upset the “honnêtes gens,” removing not only the word “Commonwealths” but also Milton's praise for Claudius' refusal to punish flatulence.²⁹ Mirabeau's prefatory remarks further de-emphasized any implicit constitutional principles by insisting that Areopagitica was exceptional among Milton's writings, that Milton, sometimes a violent republican, offered in this text only peaceable argument (8).

In a more attention-grabbing move, Mirabeau's bilingual title page epigraph, although it excised Milton's references to divinity, highlighted Areopagitica's highly affective personification of books: “Who Kills a man Kills a reasonable creature. . . . but, he who destroys a good book, Kills reason itself” (2).³⁰ The epigraph drew immediate notice from the former director of the national book trade, Chrétien-Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, who acknowledged Mirabeau's brochure in a hasty but enthusiastic postscript to his own Mémoire sur la liberté de la presse, issued the same year. Malesherbes, who learned of Areopagitica through this adaptation, remarked first that this choice quotation made Milton's genius evident.³¹ As Malesherbes' admiration indicates, Milton's impassioned pleas for the lives of books felt novel. In France, the Code de la librairie established in 1723 had made publishing rights in intellectual property subject to royal confirmation. The arguments that the philosophes had most prominently voiced against this control emphasized practical difficulties and economic interests. Denis Diderot drew on John Locke's theory that property rights could be earned through labor and

transferred by contract when he wrote, in a 1763 brief, that there should be no difference between the sale of a field or a house and the sale of a manuscript.³² Mirabeau held such a positivistic discourse of rights and interests at arm's length. Instead, he identified the need to speak about the freedom of the press to "honnêtes gens" who distrusted its self-interested proponents, "les apôtres intéressés de cette liberté" (7).

In place of a principled or a constitutional argument, Mirabeau found an organicist and emotional appeal for the liberty of the press in the vitalist tendency of Milton's rhetoric.

Areopagitica creates narrative interest by building on two prominent running strands of metaphorical language. The first equates books to living souls (492–93, 505–6, 536). The second describes how the "true warfaring Christian" encounters Truth in a series of allegorical set pieces (515), first, with reference to diet (509–14), later, to a "streaming fountain" within himself (543–44), and, finally, as a search for fragments of Truth's dismembered body (549–51, 561–63). The text's first and most developed extended metaphor concludes Milton's exordium to Parliament:

I deny not, but that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how Bookes demeane themselves, as well as men. . . . For Bookes are not absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them to be as active as that soule was whose progeny they are (492).

By the end of the second sentence above, the comparison becomes quantitative rather than explanatory—books do not resemble souls, they are "as active as" souls. The intuitive notion that books metonymically extend their author's lives serves only as a point of departure. On Christopher Kendrick's reading, this passage confuses metonymy and metaphor, ultimately "making books into the actual embodiment of creative energy" rather than a product of it, in order to create an impression of argument from the nature of things.³³ When the analogy is

pushed to its limits, the properties of tenor and vehicle are even reversed, making mere “elementall life” seem dull and vegetative compared to the “vigorously productive” immortality of books (492–93).

Across the whole of Areopagitica, the metaphor that brings books to life emerges as a literal premise of argument against a background of rhetorical figures identified as fictions or as incomplete in themselves. Milton concludes his second extended metaphor, which compares reading to diet, by vacating its vehicle, when he announces, “Bad meats will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction; but herein the difference is of bad books, that they . . . serve . . . to confute, to forewarn . . .” (512). Later, when Milton cites the scriptural comparison of Truth to “a streaming fountain” but adds that its flow must be “exercise[d]” by the believer, the conventional form of the simile clearly fails to describe the kind of agency that Milton equates with belief (543). In contrast, Milton continually refers back to his initial personification of books in order to accord texts certain rights as sensible beings. They have a claim to pity, as they can be not just murdered but even martyred; they can suffer in “new limbo’s and new hells”; and they can be subject to cruelty or to slights, embarrassed by having to parade around with jailers on their frontispieces (493, 505–6, 536). Areopagitica thus vacillates between two figurative schemes—metaphorical animation that verges on natural description on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a cautious skepticism about the ability of fallen language and its rhetorical machinery to represent divine truths. Milton’s rhetoric, in other words, raises questions about whether the agency to signify resides outside of a textual system, requiring continual reference to the intentions of its author or of God, or within a textual system, through the organization of its figurative language.

Mirabeau consistently refocuses *Areopagitica*'s argument around its initial animating metaphor. The instability of Milton's figurative language recalls seventeenth-century vitalist discourse, with its insistence on the importance of systems and of contingent organizations. Mirabeau's revision uniformly diffuses agency, and significance, throughout the system's sensitive parts. He eliminates the most prominent set pieces that identify themselves as rhetorical or allegorical fictions—the comparison of reading to diet with its injunction that “To the pure all things are pure” (512); the description of Truth as a “streaming fountain”; and the dismemberment of maiden Truth. Local alterations reinforce that books and readers exist in fact, and not merely in figure, as equally sensitive parts of the same large organic system. With Milton's exordium to Parliament replaced by Mirabeau's own preface, the first the reader hears of Milton's translated voice is the keystone passage comparing books to subjects, “car un livre n'est point une chose absolument inanimée.” Mirabeau even adds language confirming the equation of books and men in legal terms, insisting the existence of a good book should no more be compromised than that of “un bon citoyen,” a good citizen (9). Elsewhere, in place of Milton's simile between “the issue of the brain” and “the issue of the womb” (505), Mirabeau factually states that, until the advent of licensing, books entered the world as freely as all other “productions de la nature” (22). Treating books as products of nature implicitly corrects the strict Physiocratic view, advanced by Mirabeau's father under the guidance of François Quesnay, that a nation's true wealth resides in its land and agriculture alone.³⁴ The younger Mirabeau elaborated on Milton's references to the nation's “flowry crop of knowledge and new light” and to “the deep mines of knowledge” (558, 562), adding to the former that such a crop promised a bountiful harvest, “une récolte si heureuse” (49), and embellishing the latter with verbs more suggestive of mineral extraction (“creusé,” “extrait,” “mettre au grand jour,” 52).

Mirabeau's focus on the animation and sensitivity of books reflected neither existing French discourse on the freedom of the press nor an established reception of Areopagitica. Rather, he sought warrant by tilting the text toward the language of natural philosophy. With the exception of a close citation in 1679 by Charles Blount, the most radical of Areopagitica's seventeenth-century adapters, British writers before the 1780s tended to ignore or correct Milton's discomfiting animation of books.³⁵ James Thomson, who set the tone for midcentury accommodations of Milton's politics by the editor Thomas Newton and others, made no mention of the now famous passage in his 1738 preface to Areopagitica. Thomson instead assimilated Milton to a broad Whig rhetoric of liberty, of which the liberty of the press was taken to be the foundation.³⁶ Mirabeau, in contrast, echoed the terminology of contemporary science. His original turns of phrase include comparing the prudent reader to a "bon chymiste" ("skilled chemist," 29), and remarking that God has given us free will because otherwise, we would be mere machines ("autrement, l'homme n'eût été qu'une machine"), language that evokes contemporary disputes about mechanism and recalls the title of the notorious atheist Julien Offray de La Mettrie's L'homme machine [Man, a Machine] (35, cf. Milton 527). An odder insertion, an unacknowledged paraphrase from a French translation of Pope's Essay on Man, emphasized that the physiological experience of passion bound man to God and to the universe (37).³⁷

By working, very broadly, within the conceptual domain of natural philosophy, Mirabeau could see Areopagitica through the lens of Buffon, bringing Milton into line with a specifically Enlightenment version of vitalism. A Miltonic emphasis on discrepancy and fragmentation shaded into a Buffonian emphasis on particulars. The gradualist epistemology of Areopagitica, with its injunction to search for Truth's fragments and its warning that "she may have more

shapes than one” (563), would have resonated with readers of the “Initial Discourse” to Buffon’s Histoire naturelle. “Truth,” Buffon wrote there, in a passage censured by the Sorbonne and critiqued as incomprehensible by Malesherbes, has been “confounded with such a great number of strange objects . . . that I am not at all surprised that it is hard to recognize.” An “enumeration of truths,” rather than “a definition of truth,” he had insisted, was the only sure route to knowledge of nature.³⁸ By eliminating Milton’s narrative of Truth’s dismemberment, but retaining, as a turn of phrase, a later reference to her scattered limbs or “membres épars,” Mirabeau makes the fragmentation of Truth seem more natural, and the pervasiveness of error more benign. Error, he writes, is “le nuage qui s’interpose entr[e la vérité] & nous, & qui, ne se dissipant que par degrés, nous prépare à recevoir le jour de la vérité” (the cloud interposed between us and [truth], which, dissipating only by degrees, prepares us to receive the daylight of truth, 53–54; cf. Milton 566). This translation, without Milton’s eschatological emphasis on the moments of Truth’s dismemberment and reassembly, shares in the cautious optimism of the motto from Buffon that Mirabeau cited in Erotika biblion, which described both full and fragmentary knowledge as forms of light.

Far from providing an ingenious interpretation of Milton, Mirabeau followed Buffon’s explicit lead by adopting vitalism as a way of reading. Significance in natural systems, on Buffon’s view, could only be perceived clearly as the product of organization, rather than as the consequence of declared authorial intentions, and that organization becomes visible to us over time, in the process of “reading” nature, through the observation of resemblances and rapports.³⁹ An analogy between natural and textual systems permits, for instance, Mirabeau to deemphasize Milton’s intentions, by labeling Areopagitica as an exceptional, non-republican, nonsectarian text with its own sensibility, that of peaceful argument. He finds its significance diffused

throughout its figurative language. Within the text's expressive structure, one idiosyncratic metaphor that elides vehicle and tenor recurs and, especially in Mirabeau's adaptation, projects its own resemblance most strongly across the whole. This recurring metaphor contains the essence or life of Milton's text, just as for Buffon the life of an organism rests in the specific arrangement of elements, an "internal mold," that produces its own resemblance across generations.

Treating literary texts as organic systems, and thus as parts of the larger system of nature, allows Mirabeau to appropriate organicist elements of his father's rhetoric.⁴⁰ The rigid Physiocracy developed by Quesnay and Mirabeau's father saw political economy as the extension of a natural system, but Quesnay located truth in calculation. He considered both medical vitalism and fiction, including the fictions inherent in figurative language, suspect. The elder Mirabeau had found a persuasive sublimity in Quesnay's Tableau économique, a tabulation of national economy with a characteristic "zigzag" between columns indicating the flow of revenue between social classes. Diagram accordingly took the place of metaphor or allegory as the central rhetorical device of early Physiocratic texts.⁴¹ In contrast, on Buffon's view of organization—as that which becomes apparent only through the process of reinscription—knowledge of nature is fundamentally comparative. On this model, in which nature is read, rather than tabulated, analogy is a means of knowing and not a mere rhetorical device. The skills essential to the interpretation of nature transfer directly to the interpretation of literature, at least in the case of Mirabeau's search for a unifying element in Areopagitica.

What might seem the major leap in this application of Buffon, the shift from interpreting nature to interpreting literary language, is warranted by l'Histoire naturelle itself. Buffon describes the "internal mold" as a metaphor whose peculiarity is essential to its meaning. "[T]he

expression of an internal mold,” he admits, appears to elide any clear interpretive distinction between the internal and external. Since “the idea of a mold can only be related to the surface . . . it might as well be called a massive surface, as an internal mold.”⁴² This apparent contradiction in the metaphor, though, reflects Buffon’s epistemology, which involves reasoning about powers from surfaces. Buffon anticipates a correlation noted by later literary critics between the vitalist diffusion of agency and a literary language inverting “causes and effects, agents and patients,” and, in the case of metaphors, vehicle and tenor.⁴³ Enlightenment vitalism treats metaphor not as a figure of speech but as a representation of the empirical basis of human knowledge. Whereas seventeenth-century vitalist physiology had generated a storehouse of images and analogies that could inform the composition of texts, Enlightenment vitalism, as formulated by Buffon and as demonstrated in the practice of Mirabeau, offered a model for secular textual interpretation that, in many ways, prefigured subsequent practices of close reading. Buffon’s vitalist natural history coaxed readers to understand the essential traits of specimens by observing generational descent. Similarly, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary critics—including several notable readers of Areopagitica in France and in Britain—would search for the essential meaning of a text by closely examining passages that recurred in its reception history.

Enlightenment vitalism and the pieces of Areopagitica

The emergence of vitalism in the latter half of the eighteenth century as a distinct philosophical position, a middle way between animism and mechanist materialism, made it possible to engage Milton’s peculiarly literal description of the life authors imparted to their books as an argument rather than as a rhetorical flourish. Eighteenth-century exponents of vitalist natural philosophy often reframed explanatory analogy as argument, seeking justification

through a quest for metaphors whose vehicle and tenor were in perfect harmony; this, at least, characterizes Diderot's engagement with vitalist materialism. Diderot, who included his friend, the Montpellier vitalist Théophile de Bordeu, as a character in the philosophic dialogue Le rêve de d'Alembert [D'Alembert's Dream], had questioned the dualist separation of soul and body by closely examining the vehicle of one of its key explanatory metaphors, the comparison made by Descartes in part 5 of the Discourse on Method between animal bodies and clockwork machines. "What difference is there between a sensible and living watch, and a watch made of gold, iron, silver, or copper?" Diderot wrote in the unfinished Éléments de Physiologie. "If a soul were attached to the latter, what effect would it produce therein?"⁴⁴ In the Rêve, Diderot's friend d'Alembert, babbling in his sleep, at once voices and demonstrates a preferable metaphor for the animal body, a beehive whose agency, diffused through its parts, cannot be precisely located in a single site of conscious direction.⁴⁵ The centrality of metaphor in vitalist discourse helped to elevate the interpretation of figurative language to a disciplinary practice with the trappings of science.

In advance of and quite independently from more familiar Romantic engagements with Milton's poetics, Mirabeau's reception of Areopagitica illustrates how a literary praxis developed from two major vitalist ideas. First, the diffusion of agency implied by seventeenth-century physiologists and codified in the Montpellier vitalists' definition of sensitivity vested the text itself and its units of figurative language with a sensibility to some degree autonomous from its author. Second, Buffon's description of the essence of life as an "internal mold" licensed reorganizing the text's figurative language around a recurring image that, complete in itself, projected its resemblance most strongly into the mind. Scientific inquiry sparked by the vitalist idea of sensitivity created more than a storehouse of literary techniques and topoi that could be

evoked in imaginative literature. It also offered a powerful disciplinary metaphor for the practice of literary criticism—the reanimation of the dead. Since sensitivity was a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of life, its functions were visible, Ménéret had written, shortly before life began and shortly after it ceased.⁴⁶ The notion that sensitivity was lodged in the body and connected to the vital principle underwrote the British physician John Hunter’s research into reviving frozen animals and drowned men in the 1770s, as well as his likely attempt to resuscitate William Dodd, a hanged man retrieved from the gallows.⁴⁷ On a vitalist view, apparently dead things could, to borrow Milton’s language, still possess a potency of life.

Reanimation appears as a purely imaginative act in the opening pages of Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments from 1759, in support of Smith’s assertion that even sympathy with the dead, which stems from imagining “our own living souls in their inanimated bodies,” has a physiological basis.⁴⁸ Contemporaneous literary criticism that discussed the sensibility of texts with reference to their figures of speech implied that a reader could similarly imagine himself into the inanimate structure, the corpse as it were, of a text. Lord Kames particularly linked the figure of personification, the “bestowing sensibility and voluntary motion upon things inanimate,” to the vivid representation of a speaker’s state of mind. “Passionate personification,” in contrast to the debased “descriptive” form, represented for Kames an extreme agitation of mind and emphasized the communicability of the speaker’s passions; if well executed, it could “afford conviction, momentary indeed, of life and intelligence.”⁴⁹ Personification, then, invites the reader to inhabit the mind of the speaker. It can command a reader’s sympathy by showing, simultaneously, the speaker’s internal sentiment and his responsiveness to external stimuli—almost like a demonstration of sensitivity in a living specimen.⁵⁰ For Mirabeau, Milton’s

passionate personification of books clearly absorbed the reader in a moment of shared conviction that proved the pivotal persuasive moment of Areopagitica.

Imaginatively inhabiting a text, when a text is understood in vitalist terms as a sensitive structure resembling an organic system, requires sympathetic attunement, a circular interpretive movement between the apprehension of overall structure and attention to local constructions of figurative language. Buffon's "internal mold" provides a natural historical model for such attunement, as over the course of generations, the essential characteristics of a particular structure become clear through the resemblances it elicits in different specimens. Iterative readings of literary texts that refer, continually, back to their underlying linguistic structures, rather than to their author's principles or biography, provide another interpretive analogue. Michael Sonenscher thus connects the novelist and champion of *drame bourgeois* Louis-Sébastien Mercier's admiration for Edward Young's The Complaint, or Night-Thoughts to Mercier's avid interest in vitalist natural philosophy; Mercier, as though reading for the internal mold of Young's text, insisted that prose renditions and fragmentary imitations of Night-Thoughts were more powerful than formally faithful verse translations that imposed a native poetic diction.⁵¹ A response or adaptation like Mercier's or Mirabeau's never intends to close off interpretation but instead offers a point of comparison, a link in the chain of descent, that sheds new light on the peculiar "internal mold" of the original. In France, Mirabeau's Sur la liberté de la presse stood at the head of such a chain of descent. François-René de Chateaubriand reinforced the impression of an internal mold when he began a two-paragraph digest of Areopagitica in his 1836 Essay on English Literature with a secularized translation, strikingly similar to Mirabeau's, of the quotation that Mirabeau had used for his epigraph, "Tuer un homme, c'est tuer une créature raisonnable; tuer un livre, c'est tuer la raison, c'est tuer

l'immortalité plutôt que la vie" [To kill a man is to kill a reasonable creature; to kill a book is to kill reason, it is to kill immortality and not just life].⁵²

Failing to attend to the language of an ostensibly argumentative text could even be conceived as a failure to understand that its life lay in the structure of its language as much as in its general principles. British readers were, in particular, galvanized to pay closer attention to Areopagitica's literary qualities by the treatment it received in Samuel Johnson's 1779 Life of Milton. Johnson constructed his own metaphor to dismiss Areopagitica's argument against prepublication licensing, claiming, "[I]t seems not more reasonable to leave the right of printing unrestrained, because writers may be afterwards censured, than it would be to sleep with doors unbolted, because by our laws we can hang a thief."⁵³ Many of Johnson's sharpest British critics answered him with close readings of this passage that referred back to Milton's own metaphorical language.⁵⁴ In one exchange that was, afterwards, widely reprinted, William Hayley answered Johnson's remark not with an argument but with a corrected personification closer to Milton's own. "To suffer no book to be published without a license," Hayley wrote, "is tyranny as absurd as it would be to suffer no traveller to pass along the highway without producing a certificate that he is not a robber."⁵⁵

Thanks to the model of Mirabeau and of Buffon, we can more clearly see an underlying intellectual project in these scattered appreciations. Responses to Areopagitica by Hayley and other British critics circulated during an era of broadening vitalist influence on both sides of the Channel. At the same time that the Montpellier vitalists' attempts to define life drew heightened interest due to Buffon's natural history and to the Encyclopédie, John and William Hunter were popularizing in England parallel theories of a "sentient principle" that had been central to Scottish medical practice since the 1730s.⁵⁶ Hayley's analogy accepts Johnson's proposed

vehicle (that of a thief), but he adheres to Milton both by claiming for the book, rather than its author, certain rights as a sensible being, and by valuing its passive existence (traveling the highway) as a form of agency. Hayley chastises Johnson, in other words, for misrepresenting the sense in which Milton had ascribed life and action to books, for answering the treatise in principle without paying attention to its language. At the same time, he demonstrates the power or liveliness of Milton's original imagery by reproducing its oddities, reminding the reader of Milton's fear that once licensing is instituted "unoffensive books" will not be allowed to "stirre forth without a visible jaylor in thir title" (536).

Those local structures of figurative language contain, in their cracks and discrepancies as well as in their resonances, in their particular and contingent organizations, the life, or at least, the sensibility, of a literary text. The imprint of nineteenth-century vitalism on Romantic poetics has been much studied. The Romantic Milton, though, emerged from readings of his prose as well as from readings of his poetry. In 1838, the French critic Louis Raymond de Véricour praised Milton's treatise for recognizing that books possessed a life beyond mere existence, "une vie au delà de l'existence," and dismissed Johnson as a blind, stubborn Tory.⁵⁷ Indeed, Johnson's complaints about the "confusion of spirit and matter" throughout Paradise Lost had never aroused the same ardent and persistent resistance as his criticism of Areopagitica.⁵⁸ The wide applicability of the reading practices that consolidated the treatise's eighteenth-century reception—to argumentative prose, as well as to poetry; to revolutionary political adaptations, as well as to literary biographies; in France, as well as in Britain—suggests we acknowledge the breadth of influence that Enlightenment vitalism had already come to exercise on literary interpretation in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Notes

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¹ Thomas Holt White, ed., Areopagitica; with notes and illustrations (London: Charles Wood, 1819), notes the Attic spirit that also informs Milton's poetry, iv–vi; especially interesting references to Paradise Lost compare the petitioner's mental agitation in addressing Parliament to Adam's excitement on first beholding Eve, 2, and compare Milton's definition of reason as "but choosing" to God the Father's speech on free will in Book III, 88; for thought as "life-blood," see 201. Susanne Woods discusses Holt White and his edition in Milton and the Poetics of Freedom (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne Univ. Press, 2013), 184–90.

² Complete Prose Works of John Milton, Vol. 2, ed. Ernest Sirluck (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), 493. Further parenthetical citations of Areopagitica are to this edition.

³ A trade edition of Sur la liberté de la presse, prepared from the 1792 text, is available in Christophe Tournu, Milton, Mirabeau: rencontre révolutionnaire (France: EDIMAF, 2002). For focused treatments of this adaptation, see Tony Davies, "Borrowed language: Milton, Jefferson, Mirabeau," in Milton and Republicanism, ed. David Armitage, Armand Himy, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 265–70, and Olivier Lutaud, "Des révolutions d'Angleterre à la Révolution Française: L'exemple de la liberté de la presse, ou comment Milton 'ouvrit' les États généraux," in La Légende de la Révolution: Actes du colloque international de Clermont-Ferrand, ed. Christian Croisille and Jean Ehrard (Clermont-Ferrand, France: Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de l'Université Blaise-Pascal Clermont II /

Centre de recherches révolutionnaires et romantiques / Centre National des Lettres, 1988), 115–

25. Rachel Hammersley discusses translations that Mirabeau undertook or oversaw in The English Republican Tradition and Eighteenth-Century France: Between the Ancients and the Moderns (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2010), 174–84.

⁴ Jean-Paul Desprat, Mirabeau: l'excès et le retrait (Paris: Perrin, 2008), 447, identifies paraphrases in Mirabeau's May 1789 response to the closing of his unauthorized Journal des Etats-généraux. The 1790 manuscript for an undelivered speech on libels, which quotes Sur la liberté de la presse extensively, is reproduced by Mirabeau's adopted son, Lucas de Montigny, in his Mémoires biographiques, littéraires, et politiques de Mirabeau, 12 vols. (Brussels: Louis Hauman, 1834–36), 10.55–67 (see esp. 62–63). The attribution of Sur la liberté de la presse has remained accepted, notwithstanding the fact that Mirabeau often took others' work as a point of departure or used hired writers, especially during his service in the assemblies. This pamphlet's role in the campaign for his Estates-General seat, discussed further below, as well as the fact that Mirabeau reused material from it, support his personal involvement in the composition.

⁵ On definitions, see John Rogers, The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 1–5, and Catherine Packham, Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–6.

⁶ See especially Peter Hans Reill, Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2005), 33–70, on vitalism and the Count de Buffon, and Packham, Eighteenth-Century Vitalism on Adam Smith and Edinburgh vitalism, 83–108.

⁷ On the school's early relation to the animist theories of Georg-Ernst Stahl and the physician Boissier de Sauvages' Stahlian opposition to Descartes, see Elizabeth A. Williams, A Cultural

History of Medical Vitalism in Enlightenment Montpellier (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 85–93, and, on the origin of the term “vitalisme,” 325.

⁸ Ménuret de Chambaud, “Æconomie animale” in Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc., ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert (Univ. of Chicago ARTFL), <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu>, 11:361. Subsequent citations of the Encyclopédie are also to this edition. On Ménuret, see Roselyne Rey, Naissance et développement du vitalisme en France de la deuxième moitié du 18e siècle à la fin du Premier Empire, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century No. 381 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000), 63–89. Translations are my own except as indicated.

⁹ Rey, Naissance, 123.

¹⁰ Ménuret, “Æconomie animale,” 11:361.

¹¹ William Harvey, “A Second Disquisition to John Riolan” (1649), in The Works of William Harvey, trans. Robert Willis (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 137; see also Rogers, Matter of Revolution, 20–21.

¹² Francis Glisson, Tractatus de Natura substantiae energetica, qtd. and trans. by Anne-Lise Rey in “Metaphysical Problems in Francis Glisson’s Theory of Irritability,” in The Life Sciences in Early Modern Philosophy, ed. Ohad Nachtomy and Justin E. H. Smith (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 90. On Milton’s possible knowledge of Glisson, who collaborated with his physician and friend Nathan Paget, see Rogers, 104–5, and Charlotte Mai Nicholls, “‘Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit’: Medical Science and the Anatomia Animata in Milton’s Paradise Lost” (PhD diss., Univ. of Exeter, 2010), 6–8.

¹³ Rogers, Matter of Revolution, see esp. 3–20 (5).

¹⁴ Rogers, Matter of Revolution, 173–76. For specific parallels between passages in Paradise Lost and Glisson’s medical treatises, see also Nicholls, ““Your bodies,”” 81–90.

¹⁵ The image of the sieve is developed in Descartes’ Traité de l’homme; see Rey, Naissance, 96–97.

¹⁶ [Ménuret de Chambaud], “Inflammation, maladies inflammatoires,” Encyclopédie 8:713; for the attribution, see Rey, Naissance, 121.

¹⁷ Jean-Pierre Georges Cabanis, Rapports du physique et du moral de l’homme (1802), reprinted in Œuvres complètes de Cabanis, vols. 3–4 (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1824), 4:274–76.

¹⁸ Buffon, “The Generation of Animals,” trans. J. S. Barr, in From Natural History to the History of Nature: Readings from Buffon and His Critics, ed. John Lyon and Phillip R. Sloan (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 170, 177. To avoid confusion, I regularize to the U.S. spelling “mold” in quotations from this source.

¹⁹ Daniel Mornet, “Les enseignements des bibliothèques privées (1750–1780),” Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France 17 (1910): 449–96 (460); citation from Reill, Vitalizing Nature, 268n1.

²⁰ Ménuret, “Économie animale,” 11:361–62, 366; Buffon, “Discours sur les animaux carnassiers,” in l’Histoire naturelle, générale, et particulière, avec la description du cabinet du roi, 36 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1749–89), 7:21, <http://www.buffon.cnrs.fr>. Citations of Buffon are to this edition except where translations are available in Lyon and Sloan, eds., From Natural History.

²¹ Maëlle Levacher, Buffon et ses lecteurs: les complicités de “l’Histoire naturelle” (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2011), 189–90.

²² Mirabeau, Erotika biblion, ed. Jean-Pierre Dubost, Libre pensée et littérature clandestine No. 36 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), 38, 123n18; cf. Buffon, l’Histoire naturelle, 34:29.

²³ Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de feu M. Mirabeau l'ainé (Paris: Rozet and Belin, 1791), iii; Étienne Dumont, Souvenirs sur Mirabeau et sur les deux premières assemblées législatives, ed. J. Bénétruy (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), 148. Catalogue, 171, 227, 230, 233–35. The catalogue also includes a study of onanism by the Montpellier-trained Samuel-Auguste Tissot that Mirabeau may have consulted for his chapter on the subject in Erotika biblion, and four treatises on the medical application of electricity and magnetism, topics of considerable vitalist interest in the 1780s; Catalogue 240, 224; on onanism, see also Jean Stengers and Anne van Neck, Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror, trans. Kathryn A. Hoffmann (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 82–83; on medical electricity, see Williams, Cultural History, 305–9.

²⁴ Mirabeau, Erotika biblion, 31. One could hardly accuse Milton of being a philosophe, he reassured the reader of Sur la liberté de la presse, imité de l'anglois de Milton (“London” [Paris]: [n.p.], 1788), 8. Further parenthetical citations to Sur la liberté de la presse refer to this edition.

²⁵ Mirabeau’s pressing need to raise funds in order to register a fief in Provence for campaign purposes is noted by Barbara Luttrell, Mirabeau (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 108n16.

²⁶ The attribution of this collection to Mirabeau is sometimes accepted, recently by Hammersley, English Republican Tradition, 182n10, and Tournu, Milton, Mirabeau, 22–23. Doubts are expressed in Davies, “Borrowed language,” 267–68, and Lutaud, “Des révolutions d’Angleterre,” 123–24. A copy is listed in Mirabeau’s posthumous library catalogue, 143, but the attribution was denied by Montigny, who examined an extant manuscript entirely in Salaville’s hand (Mémoires, 7:316–17). If Mirabeau oversaw this project, it did not serve his interests as clearly as Sur la liberté de la presse, as is suggested by a dramatic, and, by its author’s own later

admission, misremembered anecdote in Dumont's Souvenirs about frantically burning copies that were delivered to Mirabeau's vacated apartment in his absence (111–12). This strange story is analyzed in detail in Luttrell, Mirabeau, 174–76.

²⁷ The connection to Romilly is suggested by Olivier Lutaud, "Des révolutions d'Angleterre," 122, and Lutaud, "Emprunts de la Révolution française à la première révolution anglaise," Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine 37 (1990): 589–607 (597).

²⁸ For specific parallels to Casaux's Questions à examiner avant l'assemblée des États généraux (1788), see the footnotes in Tournu, Milton, Mirabeau, 85–90.

²⁹ Davies, "Borrowed language," 266–67.

³⁰ Cf. Areopagitica, 492, "who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, Gods Image; but hee who destroyes a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye."

³¹ Malesherbes, Mémoires sur la librairie, Mémoire sur la liberté de la presse (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1994), 325.

³² Denis Diderot, "Lettre sur le commerce de la librairie," in Diderot, Œuvres, 5 vols., ed. Laurent Versini (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1994–97), 3:78. Geoffrey Turnovsky surveys reception of Diderot's letter in "Conceptualising the literary market: Diderot and the Lettre sur le commerce de la librairie," SVEC 2003:01, 137–43. The same argument is voiced in the Encyclopédie, s.v. "Droit de copie." A divergent argument by the Marquis de Condorcet, who disagreed with Diderot's assertion that ideas could be absolutely owned, nevertheless challenged royal privileges on largely economic grounds, citing their effect on prices and distribution; Condorcet, "Fragments concerning freedom of the press," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, reprinted in Daedalus 131, no. 2 (2002): 57–59. For legal and cultural background, see Carla Hesse,

“Enlightenment Epistemology and the Laws of Authorship in Revolutionary France, 1777–1793,” Representations 30 (1990): 109–37.

³³ Christopher Kendrick, Milton: A Study in Ideology and Form (New York: Methuen, 1986), 27–29. As evidence that the rhetoric of Milton’s divorce tracts also shows uneasiness with a dualist separation of spirit and matter, Stephen M. Fallon similarly points to “metaphors having in common outsides-without-insides, metaphors that press upon us the metaphysical implications of the metaphorical mode”; Fallon, “The metaphysics of Milton’s divorce tracts,” in Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton’s Prose, ed. David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 75.

³⁴ For an account of the marquis de Mirabeau’s conversion by Quesnay that pays special attention to Quesnay’s strictures on writing style and metaphor, see Liana Vardi, The Physiocrats and the World of the Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 124–30.

³⁵ “I . . . agree with Mr. Milton, and say, that . . . you had almost as good kill a Man, as a good Book,” Charles Blount, “A Just Vindication of Learning, and the Liberty of the Press” [1679], 4, in The Miscellaneous Works of Charles Blount, Esquire (London: [n.p.], 1695); cf. the pastiche from Areopagitica in, “Reasons Humbly offered for the Liberty of Unlicens’d Printing,” (London: [n.p.], 1693), 4. More typically, William Denton, who paraphrased several passages of Areopagitica without acknowledgment, concluded his version of the metaphor with a historical example, emphasizing the distinctness and importance of human agency above the putative agency of books: “[A]ll and every State should consider how Books as well as men do behave themselves, and punish or not punish accordingly; accordingly one — Carter a Printer suffered in Queen Elizabeths days,” in, “An Apology for the Liberty of the Press,” 7, bound with Jus Caesaris et ecclesiae vere dictae (London: Author, 1681). On seventeenth-century adaptations of

Areopagitica, see George F. Sensabaugh, That Grand Whig Milton (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1952), 58–65, 155–62, and Nicholas von Maltzahn, “The Whig Milton, 1667–1700,” in Milton and Republicanism, 235.

³⁶ [James Thomson], preface, Areopagitica: A Speech of Mr. John Milton, for the Liberty of Unlicens’d Printing (London: Andrew Millar, 1738), iii–viii. On Thomas Newton and the treatment of Milton’s politics in editions of his work, see Dustin Griffin, Regaining Paradise: Milton and the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 13–15.

³⁷ The graft is almost verbatim from a French translation of Alexander Pope’s Essay on Man that appears in a bilingual 1762 edition in Mirabeau’s library catalogue, 110; for the quote, M. S—, trans., Essai sur l’homme (Lausanne: Marc Chapuis, 1762), 36.

³⁸ John Lyon, trans., “Initial Discourse: On the Manner of Studying and Expounding Natural History,” in Lyon and Sloan, eds., From Natural History, 122–23; for the Sorbonne condemnation, see 285–87; Malesherbes qtd. in, 331–33.

³⁹ On Buffon’s epistemology, see esp. Reill, Vitalizing Nature, 54–56.

⁴⁰ The argument that the younger Mirabeau sought to recuperate Physiocratic thought is developed in Louis de Loménie and Charles de Loménie, Les Mirabeau: Nouvelles études sur la société française au XVIII^e siècle, 5 vols. (Paris: E. Dentu, 1879–92), 4:82–85, and François Quastana, La Pensée politique de Mirabeau (1771–1789): “Républicanisme classique” et régénération de la monarchie (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires d’Aix-Marseille, 2007), 395.

⁴¹ Vardi, Physiocrats, 64–65, 125–27, 133–34; for further discussion of Quesnay’s Tableau as rhetorical device, see Jean Cartelier, “Nobility and Royaume agricole: The Tableau économique as a Political Utopia,” in Quesnay and Physiocracy: Studies and Materials, ed. Jean Cartelier and

Gino Longhitano (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012), 62–63. Versions of the Tableau and other diagrams from Physiocratic texts are collected in R. Suaudeau, Les Représentations figurées des Physiocrates, 2nd ed. (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1958).

⁴² Buffon, “The Generation of Animals,” 178.

⁴³ See, for instance, Rogers, Matter of Revolution, on vitalism and the poetic language of Andrew Marvell, 46–60 (46).

⁴⁴ Diderot, Éléments de physiologie (pt. 1, ch. 3), qtd. and trans. in Aram Vartanian, Diderot and Descartes: A Study in Scientific Naturalism in the Enlightenment (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), 244–45. The importance of vitalism (and of Bordeu) to Diderot’s thought, as well as Diderot’s differences with Buffon, are discussed in Andrew H. Clark, Diderot’s Part (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 67–75.

⁴⁵ Diderot, Le rêve de d’Alembert, in Œuvres, 1:627.

⁴⁶ Ménuret, “Œconomie animale,” 11:361.

⁴⁷ William Dodd’s case is discussed in detail in Packham, Eighteenth-Century Vitalism, 111–15.

⁴⁸ Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 13; on Smith’s theory of sympathy in relation to vitalism, see Packham, Eighteenth-Century Vitalism, 64–67.

⁴⁹ Henry Home, Lord Kames, Elements of Criticism, 6th ed., 2 vols., ed. Peter Jones (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 2:533, 538–39.

⁵⁰ On eighteenth-century views of personification, see Heather Keenleyside, “Personification for the People: On James Thomson’s The Seasons,” ELH 76 (2009): 447–72.

⁵¹ Michael Sonenscher, Sans-Culottes: An Eighteenth-Century Emblem in the French Revolution, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 122–23. As Sonenscher proceeds to argue,

Mercier drew on the model of vitalist physiology to criticize Rousseau's political philosophy, which saw the individual and society as radically separate (126–28). Mercier includes a prose imitation of Night-Thoughts in chapter 29 of his utopian novel, The Year 2440. His remarks on Young and the “new physiognomy” of language in Night-Thoughts are quoted in F.

Baldensperger, “Young et ses ‘Nuits’ en France,” in Vol. 1 of Études d’histoire littéraire (Paris: Hachette, 1907), 77.

⁵² Chateaubriand, Essai sur la littérature anglaise et considérations sur le génie des hommes, des temps et des révolutions, ed. Sébastien Baudoin (Paris: Société des textes français modernes, 2012), 349.

⁵³ Samuel Johnson, “Milton,” ed. Stephen Fix, in Vol. 21 of The Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. John H. Middendorf (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2010), 126.

⁵⁴ One anonymous reviewer immediately complained that Johnson's illustration was “by no means analogous,” for even if an author offends there are “bondsmen, as we may call them, the printer and publisher” responsible for his book; rev. of The Works of the English Poets, Monthly Review, or Literary Journal, 1752–1825, 61 (August 1779): 86. In 1780 the Whig archdeacon Francis Blackburne took Johnson's metaphor as the central textual crux in his Remarks on Johnson's Life of Milton. To Which Are Added, Milton's Tractate “Of Education” and “Areopagitica” (London: [n.p.], 1780), 62–65.

⁵⁵ William Hayley, The Life of Milton, 2nd ed. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1796), 89. Johnson and Hayley's statements appeared, for instance, in William Belsham's History of Great Britain, From the Revolution to the Accession of the House of Hanover, 2 vols. (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798), 1:410; in a note referring to Areopagitica in The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq., with notes and illustrations by Joseph Warton, D.D. and others, 9 vols. (London: B.

Law, J. Johnson, C. Dilly, et al., 1797), 4:321–22, that was reprinted under the heading “The Liberty of the Press” in a set of “Literary Anecdotes and Observations, Selected from the Notes to the New Edition of Pope’s Works, by Dr. Warton,” in The Universal Magazine of knowledge and pleasure (November 1797: 313) and The Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany (December 1797: 435–36); as an entry in “Newspaper Chat,” The Examiner (19 August 1827): 11, and “Miscellaneous,” The Bury and Norwich Post: Or, Suffolk and Norfolk Telegraph, Essex, Cambridge, & Ely Intelligencer (22 August 1827): 4; and in Holt White, ed., Areopagitica, cxxviii–cxxix.

⁵⁶ Packham, Eighteenth-Century Vitalism, 104–5. The spread of vitalist physiology in France and in Britain were mutually reinforcing; Diderot’s knowledge of Edinburgh vitalism through the work of Robert Whytt is noted in Clark, Diderot’s Part, 54–55.

⁵⁷ Louis Raymond de Véricour, Milton et la poésie épique: cours professé à l’Athénée Royal de Paris (Paris: Delaunay, 1838), 63–64, 97. On Véricour, see Harry Redman, Jr., Major French Milton Critics of the Nineteenth Century (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1994), 97–122.

⁵⁸ Johnson, “Milton,” 197–98.