



## **Mutability and Mystery: Tracing Figurations of Nature in Edmund Spenser's *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* and Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum***

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Change is essential to nature, yet the potential for chaos inherent in disruption agitates a core human fear of living in an ever-changing Lucretian universe. Both Edmund Spenser and Francis Bacon are familiar with this fear and attempt to repair the world by offering divergent pathways to natural order. This essay sets the different figurations of nature in Spenser's *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*, or *Mutabilitie Cantos*, and Bacon's *Novum Organum* side-by-side to argue that Spenser positions orderly nature as a hero opposed to chaos, thus figuring a golden world, while Bacon repositions humanity as hero and nature as chaotic opponent, presenting a hierarchy evocative of a fallen world. Spenser's highly classical, intensely Christian, and richly literary *Mutabilitie Cantos* stands opposed to Bacon's programmatic approach for understanding nature in *Novum Organum*, which calls for the categorical separation of natural, theological, and figurative knowledge. Each author distinctly locates the origins of potentially chaotic change to reveal a key shift in natural philosophical thinking in the early modern period. Between Spenser's and Bacon's works, nature moves from completely possessing her own agency and self-awareness to representing a secret that demands human explication and ordering. To illustrate this shift, the essay examines Spenser's and Bacon's presentations

of nature, including their respective perceptions of nature's visibility and nature's role in a potential recovery of the fallen state of the world. The essay contends that these authors' perspectives on the state of the world hinge on how they position mystery and faith in proximity to nature.

Significant to this comparison are the cosmological philosophies of Aristotle, Lucretius, and Copernicus, whose thinking Spenser and Bacon were aware of and variously engaging with. Aristotle's ancient cosmology, *On the Heavens* (c.350 BCE), is prominent during the early modern period, and his theories posit that an imperfect, changing sublunary realm, including Earth, exists beneath a static, perfect, heavenly realm above; Aristotle's system assumes geocentrism and final causes related to divine purpose. Lucretius's later atomic philosophy, *On the Nature of Things* (first century BCE), challenges Aristotle's teleological worldview, asserting that matter is in motion by its nature and coheres by chance, not by heavenly designs, and thus not for specific purposes. Finally, Nicolaus Copernicus's heliocentric theory, *The Revolution of Heavenly Spheres* (c. 1543), posits heliocentrism in the early modern period. Both Spenser and Bacon are aware of Copernicus's ideas, though Bacon is writing in closer proximity to more heated controversies about them, including Galileo Galilei's related telescopic observations confirming Copernican heliocentrism, published as *Sidereal Messenger* (1609). These cosmological ideas are implicated in Spenser's and Bacon's understandings of nature and its relationship to mystery and faith.

### **Allegorical Nature versus Phenomenological Nature**

Spenser's *Mutabilitie Cantos*, published posthumously in 1609, presents a personified Nature who is powerful in her confident execution of order, which establishes peace and positions her as an authority over, and protector of, creation. Spenser first narratively introduces the figure of Nature in the second *Canto*:

Then forth issewed (great goddesse) great dame *Nature*,  
With goodly port and gracious Maiesty;  
Being far greater and more tall of stature  
Then any of the gods or Powers on hie:  
Yet certes by her face and physnomy,  
Whether she man or woman inly were,  
That could not any creature well descry:  
For, with a veile that wimpled euery where,

Her head and face was hid, that mote to none appeare.<sup>1</sup>

Nature is “greater and more tall of stature” than any other entity set forth in her court; moreover, Nature exudes “Majesty,” a trait ascribed to both royalty and divinity. This superiority is reinforced by her title of “dame,” referring to her rank, though the word is also used for the superior of a nunnery, again commingling courtly and divine authority. Nature’s size and presence set her above other entities of creation. She is also ambiguously gendered: though Spenser casts her as feminine, aligned with tropes of generative motherhood, he specifies that this gendering is a convenience or assumption: “Whether she man or woman inly were, / That could not any creature well descry.” Viewers are not able to determine Nature’s gender because of her rippling veil, which masks not only her face but also the rest of her “physnomy,” rendering her wholly enigmatic.

Spenser’s continues his description of Nature and, in addition to her ambiguous gender and comparatively large size, further illustrates her monstrousness and inscrutability:

That some doe say was so by skill deuized,  
To hide the terror of her vncouth hew,  
From mortall eyes that should be sore agrized;  
For that her face did like a Lion shew,  
That eye of wight could not indure to view:  
But others tell that it so beautious was,  
And round about such beames of splendor threw,  
That it the Sunne a thousand times did pass,  
Ne could be seene, but like an image in a glass.

(VII.vii.6)

Spenser hints at the potentially monstrous visage of Nature but situates this possibility firmly in the speculating minds of an unnamed populace, just as he does for her blinding beauty. This divided perception engenders its own kind of power, as Nature’s mystique fosters wonder in many valences: curiosity, horror, awe.<sup>2</sup> Spenser depicts Nature as fundamentally unknowable, bolstered by the description of the entities within her

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Spenser, “Two Cantos of Mutabilitie,” in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton et al. (Routledge: New York, 2007), VII.vii.5. Hereafter cited by book, canto, and stanza numbers.

<sup>2</sup> On wonder’s multi-valent complexity, see Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonder and the Order of Nature* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 173–214, and Robert John Weston Evans and Alexander Marr, *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 1–20.

purview gathered on Arlo Hill to listen to Mutabilitie debate with Jove. Nature's subjects, which are called to appear by her sergeant, Order, include the gods and their progeny (VII.vii.3) and "...all other creatures, / What-euer life or motion doe retaine" (VII.vii.4). Nature's sovereignty, bodily ambiguity, and orderliness all position her as a mythic androgyne. Phyllis Rackin explains that "[t]he [early modern dramatic] androgyne could be an image of transcendence—of surpassing the bounds that limit the human condition in a fallen world, of breaking through the constraints that material existence imposes on spiritual aspiration or the personal restrictions that define our roles in society."<sup>3</sup> Contrasting with this transcendent hermaphrodite is the Platonic model of a prelapsarian hermaphroditic human species that lived a perfectly balanced, harmonious existence before being divided in twain, eternally damned to search for its other half.<sup>4</sup> Nature's wholeness illustrates a perfection not dependent on completion but upon total unity, just as Nature herself encompasses all.

Reflected against Spenser's other hermaphrodites, Spenser's depiction of Nature is carefully threaded with mythological and divine imagery, presenting her as whole, exalted, potent, and revered. Spenser's other hermaphrodites, namely Venus's statue in *Faerie Queene* Book IV and the commingled Scudamore and Amoret in Book III, are more obviously signaled as problematic. For Spenser's statue of Venus, "The cause why she was couered with a vele, / Was hard to know," but,

they say, she hath both kinds in one,  
Both male and female, both vnder one name:  
She syre and mother is her selfe alone,  
Begets and eke conceiues, ne needeth other none.

(IV.x.41)

Venus's hermaphroditism is simultaneously sexualized and self-generating, characteristics that merit veiling to preserve mystery and modesty. Although Spenser asserts that she is beautiful, powerful, and adored (IV.x.40–42), he alludes to the troubling prayers and offerings left to her (IV.x.43), fraught with various sins and states of languishing torment resulting from unconstrained passions. Adding to Venus's

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<sup>3</sup> Phyllis Rackin, "Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage," *PMLA* 102.1 (1987): 29.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13.3 (1974): 165–208, esp. 183–85.

complicated imagery, “both her feete and legs together twyned / Were with a snake, whose head and tail were fast combyned” (IV.x.40). The ouroboros, a symbol depicting a snake or dragon swallowing its tail, is an ancient symbol of endless cycles. In combination with Venus’s other vexed imagery, it also evokes *Faerie Queene* Book I’s Error, a perversion of normative motherhood whose hermaphroditic, monstrous (I.i.21), and snake-like children eventually consume Error herself (I.i.25). Spenser’s other famous hermaphrodite is the conjoined Scudamore and Amoret, whom, “Had ye them seene, ye would haue surely thought, / That they had beene that faire Hermaphrodite” (III.xii.46). Cast as a symbol of marriage, the couple is also derisively aligned with the emblem of the hermaphrodite from Barthélemy Aneau’s *Picta Poesis*.<sup>5</sup>

In stark contrast to Spenser’s Nature, who is orderly and self-sufficient, Bacon’s idea of nature is more akin to *Mutabilitie*: often disordered and unpredictable, nature needs to be assessed and sorted carefully so that humankind can replicate its works through art, which is Bacon’s ultimate goal and the avenue through which he imagines restoring the fallen world. Bacon’s *Novum Organum* seeks to guide natural historians in their discovery and interpretation of nature’s secrets. It includes a series of aphorisms that offer Bacon’s perspectives on approaching natural knowledge, including experimental directives. Published eleven years after the *Mutabilitie Cantos* in 1620, Bacon’s consideration of nature’s role in relation to human discovery starkly diverges from Spenser’s Nature in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*. Instead of reverencing Nature as a potent, mythical, and divine force of order that humanity regards with awe, Bacon’s phenomenological nature (most often distinctly *not* personified) demands scrutiny. Discovering nature’s secrets, to Bacon, is a necessary part of bettering humankind and restoring our prelapsarian existence.

In *Novum Organum*, Bacon addresses humanity’s tendency to assume order in nature, a problem that results in overlooking nature’s true workings:

The human intellect is constitutionally prone to supposing that there is more order and equality in things than it actually finds. For though there are many things monadic in nature and quite unlike anything else, the intellect nevertheless counterfeits parallels, correspondences and relatives which do not exist. Hence the fiction

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<sup>5</sup> See Donald Cheney, “Spenser’s Hermaphrodite and the 1590 *Faerie Queene*,” in *PMLA* 87.2 (1972): 199. Barthélemy Aneau, “*MATRIMONII TYPUS*,” in *Picta poesis* (Lyons: Macé Bonhomme, 1552), 14, [https://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/facsimile.php?id=sm96\\_a7v](https://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/facsimile.php?id=sm96_a7v).

that *In the heavens everything moves in perfect circles*, with spiral lines and dragons absolutely rejected in all but name.<sup>6</sup>

Bacon explicitly resists the notion that we can assume order in nature without investigation. Following in the tradition of Lucretius' theory of atomic matter, Bacon is interested in more granular inquiry into the material causes of things. This is not to say that there isn't order in nature from Bacon's perspective; indeed, his tripartite division of nature (nature in course, nature errant, nature wrought) assumes that aspects of nature operate in predictable, cyclical, orderly fashions.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, Spenser's and Bacon's natures agree in their function: Bacon's nature in course represents the regular, transmutative cycles of birth, life, and decay; similarly, Spenser's Nature indicates to Mutabilitie this cycle's paradoxical constancy, a constancy which is necessary for life (VII.vii.58). Bacon also rejects the notion of Aristotelian cosmology, with its unmoving spheres, as Spenser's Mutabilitie does when she claims that she holds sway over the gods (VII.vii.47). But this passage emphasizes that while Bacon assumes that a natural order exists, he does not believe that we have begun to understand it, stressing inquiry and scrutiny of nature rather than faith in its workings.

### **Veiled versus Visible Nature**

In addition to her divinely whole, though still importantly conjectural, hermaphroditic form, part of Nature's power lies in her veil, representing her secrecy. Pierre Hadot notes that, "[a]fter the emergence of the philosophical notion of nature, people no longer spoke of divine secrets but rather of the secrets of nature. Gradually, personified Nature herself became the guardian of these secrets."<sup>8</sup> Hadot further explains these secrets in recounting one anonymous medieval author's version of the Numenius story, in which a poet dreams of entering Nature's temple to reveal her secrets but wakes up having realized "that one cannot expose everything to everyone, and that what Nature orders us to hide must be revealed only to a tiny number of people of value" (*The Veil of*

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<sup>6</sup> Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, in *The Instauration Magna Part II: Novum Organum and Associated Texts*, ed. Graham Rees and Maria Wakely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11:83.

<sup>7</sup> For Bacon's tripartite division of natural history, see Francis Bacon, "THE SECOND Booke of FRANCIS BACON; of the proficience or advancement of Learning, Diuine and Humane. To the King.," in *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4:63, and Francis Bacon, "A Description of the Intellectual Globe," in *Philosophical Studies c.1611–c.1619*, ed. Graham Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6:101.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 31.

Isis 63). In this light, Spenser's Nature might be viewed as casting a veil of mystery towards various symbolic ends, including in order to protect her power from vulgar minds and to inspire respect through awe. As Nature rules over both the sublunary realm (as understood in an Aristotelian cosmography) and the celestial spheres, as Spenser makes clear in the *Mutabilitie Cantos* (VII.vi.36), her power is heightened. As Sarah Powrie notes,

[a]s a representation of material substance, Mutabilitie's invasion of the celestial spheres suggests one of the ways that early modern science interrogated the Aristotelian world system. Several sixteenth-century discoveries suggested that the celestial region was not impervious to corruption and change, thus challenging Aristotle's distinction between celestial and terrestrial physics.<sup>9</sup>

While Powrie focuses on Mutabilitie's domain, it is also worth noting that Spenser specifies that Nature holds authority over all of creation, evidenced by her adjudication between the realms: "Eftsoones the time and place appointed were, / Where all, both heauenly Powers, and earthly wights, / Before great Natures presence should appear" (VII.vi.36). Nature's extensive reach illustrates Spenser's interest in non-Aristotelian models of cosmology.<sup>10</sup> As Ayesha Ramachandran asserts, "[t]hat Spenser was alert to these [philosophical] debates and distinctions, and was deeply interested in them, is evidenced by his translation of the invocation to Lucretius's *De rerum natura* in Book IV of *The Faerie Queene* and his repeated attempts to combine Lucretian and Neoplatonic philosophies in various poems" ("Mutabilitie's Lucretian Metaphysics" 223). But Spenser's cosmology remains subject to divine authority through Nature's rule. Along with her other divine attributes, Nature's veil emphasizes her proximity to God and possibly aligns her with *The Faerie Queene's* allegorical figure of the true church, Una, who appears in a veil and wimple (I.i.4). Just as one cannot look upon the face of God,<sup>11</sup> neither can Nature's visage be fully comprehended. To view Nature unveiled would verge on usurping a godly authority outside humankind's and the gods' purview. Spenser's Nature, then, is a figure not meant for human understanding, and is instead wholly in

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Powrie, "Spenser's Mutabilitie and the Indeterminate Universe," *Studies in English Literature* 53.1 (2013): 77.

<sup>10</sup> Ayesha Ramachandran, "Mutabilitie's Lucretian Metaphysics" in *Spenser's Cantos in Celebrating Mutabilitie*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 220–45.

<sup>11</sup> Exodus 33:20: "And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." *The English Bible, King James Version: The Old Testament*, ed. Herbert Marks (New York: Norton, 2012).

service to the order of things determined by a Christian God.

Unlike Spenser's figure of Nature, who seems trusted to rule over and dispense order in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, Bacon states clearly that humans must order nature for themselves through systemic understanding.<sup>12</sup> The significance of human agency in the process of recuperating natural order is emphasized in Bacon's discussion of order's precursor, discovery:

But if it be dear to the heart of any mortal men not to stick only with existing discoveries but to penetrate further, and not to overcome an opponent in disputation but to conquer nature in operation, and in fine not to express pretty and probable opinions but to acquire certain and ostensive knowledge, let such people (if it be the right course for them) join hands with me as true sons of the sciences to leave behind nature's entrance halls (trodden by countless feet), and at last throw open the doors to her inner sanctum.

(*Novum Organum* 59)

Bacon's metaphor comparing deeper inquiry of nature to overcoming a foe blurs the boundaries between intellectual investigation and conquest; indeed, the phrase, "not to overcome an opponent in disputation but to conquer nature in operation" renames the "opponent" as "nature" in a correlative construction. Bacon depicts nature as an inscrutable opponent that must be subdued by humankind through investigation. In this way, Bacon calls for others to join forces with him in a contest at once Christian in impetus but secular in process. Bacon relies on the metaphor of noble trial and conflict present in epics, including Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, but leaves out the actual trappings of myth including knights, fictional monsters, and heightened allegory that Spenser so relies upon, distancing his work from a poetics inspired by faith and instead associating it with the logical, mundane relationship between action and consequence. In Bacon's discussion of nature, it is humankind, not Nature, who is responsible for understanding divine dispensation set forth by God through a recuperative ordering of nature. If Spenser's divine veil imbues Nature with authority, the secrecy of Bacon's nature demands interrogation, supported by his assertion that it is part of God's divine plan for humankind to penetrate, assess, and categorize the contents of nature's most sequestered and esoteric

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<sup>12</sup> Sachiko Kusukawa, "Bacon's Classification of Knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. Markku Peltonen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 58.

“operations” hidden in “her inner sanctum.”<sup>13</sup> For Bacon, such intense scrutiny of nature’s holdings by the combined force of humanity is the only way to restore the world to its original, unfallen order.

### **Restoration through Faith versus Mastery**

By engaging with divine and mythological symbolism, Spenser roots his conception of Nature in the mythology of a golden world. This rhetorical posture evokes Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy*, wherein he outlines a golden world brought forth by the imaginations of poets and full of elevated heroes and symbolic monsters against a backdrop of a perfected nature, one more fertile and sensorily appealing than the nature of our lived reality.<sup>14</sup> As *The Faerie Queene* reinforces, Spenser’s conception of Nature is replete with anomalies, monsters, and examples of base humanity, all of which are encompassed by Mutabilitie’s characterization as chaotic and in flux in the *Cantos*. Importantly, Spenser positions Nature as the hero in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, for she reacquaints Mutabilitie with her place in the cosmos, neutralizes conflict, and stabilizes natural order. In other words, Spenser imagines a world in which Nature is golden, not fallen. In allegorizing Nature in the fictional space, Spenser also offers a way of viewing nature in our mundane, fallen world as a powerful, divine force. In doing so, Spenser illuminates a pathway for restoring the world through faith in Nature’s order.

Spenser’s final “vnperfite” Canto VIII cements Nature’s power and asserts that the order she brings heralds peace, the second of its two stanzas proceeding as follows:

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,  
Of that same time when no more *Change* shall be,  
But stedfast rest of all things firmly stayd  
Vpon the pillours of Eternity,  
That is contrayr to *Mutabilitie*:  
For, all that moueth, doth in *Change* delight:  
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally  
With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:  
O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight.

(VII.viii.2)

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<sup>13</sup> Hadot notes that, “the idea of a Nature that hides evokes the image of a feminine figure that could be unveiled” (*The Veil of Isis* 63).

<sup>14</sup> Philip Sidney, “The Defense of Poesy,” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Sixteenth Century / The Early Seventeenth Century* (Volume B), 10th ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and George Logan (New York: Norton, 2018), 552.

Interpretations of this canto, and of its final stanza, vary widely. Powrie views the “Canto, vnperfite” as “paralyzed by ambivalence and ambiguity,” which “subverts the allegorical orientation toward poetic ecstasy and totalizing answers” (“Mutabilitie and the Indeterminate Universe” 85); Ramachandran claims that, “[t]he *Mutabilitie Cantos* do return to faith and may even affirm the evangelical fideism demanded by Calvin and Luther—but it is a hard-won and compassionate faith, born out of the sceptical abyss, and filled with a new understanding of the impersonal cosmic process” (“Mutabilitie’s Lucretian Metaphysics” 240). I agree that Spenser’s *Cantos* engage in new notions of natural philosophy, but interpret that Spenser does not seem ready to abandon the capacities of myth and faith to mollify fears of a shifting world and worldview. Instead, the natural and cosmological stasis Nature promises when the world is restored by God provides respite from unceasing change. The “Canto, vnperfite” finally relinquishes power to God, with Nature as a divinely-sanctioned harbinger sending forth a hopeful prayer for wholeness, order, and perfection that, for Spenser, brings ultimate peace.

Bacon does not offer hope for peace brought about by an external force, but instead emphasizes active striving to regain what he views as humankind’s rightful control over nature, a view derived from his perception of a prelapsarian world in which humankind possessed “command over created things,”<sup>15</sup>

from [which] an improvement in man’s lot is bound to follow, and an enlargement of his power over nature. For by his fall man lost both his state of innocence and his command over created things. However, both of these losses can to some extent be made good even in this life, the former by religion and faith, the latter by the arts and sciences. For the curse did not quite put creation into a state of unremitting rebellion, but by virtue of that injunction *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread*, it is now by various labours (not for sure by disputations and the idle ceremonies of magic) at length and to some degree mitigated to allow man his bread or, in other words, for the use of human life.

(*Novum Organum* 447)

For Bacon, religion has a role in restoring the innocence and moral rectitude of humankind, just as the arts and sciences—the manipulation and study of nature,

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 2:15: “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.” *The English Bible, King James Version: The Old Testament*, ed. Herbert Marks (Norton: New York, 2012).

respectively—can partially restore a hierarchy where humans once again have power over nature. In Bacon’s posthumously published *New Atlantis* (1626), he puts forth the idea of a culmination of the world that is possible when humans recover their lost knowledge of nature; therein, he looks forward to deferential Christian social structures as well as to perfect human mastery of medicine, weather, and other sciences.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to Spenser’s final vision in the “Canto, vnperfite” of an ultimately peaceful stasis brought about by God to recover a monstrously fallen, mutable, and moving world, Bacon’s utopian vision of peace and order emphasizes mastery achieved through movement and striving labor on the part of a heroic humanity. In Bacon’s view, nature’s lack of transparency after the fall creates chaos and upheaval, positioning postlapsarian, shifting nature as the chaotic force that must be exposed and subdued by humanity’s heroic efforts. In the same way that Spenser positions Nature near God, Bacon posits that the recovery of the golden world falls within the purview of human activity and responsibility, though he is careful to keep myth out of his descriptions of the processes needed to achieve that vision. For Bacon, the mythic is predicated on a poetic imagination too detached from nature’s true workings, and thus requiring faith in the mysterious and hidden, which are antithetical to his natural philosophical program and interest in material causes. Bacon’s nature in his literature is the same fallen, phenomenological nature in which we live, and only the heroism of humanity can turn nature golden again.

## Conclusion

While both Spenser’s and Bacon’s versions of nature are veiled, for Spenser, the veil is sacred, pointing towards faith in Nature’s hidden design to find peace in the order she creates. For Bacon, nature’s secrecy is vexatious and fraught, requiring constant labor to understand its innermost working. Bacon’s temporal nearness to the Copernican revolution in the early seventeenth century, as well as his insistence that nature and theology be treated separately, may have fomented his conception of humankind’s adversarial relationship with nature. Bacon sees an imbalance of power between humans and nature as frustrating and yet as constituting part of humanity’s punishment after the fall. Spenser, in his engagement with the imaginative possibility of myth, seems content

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<sup>16</sup> Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*, in *Selected Philosophical Works*, ed. Rose-Mary Sargent (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 239–68.

to trust that God, working through Nature, will provide both answers and peace, even in a shifting cosmological landscape; Bacon, with his compartmentalized faith and refusal to engage directly with myth, sees the labor inherent in the investigation of nature as necessary and even as part of the penance required to re-establish ourselves outside of nature's subjugation.

As Ramachandran and Powrie have observed as an argument essential to Spenser, understanding nature is fundamentally connected to understanding the cosmos. Examining these figurations of nature in the context of one another elucidates a change in natural philosophical thinking, one that shifts the response to discomfort with imperfect human understanding. The emphasis in response moves from embracing faith in God's and Nature's ordering and eventual perfection toward urgent exploration reminiscent of the change and struggle Spenser's *Mutabilitie* embodies. Bacon, however, importantly places the burden of subduing change on human activity, not in blind faith. Bacon envisions a framework of progress with less certainty of the end point, but an insistence on striving towards understanding. If, as Spenser's *Nature* notes, *Mutabilitie* would be undone by her very desire to be an all-encompassing and rigid authority devoid of change (VII.vii.59), Bacon suggests that humanity's postlapsarian condition is such that we might achieve some order, in time, and perhaps even thrive through our heroic striving.