

**Sacramental Signification:
Eucharistic Poetics from Chaucer to Milton**

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Resumé.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One:	
Medieval Sacraments: Immanence and Transcendence in The Pearl-poet and Chaucer.....	23
Chapter Two:	
Southwell's Mass: Sacrament and Self.....	76
Chapter Three:	
Herbert's Eucharist: Giving More.....	123
Chapter Four:	
Donne's Communion.....	181
Chapter Five:	
Communion in Two Kinds: Milton's Bread and Crashaw's Wine.....	252
Epilogue:	
The Future of Presence.....	325
Works Cited.....	330

Abstract

This dissertation argues that in early modern England the primary theoretical models by which poets understood how language means what it means were applications of eucharistic theology. The logic of this thesis is twofold, based firstly on the cultural centrality of the theology and practice of the eucharist in early modern England, and secondly on the particular engagement of poets within that social and intellectual context. My study applies this conceptual relationship, what I call “eucharistic poetics,” to English religious and lyric poetry as it evolved from the late medieval to the early modern period. Introducing my discussion with a consideration of two important late medieval English authors, Geoffrey Chaucer and the Pearl-poet, I focus on five key early modern poets—Robert Southwell, John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, and John Milton. The vigorous contemporary conflicts over the eucharist influenced these poets, I argue, not only because the sacrament reflected the central concerns of the late-medieval world and the Reformation, but also because it framed those concerns through a debate about signs: what these signs do, how they function, and, even more importantly, how poets relate to the signs they create. Poets, therefore, saw in the discordant theological positioning surrounding the eucharist a framework for understanding and exploring their own kind of written sign-making.

This thesis, however, also challenges a dominant critical narrative that associates the presence of sacramental language in seventeenth-century poetry with the Protestant rejection of transubstantiation and, in turn, with a process of secularization. In part through its direct consideration of Catholic and medieval writing, it argues that “eucharistic poetry” is neither the unique product of early modern Protestantism, nor indicative of what has been read as one of Protestantism’s fruits, the birth of the modern “buffered” subject. Instead, I claim that the

eucharist provides the poets I consider not only a model of signification, but a model of poetic agency, according to which the composition of poems opens the self to presences other than its own.

Resumé

Cette thèse soutient que dans l'Angleterre du début des temps modernes, les principaux modèles théoriques selon lesquels les poètes comprenaient comment le langage signifie ce qu'il signifie étaient des applications de la théologie de l'eucharistie. L'argumentaire s'appuie sur deux considérations : premièrement, la place centrale qu'occupaient la théologie et la pratique de l'eucharistie en Angleterre à cette époque; deuxièmement, la nature de l'engagement des poètes dans ce contexte social et intellectuel. Mon étude applique cette relation conceptuelle, que j'appelle la « poésie eucharistique », à la poésie lyrique et religieuse anglaise de la fin de la période médiévale jusqu'au début des temps modernes. J'introduis ma discussion en considérant deux auteurs anglais importants de la fin de la période médiévale, Geoffrey Chaucer et le poète de *Pearl*. Je tourne ensuite mon attention vers cinq poètes du début de la période moderne - Robert Southwell, John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw et John Milton. Je soutiens que les vigoureux débats contemporains sur l'eucharistie ont influencé ces poètes non seulement parce que le sacrement exprimait les principales préoccupations du monde de la fin de la période médiévale et de la Réforme, mais aussi parce qu'il fournissait un cadre conceptuel par le biais d'un débat sur les signes : ce que ces signes font, comment ils fonctionnent, et de façon encore plus importante, comment les poètes se rapportent aux signes qu'ils créent. Les poètes, ainsi, ont trouvé un cadre conceptuel pour comprendre et explorer leur propre genre de création de signes écrits dans les positions théologiques discordantes sur l'eucharistie.

Cette thèse conteste aussi un discours critique dominant, qui associe la présence de langage sacramental dans la poésie du XVII^e siècle au rejet protestant de la transsubstantiation et au processus de sécularisation qui l'a suivi. En partie par sa considération directe d'écrits catholiques et médiévaux, elle soutient que la « poésie eucharistique » n'est ni un simple résultat

du protestantisme du début des temps modernes, ni un signe de ce qui est considéré un des résultats du protestantisme, la naissance du sujet autonomisé des temps modernes. Je prétends plutôt que l'eucharistie fournit aux poètes que je considère, non seulement un modèle de signification mais aussi un modèle d'action poétique indirecte, selon lequel la composition de poèmes ouvre le soi à d'autres présences que la sienne.

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Introduction:

The Presence of the Eucharist in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Poetry

In the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, the first Protestant liturgy instituted systematically in England, the heading for the eucharistic rubric reads:

❧ THE SUPPER ❧
of the Lorde, and the holy Com-
-munion, commonly cal-
led the Masse.¹

Like much of Cranmer's text, this heading pointedly announces its theological reforms at the same time that it suggests a degree of continuity with the traditions of pre-Reformation practice. The capitalized "SUPPER" at the top of the page, which emphasizes the sacrament as a shared meal that remembers Christ's Last Supper, clearly identifies what follows as Protestant. Yet Cranmer makes a subtle appeal to readers ambivalent about his reforming goals with the addition, "commonly called the Masse." This is partially a practical addendum. It would have helped many of the English clergy, often not terribly well educated in the new theologies of the Reformation, to navigate the new handbook and recognize that here was the liturgy replacing the missal. The text is implicitly corrective, reminding its readers that the eucharist is only commonly *called* the Mass. Even so, it still suggests some sense of basic continuity between the age-old celebration of the Latin rite and the new communion liturgy. The heading does not make an absolute distinction between the Mass, which for folk like Calvin was a papistical heresy, and the Lord's Supper, which many Reformers saw as something else entirely.

For Cranmer, the liturgy of the Mass needed to be edited for doctrine, and brought into line with scripture, but the ritual itself did not need to be abandoned. Cranmer was quite happy to

¹ All quotations from *The Book of Common Prayer* come from Brian Cummings, ed. *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

use the old Sarum rite as the source for most of his new liturgy. In his preface to the 1549 *BCP*, Cranmer is clear that he sees the old liturgy as having been corrupted by sin. Its perversion reflects a general feature of the fallen world, that there “was never any thing by the wit of man so well devised, or so surely established, which (in continuance of time) hath not been corrupted.”² In the same text’s explication “Of Ceremonies,” though, Cranmer is equally insistent that Protestant critics of the new liturgy “cannot reasonably reprove the olde (onelye for theyr age) without bewraiynge of theyr owne folye.”³ Cranmer’s inclination, in the eucharistic liturgy as elsewhere, was to retain from tradition anything that could reasonably be reformed. Usually, even the additions he made to his Latin source texts were not new compositions, but drawn from scripture, Patristic sources, or the continental Reformers. His text thus presented itself as a compendium of orthodox tradition, both drawing together in its pages different voices from the tradition of the Church and also presenting itself as a culmination of that tradition. Cranmer’s project of gathering tradition is apparent in the heading quoted above. The eucharist is the “Supper of the Lord,” the name most popular among more radical Protestants. It is also identified—with a telling “and”—as “holy Communion,” which draws attention to the ecclesial function of the sacrament, its role in cementing the unity of a single mystical and political English body. Cranmer, when he can, tries not to pit the different theologies and functions of the eucharist against each other. He would rather use them all to inform his liturgy.

Cranmer’s text did not win universal favour. His reforms fell significantly short of those “hotter” Protestants had hoped for and, at the other end of the theological spectrum, led to armed uprisings by Roman Catholics in Devon and Cornwall. These unhappy parties simply did not buy into Cranmer’s liturgical ameliorations. For the more radical Protestants, Cranmer’s eucharistic

² Ibid., 4.

³ Ibid., “Of Ceremonies,” 216.

liturgy depended too much on a tradition utterly vitiated by sin. For those who took up arms in the Prayer Book Rebellion, the new vernacular liturgy actually seemed to steal away the bodily presence of Christ exclusively attainable in the Latin Mass. The history of the eucharist in England, we see, reveals just how much was at stake in interpretations of the sacrament. Within that history, there is much in a name, and the fact that the ritual has so many—the eucharist, the Mass, the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion, the sacrament of the altar, the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood—only underscores just how various and vexed conceptions of it were.

This dissertation explores the complex significance of the eucharist as it appears in and influences English poetry from Chaucer to Milton. It pursues two main goals: to articulate how each of the poets in this study turns to the eucharist as a way of understanding poetic sign-making and to intervene in a recent body of critical work that has examined the relationship between the eucharist and poetry in early modern England. This body of criticism, which includes monographs by Regina Schwartz, Robert Whalen, Theresa DiPasquale, Ryan Netzley, Kimberly Johnson, and Sophie Read, rightly identifies what remains a central claim of my dissertation: that for early modern English poets the primary theoretical models for understanding how language means what it means were applications of eucharistic theology.⁴ The critics, though, have universally identified the connection between eucharist and poetry as an early modern, Protestant, and secularizing phenomenon, almost all because they see poetry

⁴ Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Robert Whalen, *The Poetry of Immanence: Sacrament in Donne & Herbert* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Theresa DiPasquale *Literature and Sacrament: The Sacred and the Secular in John Donne* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999); Ryan Netzley, *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

acting as a form of consolation for the loss of transubstantiation.⁵ For them, the eucharist is always present in poetry in the same way, and eucharistic presence, as we will see, is always understood as one kind of thing only. This dissertation, in contrast, by attending to the different sacramental theologies of the late middle ages and early modernity, argues against the notion that eucharistic poetics is exclusively early modern, definitively Protestant, or straightforwardly secularizing. In order to describe clearly how it will do so, though, it is first necessary to explain why eucharistic theology became so important to late medieval and early modern English poets. This explanation, in turn, will clarify why and how my project explores a feature of eucharistic poetics so far insufficiently addressed by critics, namely, how the sacrament provides poets a model of agency as well as a model of signification.

The Presence of the Eucharist in English Poetry

The eucharist, in nearly every expression of Christianity, is the central ritual of Christian belief. Despite its variation across a remarkable variety of historical and geographic contexts, this rite has always involved a corporate act of eating bread and (usually) drinking wine.⁶ All varieties of the practice trace their origin to the command of Christ at the Last Supper, recorded in the synoptic Gospels and in 1 Corinthians:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.⁷

Yet the purposes of the ritual are complex, and vary in emphasis between traditions, even as they all draw on the same set of biblical passages. Preeminent among these differences in the history

⁵ Sophie Read is the only critic who considers an unambiguously Roman Catholic poet, but even for her, as I discuss in chapter two, Catholic theological thinking hobbles a more creative version of eucharistic poetics.

⁶ Though sometimes, particularly in the “high” medieval Europe, this “corporateness” could be understood as represented by the communicating priest, who might receive the elements alone, though only by virtue of his sacerdotal authority to stand in for the church as a whole.

⁷ Matthew 26:26-28. All biblical quotations come from the Oxford World Classics edition of the Authorized Version (1997).

of the western Church was the understanding of what Christ means by “this is my body,” whether this is to be understood literally, figuratively, or in both ways at once.

According to Alister McGrath, all expressions of the eucharist involve, in some way, four main functions: recollection, anticipation, affirmation of individual faith, and affirmation of corporate belonging. The eucharist’s first role is memorial: believers “recall the saving acts of God in general, and, above all, the cross and resurrection of Christ.”⁸ Secondly, the eucharist invites a consideration of the future, holding out an eschatological promise of Christ’s return. This feature of the eucharist has not often been considered in literary discussions of the sacrament, but it is importantly highlighted in the Apostle Paul’s claim that “as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”⁹ The third role of the eucharist is the one on which, up to this point, literary critics have almost exclusively focused: the eucharist affirms the individual faith of the believer by mediating access, in some fashion, to the presence of Jesus Christ. The questions of how exactly this presence ought to be understood—real or figurative, bodily or virtual, and so on—and by what mechanism it affirms faith—metaphysical participation, contemplative engagement, etc.—were and remain hotly contested by Christian theologians. It is important to remember, however, that the debates about Christ’s local presence in the sacrament cannot be isolated from its other functions. The affirmation of individual faith is entangled with the actions of recollection, with anticipation, and also with what McGrath identifies as the eucharist’s fourth function, its affirmation of corporate belonging. This sense of belonging occurs not only between each individual communicant and the others with whom they perform the ritual, but between each Christian and the entire body of the faithful, living, dead, and yet-to come. This belonging implies a commitment of support to

⁸ *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 411.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:26.

those various senses of the Church community, a fact gestured at by the original meaning of the Latin *sacramentum*: “a solemn oath of obedience.”¹⁰ These four functions overlap significantly, so much so that, especially in the late medieval and early modern period, it would be inappropriate to think of them as fundamentally separate.

Historically, though, these four aspects of the eucharist have been articulated with incredible variety, both as they manifest in practice and in the systematic theological accounts of what actually happens to the elements and believers during that celebration. While the Patristic writers and the theologians of late antiquity are pointedly vague about the “physics” of the eucharist, by the thirteenth century the foremost theological position of orthodox western Christendom on the eucharist was the doctrine of transubstantiation, expressed most fully by Thomas Aquinas.¹¹ This doctrine held that the bread and wine worshipers consumed actually became Christ’s physical body. In order to explain the fact that the bread and wine did not *appear* to become flesh and blood, theologians like Aquinas applied to the problem a particular interpretation of Aristotelian metaphysics that divided physical entities into two parts: the accidents, their outward appearances, and the substances, their ontological essences. The orthodox perspective of the late medieval Church was that though the accidents of the eucharistic elements stayed the same, their substance changed into the real body and blood of Christ. The Thomist account of transubstantiation, though, ends up producing a peculiar account of “body,” since it insists that Christ’s human body is never divided or broken, only “extended” to those participating in the ritual. Christ’s body has a “real presence” in the eucharist, in other words, but its real presence is quite different in nature than, say, the physical presence of communicants or

¹⁰ *Christian Theology*, 414.

¹¹ Both Miri Rubin’s *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and G.J.C. Snoek’s *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction* (New York: Brill, 1995) provide good comprehensive accounts of the historical backgrounds of this theological development.

priest during the celebration. To make things even more complicated, the Roman account of the eucharist also posited that the sacrament was not merely mnemonic of Christ's sacrifice, but somehow re-offered Christ's body as a sacrifice on behalf of sin.

In Reformation-era Europe, Protestant reformers radically rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation. Yet theologians like Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli did not abolish the communion, they presented new accounts of how Christ *was* present in the bread and the wine. Luther proposed that Christ's body is present in the eucharist in the same sense that it is present in all of redeemed creation (Consubstantiation). The consecration of the bread only makes Christ's ubiquitous presence locally revealed. Calvin argued that Christ's body is not physically present, but that the bread and wine take on the effects of Christ's presence (Virtualism). Thus the communion was a special vehicle for Christ's grace, though it was a vehicle rather than Christ himself. For Zwingli, however, the bread and wine served only as mnemonic markers (Memorialism). The benefit or lack thereof for participants depended entirely on their contemplative involvement.

The intensity of the debates that surrounded these different interpretations, both between Catholics and Protestants, as well as among the Protestants themselves, reveals that eucharistic doctrines were not religious quiddities that could be isolated from the broader political, doctrinal, and ecclesial issues at stake in the period. Rather, the eucharist expressed and reflected all of these issues. The elevation of the host, for example, not only demonstrates a belief in the bodily presence of Christ, marking the host as an appropriate object of adoration, it also points to the unique ability of the priest to invoke that presence with the words of institution, *hoc est enim corpus meum*. Conversely, the insistence of some Protestant groups that the central piece of eucharistic furniture be a table rather than an altar highlights not only the memorial rather than

sacrificial nature of the ritual, it also minimalizes the distinction between celebrant and participant, bringing them together around a communal board. In almost all of its details, the sacrament performed not only denominational commitments, but expressed how the individual Christian related to God, the material world, and the other. Fundamentally, though, we can break down the debate over sacramental theories and practices as aiming to give an answer to, and understand the relationship between, two key questions: firstly, “What are the bread and wine doing?” and secondly, “What am I doing?” Framed in these terms, it becomes easier to see why the eucharist was so important to poets, who found in the sacrament a way of understanding both what their words do, and also how their activity as writers relates to the presence of their words. The eucharist, to put it another way, becomes a powerful way for poets to think through representation and agency.

As it relates to *representation*, the eucharist became a way to consider the nature of the relationship between signs and the things they signify. The various theologies of communion in early modern Europe provide different accounts of this relationship, differing on how it is that the signs of the eucharist (the bread and wine) communicate what they signify (Christ). Under Aquinas’ model, the eucharistic signs are identical with what they signify. Thus the sign operates not as a conduit or intermediary, but as the thing itself. Even in this model of signification, though, as chapter one discusses in more detail, it would be wrong to think of eucharistic presence as mere reification or unqualified immanence. Paradoxically, according to the doctrine of transubstantiation, though Christ *is* the elements, there are still aspects of his presence that remain not fully accessible in the elements themselves or in the moment of reception. In Calvin’s account of the eucharist, the sign is *not* identical with the signified, and yet it retains a unique and inherent power to exhibit that signified. For Calvin, the signification of the eucharist

functions rather like what J.L. Austin called an *illocutionary act* (or in Searle's terms, the *speech act*), in which the sign brings about what it signifies, though remaining meaningfully distinct from it. So, when the officiant of a wedding declares the couple married, his statement does not merely represent some fact out there in the world (though it does do this), it causes that fact to be. The statement, "I pronounce you man and wife," is not identical to the matrimony, and yet it is not separable from the fact of the matrimony. In a similar vein, Calvin often describes the action of the eucharist as a "seal," with its own very powerful "illocutionary" effect,¹² enacting the authority of the person it represents. The key difference for Calvin between the "seal" of the eucharist and the "sealing" power of human speech acts is that the eucharist is guaranteed by Christ, whose authority over reality is of a fundamentally higher order than any human's.

Despite their significant differences, Aquinas and Calvin both give an account of the communicative function of the eucharistic sign, each providing a model that explains how Christ's presence is assured in or by the eucharistic signs. To this extent they represent a concern that occupies the eucharistic theology of the period: guaranteeing that sacramental signification *makes present* what it signifies, that is, Christ. Yet if theologies of the eucharist presented competing accounts of how the sacrament made Christ present in the elements, they also gave different accounts of other kinds and modes of presence. First of all, as I have already hinted, sacramental theologies were often at pains to clarify that Christ is present in other places, ways, or times than he is in the elements. In all versions of the eucharist, as McGrath points out, Christ

¹² See *Institutes* 3.17.10: "That sacred communion of flesh and blood by which Christ transfuses his life into us, just as if it penetrated our bones and marrow, he testifies and seals in the Supper, and that not by presenting a vain or empty sign, but by there exerting an efficacy of the Spirit by which he fulfills what he promises." Calvin distinguishes between sign and signified, whilst maintaining their inextricability, with particular nuance: "[to some] to eat is merely to believe; while I maintain that the flesh of Christ is eaten by believing, because it is made ours by faith, and that that eating is the effect and fruit of faith; or, if you will have it more clearly, according to them, eating is faith, whereas it rather seems to me to be a consequence of faith. The difference is little in words, but not little in reality. For, although the apostle teaches that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17), no one will interpret that dwelling to be faith. All see that it explains the admirable effect of faith, because to it is owing that believers have Christ dwelling in them" (3.17.5).

is both already present in or with the elements *and* also not yet present in the way he will be at the resurrection. The ritual celebrates a certain kind of presence that is already here now, but it also anticipates another kind of presence that is yet to be. The sacrament also looks back to another kind of Christic presence distinct from that in the elements: Jesus' death on the cross. As this dissertation will discuss frequently, while Roman Catholics believed (and believe) this sacrificial presence is somehow recapitulated in the Mass, Protestant theologies had in common their insistence that the eucharist was not sacrificial in the same sense that Christ's death was. As Cranmer's eucharistic prayer makes clear, the sacrament makes the *effects* of Christ's death available to the believer, but the sacrifice itself remains "*once offered*."¹³

If eucharistic theology articulates different forms of Christ's presence, though, it also expresses a complex account of the communicant's presence. As Lee Palmer Wandel helpfully articulates, in their different theologies of the eucharist, "each Church had articulated how Christ became integral to each human being's body." "For each Christian," he reminds us, "those who did not partake of Christ's body in the way he or she did no longer shared the same body. They were, indeed, not human in the same way."¹⁴ For late medieval and early modern Christians, in other words, self-identity was tied into and dependent upon the differing sacramental articulations of the relation between that self, Christ's physical body, and the corporate body of the Church. What different versions of the eucharist present, therefore, are not just different understandings of how Christ relates to the sacramental signs, but of how the *self* is understood to be present to that sign, to Christ, and to other human beings, apart from whom Christ's presence cannot be experienced.

¹³ "Almighty God our heavenly father whiche of thy tender mercye, diddest give thine onely Sonne Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the Crosse for our redemption, who made ther (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the synnes of the whole worlde." 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, 136-7.

¹⁴ *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 262.

It is because the eucharist presents such a complex performed articulation of the relationship between signification and the self that it is so important to poets. To the poets of late medieval and early modern England, the application of eucharistic theology to poetic problems served a number of functions. It became, for one thing, a way to defend the value of verse, especially religious verse. Late medieval and early modern English culture could be quite skeptical about poetry, often particularly because it could be seen as naturally antagonistic to spiritual concerns or because it was treated as privileging the pleasant “accidents” of language over its substance or truth-value. Understanding poetry as a form of sacramental signification, therefore, acted in part as an apology for verse, and became a way for poets to imagine the consecration of their work. For poets like Robert Southwell and George Herbert, as we will see, a eucharistic conception of poetics was integral to their intended cultural reformation of verse, by which they hoped to transform English poetry from a secular to a sacred genre of writing. As many other critics have pointed out, the debates that surround Christ’s presence in the eucharist also became a way of thinking through the nature of poetic representation. Regina Schwartz rightly argues that the poets of this period are keenly aware of a parallel between the work of the eucharist and of poetry: “As sign-making characterizes the sacrament of the Eucharist, it also does poetry, which is similarly engaged in making present what is absent—not just in select figures of speech, like prosopopoeia, but in the very poetic enterprise.”¹⁵ Because eucharistic theology and practice were so central to the life of Christendom, and because the sacrament itself was the centre of such high-stakes debates about signification, it quite naturally became a way for poets to answer questions about their own forms of signification. To what extent do words make a poet present? How do signs relate to the things they signify? Is poetic signification valuable in its own right, or merely as a conduit for meaning?

¹⁵ *Sacramental Poetics*, 8.

This role the eucharist has informing poetic representation is an extremely important one, and has been recognized as so by critics, but a significant problem with the recent literary-critical readings of eucharistic poetics is that they have usually understood the question of Christ's presence in isolation from other sacramental questions. As we have seen, though, the relationship between Christ's presence and the elements cannot be understood as a sign-signified pair insulated from other presences within and outside the sacrament. Even for Catholics, Christ's presence in the elements is not exactly the same kind of presence he has elsewhere or at other times. Whatever the nature of Christ's presence in the eucharist, it does not exist there alone. The eucharist does not merely involve Christ's sign-making, but also the communicant's sign-receiving. From the communicant's perspective, moreover, the eucharistic encounter with signs is profoundly challenging. The presence of the sign, and of Christ with or in the sign, radically re-orientates an understanding of the receiver's subjectivity and agency. As theologian and philosopher Jean-Luc Marion expresses it, "The Eucharist requires of whoever approaches it a radical conceptual self-critique and charges him with renewing his norms of thought."¹⁶ The communicant acts on the elements, eating them and incorporating them into his body, but his very act of eating reveals that he is being acted upon by Christ, who incorporates the communicant into his mystical body. By recognizing that incorporation, the communicant, through his interaction with the eucharistic sign, becomes aware not only how his agency and subjectivity are subject to Christ's, but how they both depend on and are formed by others outside the self. The eucharistic encounter with signs, therefore, posits a subjectivity defined by its encounter with God and others. This dissertation explores what can be thought of as the bi-directionality of eucharistic signification, that is, not only how the eucharist informs medieval

¹⁶ *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 163.

and early modern poetic understandings of how poets make words, but also of how words make poets.

Eucharistic Presence

Until fairly recently, very little critical work had been devoted to the connection between literature and the eucharist in English poetry. This started to change in the early 2000's, with a few studies that focused narrowly on John Donne and George Herbert. Since 2008, however, which saw the publication of Regina Schwartz's *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of the Secular Age*, there has been a minor efflorescence of monographs that attempt to track the relationship between early modern religious poetry and eucharistic theology. As I was pursuing my own work on the subject, I was not surprised to see these studies continuing to be published, as they explored what seemed to me an evident and central phenomenon in the work of English poets. What has continued to surprise me, however, is just how much these critics have tended to make the same problematic assumptions about the eucharist and thus reproduce quite similar problematic conclusions about the eucharist's relationship to poetry.

At the heart of these critics' failure to fully understand the eucharist is their surprising penchant for trying to explain the ubiquitous presence of the eucharist in early modern poetry as the result of a rather straightforward process of secularization. The subtitle of Schwartz's book, *When God Left the World*, shows just how strongly this narrative of secularization informs her claims. Her strident assertion that eucharistic poetics emerge when transubstantiation dies, however, helpfully clarifies the terms of an argument that has remained the subtext of other recent studies. The migration of sacramental theology to the realm of poetry, Schwartz argues, is only possible in the context of Protestant destabilizations of Catholic doctrine. It only became

possible to apply sacramental theology to language, in other words, when one no longer really invests that theology in the eucharistic elements. As she puts it in her monograph:

... a striking and in many ways counterintuitive phenomenon took place during the Reformation when the doctrine of transubstantiation was rejected by many Reformers. Aspects of the Eucharist began showing up in the poetry of the Reformation, albeit in completely unorthodox ways. The world manifest by ritual was now manifest in poetry.¹⁷

This account of poetic sacramentality basically repeats the thesis of a 1954 monograph by Malcolm Mackenzie Ross, not cited in Schwartz's book, which claimed that the Reformed attack on the doctrine of transubstantiation was part of an inevitable process of renouncing the reliability of language, chartable through the rise and decline of religious poetry in the seventeenth century. For Mackenzie Ross, after the Reformation, the "capacity of the Eucharistic symbol in poetry to function simultaneously at the levels of the natural, the historical, and the divine is threatened and eventually lost."¹⁸ The process of this breakdown, Ross claims, is a slippery slope into secularism and the separation of religious poetry from material reality. His narrative thus concludes with poets like Pope (pejoratively called "the deist"), who is able to offer little more than spiritual aphorisms devoid of any Christian dogmatic substance: "In poetry, 'The Blood,' 'The Body,' 'The Sacrifice,' are reduced to metaphor and below metaphor, finally to cliché. 'Fact' and 'value' disengage and draw apart. A Christian 'spiritism' holds itself aloof from the order of things—and event."¹⁹ For Schwartz, as for Mackenzie Ross, the presence of the eucharist in early modern poetry reveals the opposite of what it seems to: it reflects an absence rather than a presence. Thus, though the eucharist is one of several "cultural forms" that "persist stubbornly" in early modernity, its refusal to go away only shows "a feeling of profound loss

¹⁷ *Sacramental Poetics*, 8.

¹⁸ *Poetry and Dogma: The Transfiguration of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954), vii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

[that] reverberates through the work of early modern writers, a keen sense that something is missing, a real hunger for the presence of God.”²⁰ Transubstantiation used to guarantee the meaningfulness of signification, so the story goes, and when it stopped doing so, authors made poetry the new eucharist, though only to disguise from themselves the dubiousness of their own signification and the radical isolation, internality, and boundedness of their new modern subjectivity.

If Schwartz is the most explicit in her endorsement of a secularization thesis, she is by no means alone in assuming one. All of the recent monographs that address the eucharist in early modern poetry in some way claim that the Protestant abandonment of transubstantiation fundamentally severed the connection between sign and signified. Sophie Read’s study, for example, though it pays much more attention to the historical theology of the eucharist than Schwartz’s does, still hangs on to the idea that Reformation treatments of the sacrament inaugurated a seemingly inevitable teleological movement towards secular modernity. “The Reformation,” she says, “acted as a lever between sign and signified, to institute a distinction between symbol and reality.”²¹ The presence of the eucharist in early modern poetry, therefore, only clandestinely reveals how the “alchemical aspects of [sacramental] doctrine could not survive the harsh light of the dawning age of reason.” In modernity, she concludes with an implicit sigh, “the suggestion that poetry is sacramental has become just a figure of speech.”²² Ryan Netzley and Kimberly Johnson, whose positions I discuss in more detail in the subsequent chapters, take for granted this same Reformation schism between sign and signified, but they read it in a positive light. For them, the absolute distinction between sign and signified ushered in by Protestants freed poets from having to worry about signification at all. Instead, this rupture

²⁰ *Sacramental Poetics*, 15.

²¹ *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 205, 207.

allowed poets like Donne, Herbert, and Crashaw to treat poetry as a self-contained exercise not seeking to “mean” anything outside itself at all. In their readings, the supposed crisis of meaning brought about by the demise of transubstantiation isolates poetry from reference much as modernity has been read to isolate or “buffer” the modern subject.

Eucharistic poetics, therefore, have been treated simultaneously as the last great cultural product of a thoroughly religious England and the bell tolling the immanent demise of that religious hegemony. This explanation draws its power from a narrative that, despite nearly half a century of critique, has had remarkable if frequently “subconscious” staying power. As Brian Cummings points out, this story goes back now more than a century, to Burckhardt, Heidegger, and even to Hegel, and ties the emergence of modern secularism to the so-called birth of personal identity. In this construction, “Literature was held to be a fundamentally secular form, and its emergence was explained in terms of the transition from a religious culture.”²³ Distinct from the supposedly impersonal structures of religious practice, art “is taken to be religion’s antithesis, and also its usurper.” “Once religion is thrown off,” Cummings summarizes, “new gods are needed, and art takes on the transcendence that has been left behind. ... This is the distinctive condition of modernity: an age which represents the world to itself.”²⁴ For the purposes of my study, Cummings’ identification of Hegel is especially apt, since it is Hegel who explicitly treats Protestant theologies of the eucharist as reflecting the emergence of a modern self-consciousness and internality:

...in Catholicism this spirit of all truth is in actuality set in rigid opposition to the self-conscious spirit. And, first of all, God is in the “host” presented to religious adoration as an *external thing*. (In the Lutheran Church, on the contrary, the host as such is not at first consecrated, but in the moment of enjoyment, i.e. in the annihilation of its externality, and in the act of faith, i.e. in the free self-certain spirit: only then is it consecrated and exalted to be present God.) From that first

²³ *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity, and Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

and supreme status of externalisation flows every other phase of externality—of bondage, non-spirituality, and superstition.²⁵

Hegel, without paying much attention to what Luther actually claimed about the sacrament, makes Lutheran eucharistic theology in his own image. For him, it reflects a paradigmatic shift from identifying presence as something external to the self and identifying the self as identical to that presence. Literary critics, likewise, have read the supposedly sudden appearance of the eucharist in early modern poetry as reflecting a similar transition from the external to the internal. God used to make himself present in the elements, this reading asserts, but now all that remains is a form of poetic sacramentality in which the poet, the new God, represents himself in poetry precisely so that he may construct his own autonomous, bounded, and self-conscious subjectivity. The main question that these critics differ on is whether the poets themselves embrace this secularizing shift, or whether they retain a deep nostalgia for the old dispensation of transubstantiation.

The stubbornness of this narrative is surprising, especially with regards to early modern and medieval religious culture, since it has been so thoroughly criticized in major historical studies of the period. Historians and philosophers such as Charles Taylor, Eamon Duffy, and Peter Marshall, amongst others, have over the last decades presented a much more nuanced understanding of the history of secularization in Europe and in England.²⁶ These scholars, in quite different ways, have challenged a historiography that sees the move from medieval Catholicism, through early modern religious reform, to modern secularism as necessarily teleological. My project performs a similar though much narrower rereading of eucharistic

²⁵ *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894), 157-8.

²⁶ See Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007), Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), and Marshall's *Reformation England 1480-1642*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

poetics. In particular, this dissertation focuses on rearticulating what exactly eucharistic presence really means. Perhaps the main reason that the critics above continue to reproduce versions of a secularization thesis is that they can only conceive of eucharistic presence as one thing. For all these critics, eucharistic presence means absolute immanent reification. According to this misapprehension, all eucharistic theology is driven by a fear that signification is defined by loss, that is, that signs are diminished emanations of what they signify. In order to guard against this ideological spectre, transubstantiation simply denies that the host is a sign at all. According to Mackenzie Ross, Schwartz, and Read, the presence of the eucharist in Protestant poetry thus cannot help but belie anxiety, as words are always defined by their failure to capture and make immediately immanent the meanings they signify. For Netzley and Johnson, the abandonment of transubstantiation also brings about the end of signification, though for them this isn't something that makes poets anxious. Rather, though the signified can no longer be made perfectly and immanently present, the sign itself becomes defined as presence, and its signifying function completely disappears. Poetry becomes meaningless, in Netzley's and Johnson's accounts, though in a liberating way. Presence, though, in either case, is always only one thing and always only in one place.

My claim, however, is that eucharistic theology does not imagine presence exclusively as immanence, whether that immanence is understood temporally, spatially, or semantically. The eucharist rather posits both an awareness of different presences and of different modes of presence. It is because the eucharist has this complex understanding of presence that it acts as the primary cultural form, within *both* late medieval and early modern England, by which the poets I consider explore the relationship between the self, text, God, and the other. In their work, poetry does not replace the eucharist; poetics learns from the eucharist a sacramental disposition,

according to which subjectivity is conceived of as bound up with and dependent on the sign. Developing this conception of eucharistic presence, I will demonstrate, contrary to the explanations offered in the criticism so far, that the phenomenon of “eucharistic poetics” is neither indicative of a simple progression to Enlightenment disenchantment (in which poetry appropriates the vestiges of the religious) nor narrowly representative of an English Protestant aesthetic.

In order to revise the definition of eucharistic poetics, and to clarify the complex ways that eucharistic theology informs poetic representations of presence, each of the chapters in this dissertation is organized with reference to a particular name of the eucharist. Like the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, this project aims to bring together quite different understandings of eucharistic presence, not to conflate their variances, but to allow them to inform each other. Each chapter, similarly, focuses on one or two poets in order to show both how differently each author makes use of the eucharist and also how all of them discover in the eucharist a powerful account of poetic signification and agency.

This project begins by considering two neglected poetic voices. Oddly, considering the strong claims made about the absolute distinction between the medieval and the early modern, and between the Catholic and the Protestant (which distinctions have usually also been presented as one and the same), critical studies of eucharistic poetics have yet to pay serious attention to Catholic or medieval writers. Of all the monographs I discuss above, only Sophie Read’s considers even a single unambiguously Catholic author,²⁷ and none attempt a cursory reading of medieval literature. It is thus easy for them to present the Reformation as a radical break from the supposed homogeneity of medieval thought and, concomitantly, to treat transubstantiation as if it

²⁷ As chapter two of this dissertation discusses, however, her reading of Robert Southwell quite explicitly (and mistakenly) aligns him with a medieval and moribund aesthetic.

were largely synonymous with the medieval. In order to address this deeply problematic omission, therefore, my project begins with two chapters that address medieval and Catholic poets. Chapter one, “Medieval Sacraments,” turns its attention to Chaucer and the Pearl-poet, demonstrating how, well before the supposedly “proto-secular” poetics of the seventeenth century, these two authors analogize their own poetic signification with the culturally central signification of the eucharist. Focussing on “The Pardoner’s Tale,” “The Summoner’s Tale,” and *Pearl* in the context of the debate between nominalists and realists, this chapter argues that the playful and creative eucharistic poetics of these medieval authors belie a narrative that explains sacramentality in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry as some kind of substitution or consolation for an abandoned social ritual.

Chapter two, “Southwell’s Mass,” focuses on the poetry of Robert Southwell. It examines his position as a Catholic writing in a distinctly early modern style to help set up terms of comparison between the early modern and the late medieval that do not depend primarily on simplistic associations of Catholicism (or transubstantiation) with the old world and Protestantism with the new. This chapter, departing from what little criticism has considered the Jesuit poet, argues that many of the formal and thematic qualities normally ascribed to a distinctly Protestant poetics, in particular the so-called migration of sacramental thinking into the realm of poetry, are apparent in Southwell’s poetry. It also argues that Southwell’s sacramental understanding of subjectivity has a significant influence on the development of eucharistic poetics in the work of subsequent Protestant poets, especially George Herbert.

Chapters three and four of the dissertation focus on the two poets that have so far dominated discussions of the relationship between the eucharist and poetry in early modern England: George Herbert and John Donne. Chapter three, “Herbert’s Eucharist,” explores how

the sacrament models for Herbert a version of poetic agency that acts as a supplement to divine presence rather than in competition with it. Herbert, this chapter shows, draws on Calvin's distinction between propitiatory and eucharistic sacrifice, and aligns his poetry with the latter. Chapter four, "Donne's Communion," makes use of Donne's explications of the eucharist in his sermons, and points out how he reads the sacrament as defined by an essential doubleness, that is, by its insistence on the presence of two things at once. Donne, this chapter argues, applies this eucharistic "doubleness" as a way of understanding three interrelated, but equally co-present, sacramental pairs: physical and spiritual love, soul and body, and author and text.

The fifth and final chapter, "Communion in Two Kinds," considers the work of John Milton and Richard Crashaw. It argues that the drastic differences between these two authors' poetry can be usefully mapped onto the two elements in Cranmer's most commonly used name for the eucharist, "the sacrament of Christ's body and blood." Claiming that these two contemporaries share an understanding of poetics tied to sacramental signification, it nevertheless distinguishes Crashaw as a poet fascinated by sacramental fluids, and Milton as an author deeply concerned with eucharistic solid food. This comparison of such stylistically and confessionally distinct authors aims to cap off my broader account of eucharistic poetics and its place within historical narratives of secularization. Specifically, it argues against the traditional view that Crashaw is one of England's literary and historical "dead ends," while Milton is the pivotal figure of transition from the early to the "truly" modern.

By reversing the normal positions attributed to Crashaw and Milton, my final chapter will draw out some practical conclusions that emerge from the revision of eucharistic poetics I have been introducing here. Like all the chapters in this dissertation, it moves away from understanding eucharistic presence in poetry as singular, either in the sense that it is the same for

every poet or in the sense that it demands one kind of presence displace or annihilate all others. This latter sense is one, as we will see, that so far continues to dominate critical readings of eucharistic poetics. This dissertation, however, forwards a notion of eucharistic presence, and an account of the eucharist's presence in poetry, that reads sacramentality as a disposition of openness to the sign and to the other. Because of this approach, rather than making early modern poets simply primordial versions of ourselves, fraught with all our anxieties about self-construction, and pained by all the same nostalgia for a lost communal age, this dissertation attends to the authors in this study as presences quite different from our own. Indeed, because it does not place them within a historical narrative defined by the inevitable and teleological displacement of old ways of thinking, this project holds out the possibility that these poets might challenge our understandings of ourselves rather than simply confirming them.

Medieval Sacraments: Immanence and Transcendence in The Pearl-poet and Chaucer

The final stanza of the anonymous fourteenth-century poem *Pearl* concludes with a reference to the eucharist that has long troubled critics. The narrator suddenly wakes from a vision of his deceased daughter beatified in the New Jerusalem when, in the dream, he tries to cross the river that separates him from the kingdom where his lost “pearl” now dwells. Returned to the world of the waking, he describes a religious consolation available to him now that the dream has faded:

To pay the Prince other sete saghte
Hit is ful ethe to the god Krystyn;
Foe I haf founden hym, bothe daye and na3te,
A Gode, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin.
Over this hyul this lote I la3te.
For pyty of my perle enclyin,
And sythen to God I hit byta3te
In Krystes dere blessing and myn,
That in the forme of bred and wyn
The preste uus schewes uch a daye.
He gef uus to be his homly hyne
Ande precious perles unto his pay. (1201-12)

(To please the prince, or to be reconciled [with him], is very easy for the Christian; For I have found him, both day and night, a God, a Lord, and a true friend. On this hill, these things befell me, lying prostrate with grief for my pearl, which I have since bestowed unto God, with my own and Christ’s dear blessing, that in the form of bread and wine the priest shows us every day. May he grant us to be his household servants, and precious pearls for his pleasure.)¹

This final stanza has seemed disjunctive to critics, many of whom have considered its appeal to corporate piety rather flailing and abrupt in contrast to the very personal religious experience described by the rest of the poem. According to David Aers, while the majority of the poem “displays a mental universe that is far removed from [a] concern with Christian community and

¹ This and all subsequent quotations from *Pearl* come from Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, ed., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, 5th ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007).

... networks of obligations,” the last stanza suddenly introduces a perfunctory gesture to the narrator’s spiritual situation within the body of the Church:

Only in the last five lines does the poet explicitly invoke the Church and the body of Christ in the Eucharist, moving ...from his habitual “I” to an unusual “us,” a pronoun at last linking his spiritual life with that of the community in which he encounters sacraments and Scripture.²

For Aers, this move is “theologically superficial and psychologically superficial,” and instead of suggesting a clandestine communitarian ideal hidden below the surface of the poem, it actually highlights the poet’s individualistic preoccupations.³

Aers sets up a dichotomy between the sacrament as a ritual of communal identity and the radically subjective work of the Pearl-poet, whose self-fashioning, though obliged to gesture to the corporate body of the Church, nevertheless asserts itself over and against it. Here Aers, in a moment uncharacteristic with much of his other scholarship,⁴ explains what appears odd to a modern reader of *Pearl* by deferring implicitly to an idea that the characteristic feature of the medieval world is its communitarian conception of human identity. The aesthetic achievement of *Pearl*, for Aers, is hampered by the author’s almost reflexive conventional appeal to the community forming apparatus of the eucharist. For him, the artistic merit the poem displays emerges out of its unusual, even proto-modern, resistance to the idea that only a communal “network of obligations” can make the experience of the dream vision intelligible, even if the poet is not fully self-aware of that resistance. The present chapter, in contrast, contends that the Pearl-poet’s concluding allusion to the bread and wine of communion is continuous with the aims and tone of the rest of the poem. It will present the Pearl-poet’s concluding sacramentality

² “The Self Mourning: Reflections on Pearl,” *Speculum* 68 (1993): 71-2.

³ *Ibid.*, 70-73.

⁴ See “A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the ‘History of the Subject’” in *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 177-202.

as reflecting a desire to use the eucharist to consider and address poetic concerns. The seemingly problematic final lines of *Pearl*, in fact, turn out to be a useful starting point for the consideration of a deeper connection between word and sacrament in the work of Chaucer. The shared interest of both authors in the connection between sacrament and poetry, as we shall see, complicates critical accounts of the relationship between literature and eucharist in later periods. Both Chaucer and the Pearl-poet engage the eucharist not as the perfect expression of late medieval communal identity, but rather as a more complex manifestation of friction not only between the self and community, but also between a variety of contrasting theological, philosophical, and literary impulses. This chapter's account of these engagements will have implications not only for an understanding of these medieval authors, but also for their place in a tradition that continues well into the seventeenth-century.

As I discuss in the introduction to this dissertation, there are a variety of reasons for seeing concerns surrounding the eucharist as parallel to those surrounding poetry. Both explore the nature of signification, the agency of interpreters, the formation of communities, and the possibility of manifesting different kinds of presence to readers and recipients. Yet, as we have seen, the preponderance of literary-critical applications of eucharistic theology have focused almost exclusively on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These studies have also often explicitly recapitulated the narrative that early modern subjectivity emerged out of a collapsed communal medieval ideology (the same story implicit in Aers' reading above). These critical approaches have read the parallels early modern poets make between the eucharist and poetry as evidence of an increasing disinvestment in the potency of the ritual itself. In other words, poetry replaces the eucharist. But what if versions of the same features that have been identified as uniquely early modern poetic engagements with the eucharist can be found in the centuries

before the Reformation, when the celebration of the Mass is not only at the heart of religious devotion, but also the central articulation of the individual's social and political relations? How would this modify an understanding of the connection between sacrament and poetry? A growing critical consensus has found in the work of early modern poets such as Donne and Herbert an appeal to the eucharist as a way of understanding meaning, as well as the nature of authorial presence within writing. Yet if, as this chapter will demonstrate, we find similar appeals in the work of the Pearl-poet and Chaucer, it will be necessary to reassess not only the periodization that has so far informed critical understandings of the relationship between literature and sacrament, but also what that periodization has implied about literary subjectivity.

One of the reasons it has been possible for literary critics of early modern poetry to generate the historical narratives they have is their tendency to see the medieval world as ideologically homogeneous relative to the fractured political and religious context in Europe following the Reformation. While it would be wrong to suggest that there is nothing true about this idea, it is important to remember that the apparent unity of the late medieval world depended greatly on an increasing inability of ecclesiastical power to enforce theological and ideological uniformity. The Great Schism, as Alister McGrath points out, opened the doors for an age of unprecedented theological speculation, both because the ecclesiastical authorities were too caught up in internal conflict to provide magisterial pronouncements on new theologies and also because the obvious disunity of the Church demanded novel ways of evaluating those new ideas. "By the end of the fifteenth century," McGrath writes, "it was becoming increasingly clear that the distinction between 'explicit catholic doctrine' and 'theological opinion' was becoming confused, with wide uncertainty concerning to which of the two categories in question the

increasingly wide range of theological views in circulation should be assigned.”⁵ Thus, even though Europe remained formally unified under the authority of the Catholic Church, that uniformity masked a significant heterogeneity. The connection between literature and sacrament, therefore, must be explored in the context of this heterogeneity if any meaningful conclusions can be applied to authors like Chaucer and the Pearl-poet, or if anything is to be said about their relationship to the subsequent tradition of eucharistic poetics in England. It is only framed by an understanding of one of the central debates of the late medieval world—the dispute between scholastic nominalism and realism, itself a debate about the nature of meaning—that we can come to understand the medieval manifestation of eucharistic poetry in English. As I will argue, late medieval theologies and practices of the eucharist were framed by and in dialogue with the competing philosophies of nominalism and realism. In this context, there was a profound tension between two opposing aspects of the sacrament, what I will be calling its *transcendent* and *immanent* aspects, terms that will require some further clarification below. With this revised understanding of the practice and meaning of the late medieval sacrament, it will be possible to explain how the Pearl-poet and Chaucer engage these opposing aspects of the eucharist to articulate an analogous tension between transcendent and immanent understandings of what poetry is and does.

The eucharist was the aesthetic and cultural core of late medieval Europe, but it should not be imagined as a static core. As Miri Rubin has pointed out, medieval religion “described and explained the interweaving of natural and supernatural with human action, in a paradigm ... of sacramentality, with the eucharist at its heart.”⁶ Yet the fact that the medieval cult of the eucharist was the heart of this sacramental world does not mean that that world was

⁵ *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Wiley, 2004), 25.

⁶ *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, 1.

homogenous. Rather, the very centrality of the ritual made the eucharist, from 1100 onwards, increasingly overdetermined as a cultural act. Its uses vary considerably in the period, in ways “determined by aspects of experience, gender, region, age, occupation, but never in predictable or univocal ways.”⁷ The eucharist could at once emphasize the unity of believers as equal members in the Church, as many expressions of the feast of Corpus Christi overtly did, and stratify social and occupational hierarchies, as it did for professional fraternities that used particular kinds of eucharistic devotion to set themselves off from the community at large. This same ritual elevated the male priesthood to a position of incredible authority, giving it power to extend or withhold God himself, and at the same time became a focal point for the female mysticisms of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, exemplified by the likes of Margery Kempe, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, and others. It was this very ability of the eucharist to do different work for diverse ideological positions that allowed it to become the apparent marker of solidarity within an age of remarkable doctrinal plurality.

Often, seen through the lens of the Tridentine settlement in the sixteenth century, the eventually triumphant theology of Thomist transubstantiation has been treated, especially by early modernists, as the quintessential expression of an internally coherent medieval theology. Until fairly recently, transubstantiation was often seen by English historians and critics as the doctrine that rigidified socio-political order around a clerical privilege manifest in the consecration of the elements. Yet even recent revisionist accounts of the period, which rightly challenge this historiography by pointing to the remarkable vitality of lay-participation in the life of the late-medieval Church, especially the eucharist,⁸ have tended to understand that vitality as a reflection of a strongly communal sense of identity within the Church universal. Thus while the

⁷ Ibid., 288.

⁸ Including, for example, Eamon Duffy’s now classic *Stripping of the Altars*.

older account implicitly points to transubstantiation as the harness of a since cast-off medieval yoke, the revisionist interpretation sees it as the magisterial expression of a pre-modern collective identity. Both of these readings emphasize the eucharist as a ritual of social and religious unity over its other functions and receptions. This emphasis is not unwarranted, as the semantic association between the late medieval terms *corpus mysticum*—referring to the Church—and *corpus verum*—referring to the consecrated host—makes clear. Yet the bizarre friction in the etymological history of these words,⁹ between the individual body of Christ and the corporate body of his Church, hints at how the medieval eucharist expressed apparently divergent functions.

As the meeting point between the divine and the material in medieval theology, the sacrament increasingly became an expression of paradoxical conceptions of human identity. In different ways the ritual could be body affirming and ascetic, communal and particular, contemplative and performative. It is the intention of this chapter to show how the tension inherent in the eucharist is 1) closely tied to opposing tendencies within medieval debates about the nature of signification and 2) appropriated by Chaucer and the Pearl-poet, in response to and in dialogue with the contested perspectives on the medieval theology of language, to understand the more particular problems of poetic signification. We can understand the tension in the eucharist as reflecting the two basic valences I introduced above: the transcendent and the immanent. I use the terms “transcendent” and “immanent” following Kant’s usage, according to which “transcendent” refers to whatever is outside or beyond immediate human experience and

⁹ As Henri de Lubac first pointed out, these terms actually traded meanings around the twelfth century. *Corpus Mysticum: the Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages, Historical Survey*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (London: SCM Press, 2006).

“immanent” refers to that which human experience is directly able to encounter.¹⁰ I use these Kantian terms because they can usefully and flexibly describe different related aspects of the eucharist, and because they are less accompanied by the semantic baggage of other terms usually used in discussion of the eucharist—say “symbolic” and “literal,” or “real” and “virtual.”

The transcendent valence of the eucharist is apparent in the way the sacrament defers to a reality beyond the immediately present or perceivable. The transcendent, though, within the eucharist, often appears where we might least expect it. According to the model of transubstantiation, the “real” fleshy presence of the eucharist is actually *not* the taste-able stuff, bread and wine, but the body of Christ, which cannot be encountered directly by the senses. Thus, though the “stuff” of the sacrament is insistently immanent in one sense—Christ is bodily present—it is also transcendent, beyond direct human experience. Christ’s presence is also transcendent, even according to transubstantiation, in that it remains, in one important sense, physically distant from the recipient. Even Catholics insist that Christ’s body never “leaves” the right hand of the Father in heaven. The presence that is made available in the eucharist cannot, therefore, be accounted for only in terms of proximity. The transcendent also appears, though, insofar as the eucharist makes claims about human identity. The eucharist, after all, subsumes the individual’s sensible and experienced body into the mystical body of Christ’s Church. This church-body, which includes all Christians past and yet to be, remains remote from direct experience. Thus, within the eucharist, even the self’s intimate experience of the body becomes intelligible only by reference to a transcendent metaphysical account of what a “body” really is.

The immanent valence of the eucharist, which exists in contrast with but always to some extent alongside its transcendent valence, draws direct attention to and validates what is

¹⁰ “We shall term those principles the application of which is confined entirely within the limits of possible experience, immanent; those, on the other hand, which transgress these limits, we shall call transcendent principles.” *The Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

immediately present and able to be experienced. Again, though, under the terms of transubstantiation, “immanence” appears in a complex way. In one sense, it is the visible, sensible, and consumable elements that are immanent, since they act as conduits of divine grace. In another sense, though, the bread and wine are merely forms, and the immanence of the Mass occurs as it claims to make Christ himself immediately, really, and bodily present. It is a little problematic to describe this presence as strictly “literal” since, as I have already mentioned, it can only be apprehended by faith and not the senses. Paradoxically, therefore, Christ is “really” immanent in the Mass, but he can only be experienced “transcendently.” His real presence, in other words, is quite different than other kinds of immanent presence. Even so, the idea that Christ exists bodily in the sacrament, and that his presence is accessible only through the bodily practice of eating, means that the medieval eucharist could be read as validating both the material stuff of the created world and the body itself, including its appetites and passions.¹¹ This immanent valence of the eucharist stands in remarkable contrast to gnostic or stoic systems of thought, reflecting in its esteem of the body and the material the Christian doctrine of the incarnation.

Yet if the immanence of the eucharist may be understood in material terms, it also can be understood in terms of human identity. Especially as it could destabilize the usual hierarchy that placed the spiritual above the bodily, the eucharist’s immanence could sometimes have democratizing results. The great efflorescence of female devotional writing and activity in the late middle ages, for example, often centered itself upon devotion to the eucharist precisely because it elevated a bodiliness that was otherwise negatively associated with the female. However, precisely because the presence of Christ was understood as only obtainable through

¹¹ As we will see throughout this dissertation, however, those who criticized transubstantiation often did so because they felt it did not validate the material and bodily.

the material elements, and not apart from them, the immanence of the sacrament often also legitimized social hierarchies, particularly as certain groups acquired more frequent access to the elements. So, even as the eucharist expressed the spiritual equality of all communicants before God, in the medieval period, it also served to endorse stratifications in the here and now. The immanent materiality of the eucharist, therefore, frequently had opposing implications for socio-political identity: sometimes it could be used to guarantee the social status quo, and sometimes to endorse new ideas that challenged the traditional hierarchies of medieval culture. These complex social functions of the eucharist, which drew their force from the immanent bodiliness of eucharistic presence in medieval thought, always acted in tension with the sacrament's other function, its incorporation of communicants into a transcendent social community, a kingdom insistently not of this world.

The tension between the immanent and transcendent aspects of the eucharist meant that sometimes explorations of the ritual drew attention to and celebrated the materiality of the bread and wine,¹² while at other times the sacrament became a way of considering the "limits of matter."¹³ The tension between immanence and transcendence, it is important to point out, is apparent not just in popular or lay understandings of the eucharist, but in the liturgy of the Mass itself. Though early modern literary critics have usually thought of the medieval eucharist exclusively and straightforwardly as an attempt to capture pure immanence, the theology and celebration of the sacrament is much more complex. According to the doctrine of the sacrifice of

¹² Consider, for example, how female mystics of the late middle ages appropriated the idea of Christ feeding his children with his own body as a way of dignifying the female body.

¹³ *Corpus Christi*, 218. See also 319-324 for a discussion of the way orthodox authorities, in response to Cathar critiques of transubstantiation based on a dualist understanding of the incommensurability of divine and material substance, ended up emphasizing more and more the eucharist as the exception to normal physical laws, the persistence of matter and so on. That is to say, they argued that the materiality of the eucharist should not be understood as profaning God's transcendence, because the materiality of the eucharist is very little like the materiality of other kinds of matter. This is exactly the kind eucharistic theology that Wyclif would later vehemently reject because, as he saw it, it turns God into a deceiver, whose sacraments present themselves as material objects without following the rules of material substances (see pg. 70 in this chapter.)

the Mass, for example, though Christ becomes immanently present in the elements, that same presence also mystically re-performs the sacrificial work of the cross, which is offered by the celebrant back to God. Thus, though there is a downward or kenotic aspect to Christ's presence in the Mass, there is also an upward or ascendant aspect to it. Christ makes himself present in the elements for the sake of the communicants, but the priest also offers Christ's presence as a sacrifice back "up" to God. In the Sarum Missal, the standard medieval liturgy in southern England in the late middle ages, the text stresses the host's return to God as much, if not more than, Christ's downward movement into it. Thus, though the priest prays, *Hæc sacro sancta commixtio Corporis et Sanguinis Domini nostri Jesu Christi fiat mihi omnibusque summentibus salus mentis et corporis* ("Let this holy commixture of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ be to me and to all receiving it, salvation of mind and body"), he also prays the following:

Suscipe, Sancta Trinitas, hanc oblationem, quam ego indignus peccator offero in honore tuo, ... pro peccatis et offensionibus meis: et pro salute vivorum et requie omnium fidelium defunctorum. ... acceptum sit Omnipotenti Deo hoc sacrificium novum.

("Receive, Holy Trinity, this oblation, which I, an unworthy sinner, offer in honour of thee, for my sins and offences, and for the salvation of the living, and the rest of all the faithful dead. ... let this new sacrifice be acceptable to the omnipotent God.")¹⁴

The presence of the Mass, in other words, is at once immanent, insofar as Christ becomes materially present as the elements, and transcendent, insofar as the Mass carries Christ's presence back up to heaven. It is only because the presence of the eucharist moves away from as well as towards communicants that it can forgive "sins and offenses."

Similarly, as there is a tension between the immanence and transcendent presence of the Mass understood in spatial terms (it is both here and in heaven), there is also a tension understood in temporal terms. The eucharist is, necessarily, a temporary compensation for the

¹⁴ John Wickam Legg, ed., *The Sarum Missal: Edited from Three Early Manuscripts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1916).

distance of Christ's ascended body that, though it does provide a version of presence in the now, it also points to the fuller and more immediate presence that will occur at the resurrection of the dead. Even Thomas Aquinas claims that the bodily presence of Christ is given "meanwhile in our pilgrimage," and in doing so acknowledges, for all his insistence on the bodily presence of Christ in the Mass, another kind of presence that has not yet been fully realized.¹⁵

The tension in Aquinas' account, and in the liturgy of the Mass itself, echoes a friction apparent in the very name medievals gave to the host. As Henri de Lubac has shown, the term *corpus verum* (true body), which by the thirteenth century referred to the host, had up until the eleventh century referred to the Church. Over the same period, however, the old term for the eucharist, the *corpus mysticum* (mystical body), became the new way to refer to the Church. Michel de Certeau, who built on De Lubac's work, describes how three senses of the word "body"—the unique historical body of Christ, the body of Christ expressed in the sacrament, and the Church as Christ's body on earth—evolved in relation to each other over this same period. For the first millennium of its existence, according to de Certeau, the Christian tradition conceived of the Church as the visible signifier of Christ's continued presence in the world. The eucharist, on the other hand, was the ritual performance of the invisible continuity between Christ's historical body and the body of believers. In the thirteenth century, the role-reversal of the terms *corpus mysticum* and *corpus verum* thus marks two shifts: an increasing identification of the eucharistic signifier with the historical body of Christ, and a movement from understanding the Church primarily as a community that embodies Christ, to understanding it primarily as an institutional authority that ensures the continued presence of Christ's historical

¹⁵ *Summa Theologica*, Blackfriars edn. 60 vols. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964-75), 75.1a.

body in the sacrament, rather than as itself.¹⁶ This latter paradigm never fully replaces the former in western Christian thought, but it does introduce a new kind of emphasis within it. It stresses one kind of immanence instead of another. Though Christ himself becomes more immediate, more immanent to the experience of the eucharistic recipients, the communicants themselves are abstracted from that material immanence. The participant no longer becomes the *corpus verum*, though he consumes it. Instead, the *corpus verum* holds out a promise, as Aquinas suggests, of a yet-to-fully-be participation in the *corpus mysticum*.

Thus the movement towards an emphasis on the immanent materiality of transubstantiation in late medieval theology also brings along with it a particular version of transcendence. The emphasis on Christ's "here-ness," paradoxically, makes that "here-ness" more external from the believer. This paradox of the medieval eucharist—the way different emphases on the transcendent or the immanent end up redefining both—reflects a tendency that generated much of the controversy that drove late-medieval philosophy and theology. Very similar paradoxes are evident in the debates that surrounded the question of universals, arguably the most significant theo-philosophical issue of the period. This debate, over how it is that individual things relate to their properties, encountered many of the same problems as eucharistic theology, especially as it attempted to navigate between transcendent and immanent accounts of meaning. There were two main schools of thought with regards to the question of universals: an older philosophical tradition, sometimes called the *via antiqua*, broadly described as "realist," and a newer philosophical tradition, the *via moderna*, generally seen as beginning with William of Ockham and usually termed "nominalist."¹⁷ The older realist position claimed that when

¹⁶ *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 79-85.

¹⁷ As a significant amount of recent scholarship has pointed out, however, different camps within the nominalist school had vastly differing theological conclusions developed from nominalist semiotic positions, especially in

words refer to a common property shared by two or more individual things (say the word “green” as it describes both grass and an apple), they refer to some really existent thing, a universal (“green-ness”), that is metaphysically distinct from the individual things described by that word. The newer nominalist position held that the shared qualities of two individual things were not distinct or real metaphysical entities, but rather simply mental predications of those qualities onto real objects. For the realist school, universals existed outside the mind and independently of the will or intellection, whereas for the nominalist school, universals existed within the mind, and depended on the operation of the will.¹⁸

Both the nominalist and the realist schools attempted to navigate a tension between immanence and transcendence specifically as it related to signification. The realist position, which emerged out of the Platonic tradition’s supposition of Forms, makes a strong case for the reliability of the connection between language and reality. When we use words like “blue,” or “large,” or even adjectives that describe imperceptible qualities, like “brave,” the words refer to something that really exists independent of our describing it. Thus the truthfulness of any predication depends on whether or not the thing really contains, or more accurately, participates in, “blueness” or “largeness” or “bravery.” In one sense this position clearly endorses an immanent understanding of the experienced world. Qualities are not merely notional, but are in fact *in* the things of which they are predicated. In another sense, though, the realist ontology of universals makes them a very different kind of thing than the particulars that instantiate them.

regards to soteriology. McGrath, for example, distinguishes the distinct *schola Augustina Moderna*, which accepted the critique of realist metaphysics, but rejected a tendency to what it saw as Pelagianism among Ockham’s disciples. Heiko Oberman identifies this sub-school with theologians like Thomas Bradwardine and Gregory of Rimini. *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: E & T Clark, 1986), 8-12.

¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that for Ockham this does not mean that universals are either arbitrary or incommunicable between individuals, as he posited a pre-linguistic “mental grammar” inherent in humans which was given by God. See Claude Panaccio, “Semantics and Mental Language,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 53-75, and pg. 42 in this chapter.

Universals as entities, and here is where the connection to the eucharist will start to become apparent, are indivisible and yet present in different physical locations, and though they can be experienced through material things, they are themselves immaterial. There is a tension between the ontological claim that the qualities of a thing are somehow quite literally *in* it, and the necessary corollary that the qualities that make up a thing have a distinct ontological status from the thing that is experienced. Thus, in the very attempt to assert how words can reliably refer to reality, reality itself becomes understood as transcendent. In fact, the realist school sometimes had quite a difficult time clearly articulating what universals actually are *in*.¹⁹ Things, even as they have immanent reality, necessarily defer to transcendent universals. This paradox is strikingly similar to the way that accounts of transubstantiation, insisting that Christ's body is materially present in the elements, are forced to reconfigure the meaning of "materiality" in counterintuitive ways.

According to the realist position, things are only what words describe them to be to the extent that they contain or participate in a transcendent universal. What makes this realist account particularly pertinent to a reading of fourteenth-century poetry is that it turned metaphysics into a kind of signification. As Robert Myles explains, in the medieval world the difference between God and creation is comprehended in terms of "Speaker" and "words":

We may speak of "dual ontologies" or dual "orders of being" to describe the real distinction between the order of being of the "Speaker," God, and the order of being of words or created reality. Just as we are not identical with our words, neither is God ... There is an order of existential dependency between the two orders of being, just as there is an existential order of dependency between us and our words.²⁰

¹⁹ For Aquinas the immediate experienced thing is the hylomorphic composite of substantial form and matter. Duns Scotus's alternate proposition, that there exists a kind of formless matter uninformed by particular qualities, shows that it was not exactly clear what *it* was that universals inform.

²⁰ *Chaucerian Realism* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 67.

The relationship between God, the first order of being, and creation, is a relationship between the speaker and his words. Likewise, according to the realist account of universals, universals relate to specific things in the same way. That is, universals, to the extent that they exist in the same “order of being” as God (i.e. immaterial, indivisible, and, in some versions of realism, even eternal) relate to particulars as God relates to creation, i.e. as a form of signification. This is in fact why Claude Panaccio claims that it is more useful to describe realism as “representationalism”: “a doctrine according to which the immediate object of cognition is always a representation rather than the external thing itself.” In other words, universals are entities that “speak” particulars into existence as God continually “speaks” all creation into existence. In the realist account, therefore, the way that things *are* ends up being very similar to the way that words mean what they mean. For poets like Chaucer and the Pearl-poet, as we will see, this understanding of existence as a kind of signification could be extremely empowering, since it made the poetic creation of words reflective of a deeper metaphysical reality. Poetic signification, in the realist universe, could be understood as a figure of reality itself.

Yet this same idea—that particulars relate to universals through a kind of signification—could also be read as having opposite implications for human sign-making. In many strains of realist thought, though human language *is* a picture of the relation between the immanent world and the transcendent reality that “speaks” it, it is *only* a picture. This means that while signification, conceptually, is elevated to a central position within realist thought, actual human language (especially the “all too human” vernacular) is always marked by its failure to perfectly emulate the divine “speech” of realist metaphysics, that truer and more reliable form of signification. Thus the very analogy made between speech and metaphysics could even lead to

an attitude in which human language was inherently suspect. Perhaps the most powerful articulation of this idea can be found in Aquinas' insistence that God can only be spoken of by analogy. For him, any quality we linguistically predicate of God, say "wise," cannot be true of God in the plain sense that it is true of his creatures. The word "wise," we might say, less accurately signifies God's wisdom than creation does, since creation is God's own speech, while words are ours. No human speech, therefore, can ever *fully* predicate anything about God.²¹

So, we see a very similar paradox expressed in the way realist thought treats both particulars and human language. In both cases, counterintuitively, the effort to give a robust account of the reliability of meaning ends up refiguring immanent reality as significantly less real. In the realist understanding of universals, in order to make the common properties we describe particulars as having really true, particulars themselves become less real than the universal properties they instantiate. By extension, this theoretical ontology implies something quite similar for signification: it becomes at once truer and less "real." In an abstract way, signification grounds the meaning of reality; in a more practical way, however, realism could result in a tendency to see real human language as the mere sign of a higher order signification. Realist ontology, therefore, seems to hold together two apparently opposite attitudes to both signification and immanence. It emphasizes the reality of the transcendent, we might say, to ensure the knowability of the immanent.

Nominalism, which provided a number of philosophical critiques of the *via antiqua* school, shifts this emphasis, and gives ontological priority to particular things rather than to abstract universals. This is an important point to raise about nominalism because, especially to

²¹ See *Summa Theologica* 1.13.5: "...this term 'wise' applied to man in some degree circumscribes and comprehends the thing signified; whereas this is not the case when it is applied to God; but it leaves the thing signified as incomprehended, and as exceeding the signification of the name. Hence it is evident that this term 'wise' is not applied in the same way to God and to man. The same rule applies to other terms. Hence no name is predicated univocally of God and of creatures."

critics who see the *via moderna* as one source of modernity, the school has often been associated with ideas that might suggest just the opposite. *Via moderna* theologians, for example, often stressed God's transcendent unknowability and his arbitrary will. For them, the way things happen to be does not directly correlate to God's absolute nature. Because of this, nominalists placed much less stock in the ability of natural theology to produce any reliable statements about God. Creation, in other words, was not a system of signs reliably signifying some transcendent reality. Thus, in this sense, the new philosophical school saw God as further "outside" the experienceable universe. In fact, though many historians of early modernity have seen the Reformers' insistence on the distinction between Christ's physical presence in heaven and his spiritual presence in the eucharist as the great fissure of modernity, many interpreters of medieval thought have seen that fissure coming earlier, in the nominalist insistence on the separation of immanent reality and divine transcendence. According to this reading, it is the late middle ages, rather than the Reformation that was rent by epistemological anxiety, as well as a horrifying sense that individual things, including the individual subject, were somehow now cut off from participation in a great chain of being. Many anxious historians, philosophers, and literary critics thus treat the nominalist turn away from realist ontology as leading to the disconnection of faith from reason, and of linguistic predication from truth. David Williams, for example, describes it as follows:

Nominalism limits the intellectually knowable to the phenomena of human sense experience and ideas about that experience. Belief in God is warehoused, we might say, in the concept of "faith," which nominalists segregated from knowledge... Medieval Nominalism eventually came to emphasize the contingency of human knowledge to the point of anticipating the relativism of later periods, in the sense that, if human understanding is based on individual experience, and if there is no inherent bond between one person's experience and another's..., then one person's perception of the truth is as good and "true" as another's.²²

²² *Language Redeemed: Chaucer's Mature Poetry* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 8-9.

Williams displays exactly the kind of anxiety that medieval realists felt when they encountered the nominalist rejection of metaphysical universals.²³ They both respond, “How can words mean anything, if they don’t refer to some real thing, i.e. a universal?” What Williams fails to recognize, however, is that one of the things nominalism was attempting to deal with was what it saw as the fundamental unrealness of realism. For the nominalist school, the problem with realism was not only its philosophical inelegance, its failure to satisfy what has since come to be known as “Ockham’s Razor” (that is, because it posits incredibly complex entities to make sense of relatively simple phenomena), but also the fact that universals do not seem to fit at all the description of what common sense tells us is real. According to the theory of universals, the “reality” of a material object is the one feature of the thing that cannot be directly apprehended. Nominalists, in contrast, resisted ascribing ontological priority to such amorphous entities. In fact, Marilyn McCord Adams has suggested Ockham’s nominalism might just as meaningfully be called “direct realism,” as opposed to the “representationalism” of scholastic realism.²⁴ As Claude Panaccio points out, nominalism “is simply the negation” of the idea that the “immediate object of cognition” is only a “representation” of a reality that cannot be directly comprehended. In Ockham’s thought, he points out, both words and concepts “have external things as their immediate objects.”²⁵ For nominalists, in fact, realists were far more guilty of doing exactly what they accused Ockham and his disciples of doing, that is, divorcing meaning from reality. For Ockham, predicates have a direct relationship with particular things, ungoverned by the mediation of metaphysically dubious universals. For nominalists, though, this connection

²³ Not coincidentally, he also exhibits the same nostalgia for a lost communitarian world that so often informs literary histories of early modernity. His lost world is just a few centuries further back.

²⁴ For a full exposition of this idea see *William Ockham* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 85-96.

²⁵ *Ockham on Concepts* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 16.

between word and thing was not arbitrary, as realists at the time accused, and as critics like Williams still seem to think, but innate within the human soul. This is apparent in Ockham's supposition, which interestingly anticipates linguistic models like Chomsky's, of a universal mental grammar from which all human language is derived. Thus, within nominalist thought, the connection between predicate and thing, and thus between sign to signified, remains more strictly immanent, and does not depend on a deferral outside itself to some external transcendent reality.

Though the eucharist itself was not always treated systematically in the disputes between these two schools, the same conflict that occupied the debate between realists and nominalists also occupied late medieval eucharistic theology: a conflict between an emphasis on the transcendent and an emphasis on the immanent in accounts of meaning. It is for this reason that debates over the eucharist and debates over the existence of metaphysical universals overlapped significantly. It is significant to note, however, that this overlap does not occur in such a way that a distinctive eucharistic theology can be discerned as normative within particular schools. Ockham, for example, despite his radical break with much of Thomist thought, nevertheless hangs on to a basically realist account of transubstantiation. Paul Vincent Spade has even gone so far as to argue that Ockham's commitment to the doctrine of transubstantiation accounts for his inability to remove "quality" from the list of Aristotelian categories, despite abandoning all the others.²⁶ Wyclif, on the other hand, as we will see, bases his rejection of transubstantiation on realist philosophical principles. Yet the key question in the debates over the eucharist and universals is clearly the same: to what extent do signs point outwards to a higher transcendent reality, and to what extent do signs themselves become the site of meaning? The eucharistic theology of medieval Europe, though it was closely intertwined with the developments of late

²⁶ See "Ockham's Nominalist Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, 103-106.

scholasticism, never settled on one particular answer to this question, but instead attempted to navigate a tension between transcendent and immanent expressions of divine presence. The realist and the nominalist philosophical systems wanted to develop an ontology that clearly delineated the exact hierarchy of transcendence and immanence, but the cult of the eucharist was usually more ambiguous, especially because its significance depended on its ability to offer participants both transcendence and immanence at once. In many ways, in fact, the eucharist in practice came closer to achieving what neither school satisfactorily could, that is, integrating into a single account of existence a simultaneous appeal to both transcendence and immanence.

Having now set up this theological and philosophical context, this chapter will explore why the tension between immanence and transcendence was so important to medieval poets. It will specifically consider how both the Pearl-poet and Chaucer make use of medieval eucharistic theology, as it parallels the debated terms of late scholasticism, in order make sense of their own use of signs. As we will see, such appropriations help both poets think through how poetry creates identity, and consider the ways that poetic creation participates in, or remains distinct from, the deeper reality of the universe. Analyzing the poets' self-conscious interrogation of the relationship between word and sacrament, though, will also help nuance a picture of medieval literature as the product of a thoroughly "enchanted" universe, in which the work of poetic creation is mystically entangled with a reality that is itself a system of signs. Umberto Eco explains quite helpfully this common, though somewhat problematic position:

The Mediaevals inhabited a world filled with references, reminders and overtones of Divinity, manifestations of God in things. Nature spoke to them heraldically: lions or nut-trees were more than they seemed; griffins were just as real as lions because, like them, they were signs of a higher truth ... there was a certain weakness in their capacity to differentiate among things, a tendency in the concepts to include not just the things of which they were concepts, but also things similar or related to them.²⁷

²⁷ *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 53.

As we have already seen, there is some truth in this articulation of medieval habits of thought, particularly within scholastic realism. The realist idea of immanent creation as a kind of “speech” related closely to what Eco describes as a medieval tendency to “perceiv[e] the world as a divine work of art, of such a kind that everything in it possesses moral, allegorical, and anagogical meanings in addition to its literal meaning.”²⁸ In one sense, this understanding of reality can be thought of as endorsing exactly the kinds of allegorical and multi-layered signification that the Pearl-poet uses, and that Chaucer puts in the mouths of many of his pilgrims. Reading the world as itself a system of signs, however, can also suggest, especially in the scholastic paradigm, that any human literary production may only, at best, weakly imitate God’s created text or, at worst, threaten it. It is my claim that Chaucer and the Pearl-poet are aware of this, and so, though they do appeal to the conception of reality Eco describes, they are actually more aware of its risks than he seems to think medievals could be. It is with this complex awareness, already expressed in medieval understandings of the eucharist and the debate about universals, that Chaucer and the Pearl-poet understand their own subjective and poetic place within the medieval universe. Both are alive to the philosophical and literary problems of a world where everything is a sign, and both engage with that world in order to test its boundaries and consider its paradoxes. In their work, therefore, the eucharist becomes an especially helpful tool for exploring the tensions between immanent and transcendent conceptions of poetic presence, as well as for articulating the challenges competing medieval understandings of reality posed for poets.

²⁸ Ibid.

***Pearl* and Sacramental Subjectivity**

When we recognize how the eucharist often expresses seemingly contradictory impulses, the concluding stanza of *Pearl* starts to make sense. Instead of appearing a pious but hackneyed conclusion to the intensely personal experiences described in the dream vision, it may be read as a way of reflecting on the allegorical complexity of the poem itself, in which the titular “pearl” has a complex variety of allegorical significances. In the opening stanza of the poem, this pearl seems to be what its name suggests, a gemstone. As the poem progresses, it becomes clear that “pearl” is actually the narrator’s deceased female relative, usually understood to be his daughter. But even this identification is not static, and the pearl-maiden less and less represents herself as the deceased spirit known to the narrator, and more and more as a figure standing for the Church, salvation, and the experience of the beatific vision. Her identity, therefore, has simultaneous immanent and transcendent valences. She is in one sense, from the narrator’s perspective, a *corpus verum*, the manifestation of an individual personal presence. At the same time, she is also a figure for the *corpus mysticum* and, like the eucharist, represents a yet-to-be realized eschatological presence that, as the conclusion of the poem makes clear, the narrator can glimpse but cannot directly access. Thus to suggest that the narrator’s encounter with the maiden is strictly “personal,” while the turn to the eucharist is perfunctorily “communal” is to miss the point. The pearl-maiden’s multilayered reality brings together the personal and the communal. When the narrator draws attention to the “forme of bred” in his final lines, in fact, he invites us to see a comparison between the “pearl” of his dream and the host at the very heart of medieval devotion.

This comparison is apparent not only in the visual similarity between the circular white wafer “The preste uis schewes uch a daye” (1210) and the round white pearl the narrator loses in

the opening lines of the poem, but also in the way the last lines of the poem echo the first. The very structure of the poem presents the eucharist as paralleling and fulfilling the semiotic function of the pearl. The final devotional resolution of the poem, that “To pay the Prince other sete saghte / Hit is ful ethe to the god Krystyin” (“it is easy for the good Christian to please his prince and be reconciled with him”), returns us back to the very first adjective phrase describing the pearl in line 1 of the poem: “Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye” (“Pearl, pleasant and pleasing to princes”). Indeed the whole first stanza finds fulfillment in the last:

Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye
 To clanly clos in golde so clere;
 Oute of oryent, I hardly saye.
 Ne proved I never her precios pere.
 So rounde, so reken in uche araye,
 So smal, so smoþe her syde³ were,
 Quere-so-ever I jugged gemme³ gaye,
 I sette hyr sengely in synglere
 Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;
 þur³ gresse to ground hit fro me yot,
 I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
 Of þat pryvy perle wythouten spot. (1-12)

(Pearl, pleasant and pleasing to princes, set skilfully in fine gold; even out of the orient, I am bold to say, I have never come across an equal. So round, so radiant in every aspect, so elegant and smooth were her sides that wherever I valued bright gemstones, I considered her alone quite singular. Alas! I lost her in a garden; she fell from me through the grass and to the ground. I shrank with grief, wounded by love's domination, for that secret spotless pearl.)

In these opening lines, where we are introduced to the speaker's grief, the pearl is “leste,” while in the final stanza, the speaker “finds” God (“Foe I haf *founden* hym, bothe daye and na³te, / A Gode, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin,” 1203-4). While in the first stanza the “perle plesaunte,” which seems at this point to be a literal gemstone, is “pleasing to princes” (“to princes paye”), in the last stanza it is “uus” who become pleasing to *the* Prince, made acceptable to God through the operation of the eucharist. The chiasmic inversion to the first lines in the last invites the

reader to see the sacrament as an offering that comes along with and confirms the speaker's parallel offering of his "pearl" to God. The speaker's ambiguous grammar in the final lines highlights this parallel. The speaker describes how he bestowed his pearl back to God ("sythen to God I hit byta3te," 1207), but the clauses that modify this description are enigmatic. The pearl is bestowed to God "In Krystes dere blessing and myn" (1208). In its most straightforward sense, this is simply a pious valediction. The narrator offers his pearl back to God, bidding her farewell with Christ's blessing and with his own. The next line, however, adds something to this sense. The "dere blessing" referred to, the narrator clarifies, is not just a general benediction, but the very specific blessing "That in the forme of bred and wyn / The preste uus schewes uch a daye" (1209-10). When the speaker bestows his pearl to God, therefore, he does not merely do so with a "Christ bless you" on his lips, he offers it up "*In* Krystes dere [eucharistic] blessing," that is, as his own personal supplement to the sacrifice of the Mass. He thus presents his poetic pearl as a kind of auxiliary sub-host, which by its oblation makes him a "precious perl[e] unto [Christ]" just as the oblation of the host makes communicants "acceptable" before God in the Sarum Mass. By having his narrator bestow his pearl to God in eucharist, though, the Pearl-poet also bestows upon his literary work something of the sacramental power that operates in the Mass. He transforms his text of poetic bread, we could say, into literary flesh. In this final parallel, therefore, the Pearl-poet makes explicit a connection he sees between the metaphorical transformations the "pearl" undergoes (as a real character within the poem and as a shifting signifier for other realities), the spiritual transformations the narrator himself experiences, and the miraculous transubstantiation of the eucharist. As John Gatta puts it,

Eucharistic transformation patterns help to illuminate the *Pearl* poet's literary application of transformational imagery, which accompanies transmutations from

sorrow to joy, loss to gain, natural fatherly love to Christ-like sacrificial love, and death to life.²⁹

The pearl, in its multiplicity, becomes less identifiable with any one metaphorical tenor *in* the poem and more a symbol *of* the poem itself. The parallels the Pearl-poet sets up between the pearl-figure and the eucharist, therefore, connect the work of poetic signification to a transcendent power that, in the eyes of medieval Christians, secured the relation between the immanent world and God. The Pearl-poet thus clearly appeals to that realist conception of metaphysical signification I described above, presenting his own allegorical poetry as if it reflected the underlying nature of reality. It makes this appeal, though, not with some generalized gesture to the representational nature of creation as such, but with an even bolder comparison between the central figure of his poem and the “forme of bred and wyn” (1209).

Yet if the Pearl-poet draws on the eucharist, in the final lines of *Pearl*, to present his poem as having a similar power to manifest the transcendent in its immanent text, and if the sacrament also becomes a way of connecting him to the transcendent body of the Church, it also has seemingly opposite functions within the dream vision. If the conclusion of the poem presents a rather bold understanding of itself as participating in a realist ontology of signification, its appeal to the eucharist in the main body of the text often has significant implications for what a nominalist might call the “direct object of apprehension,” the narrator himself. Indeed, the eucharist frequently appears as an important point of reference in sections of *Pearl* that help define both the narrator’s own particular aristocratic social identity in the here and now and the moral imperatives that come along with it.

One key distinction often presented as defining the difference between medieval and early modern understandings of reality is between the conception of the self as “porous” and a

²⁹ “Transformation, Symbolism and the Liturgy of the Mass in ‘Pearl’,” *Modern Philology* 71.3 (1974): 256.

conception of the self as “buffered.” In the medieval understanding of the “porous” self, so the explanation goes, the boundary between the ego and the other was easily crossable, such that the frontier between “me” and everything else was more of a no-man’s land than a clear border. It is only at the dawn of the Reformation, as many literary critics of poetic sacramentality keep stating, that people started conceiving of themselves in more “buffered” terms, that is, as clearly and necessarily cordoned off from realities, physical and spiritual, outside themselves. The problem with this understanding is not that it reflects nothing significant about the difference between the middle ages and early modernity (or modernity more generally), but that it often ends up getting used to make some rather ridiculous assertions about medieval people, usually that medievals weren’t really conscious of their selfhood, or that, as even Umberto Eco seems to imply, they had a pretty difficult time distinguishing one thing from another.

As Lee Patterson puts it, however, when he rebuts exactly this rather foggy notion of the medieval, “the dialectic between an inward subjectivity and an external world that alienates it from both itself and its divine source provides the fundamental economy of the medieval idea of selfhood.”³⁰ In other words, medieval people weren’t all that confused about the difference between “me” and everything else. What is especially significant about Patterson’s reminder for my argument is what it might say about the eucharist. For critics of early modern literature such as Regina Schwartz and Sophie Read, as I discuss in the introduction, the eucharist is rather uncritically considered to be the ideological centre of an unqualifiedly porous worldview. The apparent inability of medieval theology to distinguish sign from signified in transubstantiation, in fact, they implicitly read as reflecting a general medieval imprecision about all distinctions, especially between the subject and the other. When the Reformation started making all its philosophically prudent separations—between bodily and spiritual presence, between nature and

³⁰ *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 8.

God, between sign and signified—people started to miss the old fuzzy dispensation and so turned longingly to the eucharist as a memento of their former subjectivities. In *Pearl* though, and in Chaucer's poetry, the eucharist is just as often a powerful tool for articulating the difference "between an inward subjectivity and an external world" as it is for blurring that distinction. As we have already seen, there is indeed a sense in which the Pearl-poet appeals to the eucharist as a way of entangling his poetic work with a reality that is outside and beyond himself, but he does this quite consciously and with *self*-awareness, not because he has a hard time making distinctions in the period's metaphysical fog.

In *Pearl*, just as real-world eucharistic practice was often essential to defining very immanent features of human life, allusions to and invocations of the sacrament often stress the devotional need for emotional self-containment. In a way that bears some resemblance to Donne's later mistrust of emotional ecstasy (which I discuss in chapter four of this dissertation), the Pearl-poet often promotes the consummately eucharistic devotional attitude as one that requires spiritual decorum, that is, a willingness to accept that the earthly self does *not* fully comprehend or participate in the underlying divine reality that connects all things. Not respecting this decorum, the Pearl-maiden repeatedly reminds the narrator, would actually reflect a presumptive belief that he participates in transcendent reality to the same extent that she does. One such moment in *Pearl* occurs when the narrator expresses feelings of hurt that, though the Pearl-maiden was young when she died, and no great saint, she has now been elevated to a very high place in the heavenly realms. The narrator's claim that this seems unjust, and the Pearl-maiden's explanatory response get worked out as a reflection on the parable of the vineyard from Matthew 20:1-16, which the maiden had earlier narrated (lines 581-625). Just as he feels it is unfair that the Pearl-maiden has received such a generous heavenly reward after living such a

short life, he feels that it is similarly unfair that all the workers in the parable are paid the same despite having worked a different number of hours. This story doesn't seem believable, the narrator explains, and he even goes so far as to suggest that the parable might not actually really be scriptural: "Me thynk thy tale unresounable. / Goddes ryght is redy and evermore rert, / Other Holy Wryt is bot a fable" (590-92, "I think your tale is unreasonable. God's justice is quick, and always supreme, or Holy Scripture is merely a fable"). Like many Christians before and after him, the narrator stumbles on the scandal of the passage. He wants scripture to confirm the hierarchies of reward and status that govern the real world. He wants the young Pearl-maiden to be put in her rightful place. The Pearl-maiden responds, however, by explaining:

Bot now thou motes, me for to mate,
 That I my peny haf wrang tan here;
 Thou says that I that come to late
 Am not worthy so gret fere.
 Where wyses thou ever any bourne abate
 Ever so holy in hys prayere
 That he ne forfeited by sumkyn gate
 The mede sumtyme of hevenes clere?
 And ay the ofter, the alder thay were,
 Thay laften ryght and wroghten woghe.
 Mercy and grace moste hem then sterc,
 For the grace of God is gret innoghe. (614-25)

(But now you argue, to shame me, that I have received my penny unfairly; you say that I came too late, and do not deserve such generous treatment. But where have you ever known of any man who had always lived a holy and prayerful life and never once forfeited in some way Heaven's bright bounty? And the older they were, the more often they forsook the right and did the wrong. Mercy and grace must then guide them, for the grace of God is sufficiently great.)

The older people get, she argues, the more they are likely to have "forfeited" heaven's bounty by sinning. She thus presents the rules of her heavenly realm as an inversion of the normal values of the immanent world. The last on earth, she points out, have become first in heaven. What is especially significant about the appearance of the vineyard parable here, as Jennifer Garrison

points out, was that it had strong eucharistic associations in the period.³¹ In lay handbooks of devotion, in fact, it was a common trope to associate the worker's reception of the identical payment in coin with every Christian's identical reward, the host, which was often stamped with images of Christ on the cross intentionally designed to imitate the exergue of coinage. Thus, when in the maiden's retelling of the parable, the lord of the vineyard commands his reeve "to set hem alle upon a rawe" (545), the Pearl-poet's audience would have readily recognized the resemblance here to a queue for receiving the sacrament.

The sacrament thus appears obliquely as the representation of a transcendent heavenly reality, in which the normal worldly rules of hierarchy and status are turned on their heads. The important point to make, though, is that even as the Pearl-poet evokes this alternative way of ordering things, he backs away quite quickly from suggesting that it ought to re-order social relations in the real world. He does not, either through the voice of the pearl-maiden or the narrator, dwell on the equalizing social implications of the vineyard parable. Instead, he focuses on the demand it places on the narrator to recognize how his immanent understandings of justice don't apply in this transcendent world. The pearl-maiden demands that he rein in his feelings of injury, not really because he is wrong, but because the kind of distinctions he makes in his reality are of a different order than those in hers. This is why, just a few lines later, the pearl-maiden seems to hedge her bets somewhat, comforting the narrator by suggesting that, though everyone will receive the same "penny" of salvation, some version of the hierarchy the speaker desires will still exist in heaven:

Of more and lasse in Godes ryche,
That gentyl sayde, lys no joparde,

³¹ "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject," *The Chaucer Review* 44.3 (2010): 316.

For ther is uch mon payed inlyche,
Whether lyttel other much be hys rewarde. (602-605)

(“Of more and less in God's kingdom,” that lady said, “there is no question, for there each man is paid fully, whether his reward is little or much.”)

The word that is hardest to pin down here is “inlyche,” which some editors gloss as “alike,” but as both William Vantuono and Sarah Stanbury point out, makes better sense to translate as “fully,” since that seems less flatly contradictory with the pearl-maiden’s assertion that there are in fact degrees of “more and less” in God’s kingdom.³² The moral lesson within the poem, therefore, even as it alludes to the eucharist, is not to point out that the narrator hasn’t sufficiently opened himself up to the transcendent reality that exists outside himself, but rather just the opposite, that he hasn’t sufficiently recognized the difference between the immanent and the transcendent realms. Thus, even though there is in the final lines of the poem an apotheosis of poetry, such that it seems to perform the same transcendent work as the sacrifice of the Mass, here the pearl-maiden seems to check that very same impulse. Don’t worry, she seems to be telling the narrator, the apparent egalitarianism of heaven doesn’t actually undermine your need for social and moral hierarchy, you just need to recognize that you don’t actually have the intellectual or spiritual capacity to recognize how the order you desire might exist alongside what seems to you a subversive equality. The devotional message, in other words, is to recognize the self’s boundedness from rather than its connectedness to transcendent reality.

Pearl, in fact, is often anxious to insist that the ideal devotional attitude requires not only a consciousness about the limits of the self, but even an active process of self-bounding and containment. Unlike some traditions within Christian mystical heritage, in which encountering

³² See relevant notes in their respective editions: William Vantuono, ed. and trans., *The Pearl Poems: An Omnibus Edition. Vol. 1: Pearl and Cleanness* (New York: Garland, 1984) and Sarah Stanbury, ed., *Pearl* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001).

the divine breaks down the boundaries of subjectivity (the literal sense of ecstasy: “to stand outside oneself”), the Pearl-poet does not trade his initial grief for beatific joy, but rather for pious self-restraint. This is an attitude the poem explicitly connects with specific expectations of aristocratic life. The pearl-maiden herself, for all that she represents the ultimate joy of the beatific vision, is not actually held up as a model of holy ecstasy, but as a model of stoic devotion managed by absolute self-control. Both the maiden’s rebukes of the narrator’s inapposite passion and the poem’s attention to the physical boundaries of the maiden and her clothing emphasize this model of emotional containment.³³ When the narrator first encounters her, his attention to her borders personifies the lapidary image of a pearl encased in gold in order to underscore a clearly defined and controlled subjectivity. The description, for example, of her face surrounded by a pure white wimple, “Her lere leke al hyr umbegon” (209), immediately leads into an account of her restrained aristocratic comportment, “Her semblaunt sade for doc other erle” (Her semblance grave as any duke or earl, 210).

Thus it is that *Pearl* enacts the inherent paradox of the late medieval eucharist. By comparing its own poetic work to the work of the sacrament, the Pearl-poet elevates his poetry to a sacramental status that necessarily implies the blurring of the subjective boundary between the poet and a deeper order of being, itself understood as a kind of divine signification. At the same time, though, the poem is aware of the dangers that might result from not appropriately acknowledging the boundaries of the self. This is why, at the end of the poem, the dream vision concludes with an image of an uncrossable boundary, itself as much an image of the border between self and other as between heaven and earth.

The river that separates the narrator from the maiden is perhaps the most significant image of the paradoxical relation between immanence and transcendence in *Pearl*. On the one

³³Garrison, “Liturgy and Loss,” 307.

hand, the very existence of the perfected woman on *the other side* of the river implies an ideal state of affairs in which, if and when the narrator ever arrives there, the clear psychological distinctions between him and the beatified maiden would begin to blur, just as the maiden herself is almost physically identical to the other maidens in the train of the lamb.³⁴ On the other hand, the river becomes the incommensurable boundary between the narrator and the world of heaven. His attempt to cross it, and his sudden return to wakefulness, indicate that his desperate desire to enter the city of the lamb and become part of the heavenly community is transgressive. The ecstatic frenzy and delight the narrator experiences (Delyt me drof in yye and ere, / My manes mynde to maddyng malte” 1153-4: Delight assailed both eye and ear, and my mortal mind was reduced to a frenzy), turns out not to be “at my Princes paye” (1164)—it displeases God. The narrator is clear why:

Hit payed hym not that I so flonc
Over mervelous meres, so mad arayde.
Of raas thagh I were rasch and ronk,
Yet rapely therinne I was restayed.
For, ryght as I sparred unto the bonc,
That braththe out of my drem me brayed. (1165-70)

(It did not please Him that I should throw myself across those wondrous waters in so wild a manner. Though I was rash and heedless in my headlong haste, yet I was shortly held back. For, just as I rushed forward to the bank, that hasty action startled me out of my dream.)

It is the narrator’s lack of self-control, emphasized by the repeated descriptions of his rashness (“flonc”-rush; “mad”-crazy; “rasch”-rash ; “ronk”-haughty/excessive; “braththe”-impetuosity), his inability to contain his emotions and acknowledge the boundary that still separates him from the higher orders of reality that offends God. The river, therefore, is an image of the subjective

³⁴ See 1097-1102: “This noble cité of ryche empyrse / Was sodanly ful wythouten sommoun / Of such vergynes in the same gyse / That was my blysful anunder croun; / And coronde wern alle of the same fasoun, / Depaynt in perles and wedes qwyte” (This noble city of glorious renown was suddenly and without warning filled by similar virgins in the same guise as my blissful maiden beneath her crown; and they were all crowned in identical fashion, adorned in pearls and white clothing.)

boundaries the Pearl-poet sees as necessary to maintain in the this-worldly context of devotional practice.

As Carolyne Walker Bynum discusses in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, anxieties about unseemly ecstasy in late medieval Europe often surrounded reception of the eucharist. At the same time as the *devotio moderna* was encouraging more frequent reception, especially by those in religious orders and educated elites, Church authorities worried that too frequent reception, particularly by women, might make communicants forget the radical subjective and metaphysical distinction between humans and God.³⁵ Bynum describes the case of Dorothy of Montou, whose spiritual ecstasies when receiving the eucharist caused her husband, who thought her behavior indecorous, much consternation. An account of Montou's passionate hunger for the eucharist, recorded by her confessor, is extremely reminiscent of the *Pearl* narrator's ecstatic "Delyt" gazing on the heavenly city:

Often, indeed, because of the frenzy of this desire she was not able to pray; her heart grieved so that it seemed to her as if she wanted to die if she was not permitted to receive the sacrament on that day.³⁶

Compare with lines 1157-60 of *Pearl*:

I thoght that nothyng myght me dere
To fech me bur and take me halte
And to start in the strem schulde non me stere,
To swymme the remnaunt, thagh I ther swalte.

(I thought that nothing would harm me by striking me a blow and making me halt, and that none would prevent me from plunging into the stream and swimming the rest of the way, though I died in the attempt.)

The appearance of the eucharist in the final lines of *Pearl*, however, quite unlike in the account of Dorothy's experience of the sacrament, does not recapitulate for the narrator this ecstatic

³⁵ *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 57-60.

³⁶ Qtd. in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 137.

desire; rather it orders his excessive desires into a subjectivity governed by an awareness of its own epistemological and metaphysical limits and a concomitant emotional self-moderation. Importantly, the sacramental bread and wine of the last stanza are those that “The preste uus *schewes* uch a daye” (1210, my emphasis). This eucharist is seen and adored, but not consumed. The daily repetition (“uch a daye”) of the celebration reminds us that this Mass is not the expression of global unity commemorated in the mandatory annual reception at Easter, but the more frequent celebrations during which lay-reception was not common. This eucharist is the kind that would have been celebrated in private chapels or even simply observed from special pews built for aristocrats.³⁷ The kind of response it directs the faithful observer to is one that participates in the growing “asocial mysticism” of the period,³⁸ a form of introspection encouraged by the new forms of private devotion in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These movements often focused more on the eucharist as “a matter of personal decision” that primarily “provided for one’s individual spiritual needs rather than [serving as] a corporate act by which the bonds of community were strengthened.”³⁹ This is not to say that this tendency in the liturgical practice of the late medieval Mass, or the *Pearl*-poet’s use of it, abandons an investment in the mystical unity promised to Christian believers in the sacrament. The developments of late medieval eucharistic practice rather depended on the loud endorsement of such thinking, as often as not by the very people who had the most intimate and frequent access to the sacraments. Such notions provided a certain ideological protection to the quotidian eucharistic habits used to mark out social hierarchy and encourage individualistic forms of

³⁷ See Garrison 298; Pamela C. Graves, “Social Space in the English Medieval Parish Church,” *Economy and Society* 18 (1989): 297–322; and Colin Richmond, “Religion and the Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman,” in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Dobson (Gloucester: Sutton 1984), 193–203.

³⁸ John Bossy, “The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700,” *Past and Present* 100 (1983): 59.

³⁹ Frank C. Senn, *The People’s Work: A Social History of the Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 179.

devotion. It is one thing to meditate on the mystical body of all believers in one's private chapel; it is quite something else to share bread with the stinking parish beggar.⁴⁰

Chaucer's Eucharistic Jokes

For the Pearl-poet, the subjective porosity implied by his alignment of poetry and eucharist comes alongside and is tempered by a concomitant imperative to subjective buffering and devotional propriety. There is a tension in *Pearl*, just as there is a tension in medieval eucharistic theology and practice, between an understanding of the self as participating in some deeper transcendent reality and a conscious construction of the self as socially, hierarchically, and metaphysically distinct from other people and everything else that exists outside the self. If *Pearl* tries to navigate this tension in order to present to its audience a model of the devotional life that synthesizes this tension, Chaucer is much more interested in drawing attention to its inherent conflicts. Chaucer's work is more ironic and playful, and he doesn't come down "in favour" of an emphasis on either transcendence or immanence. In his work, in fact, the conflict between the immanent and the transcendent valences of the eucharist often becomes a source of humour. The two most important references to the eucharist in *The Canterbury Tales* both show up as jokes, and they are kept at a significant rhetorical distance from Chaucer himself, as they told by two of the most loathsome characters in the entirety of the *Tales*, the Pardoner and the Summoner. Yet even though it is couched in humour, Chaucer draws the same parallel seen in *Pearl* between poetry and the sacrament. In his typical manner, though, Chaucer uses this sacramental analogy to be at once self-aggrandizing and self-deprecating.

The first of these two eucharistic jokes appears in the "Pardoner's Tale." The tale, like many in the work, proposes a superficially straightforward moral: *radix malorum est cupiditas*

⁴⁰ As Garrison points out, while the sacramental bread was more often not received, the practice of passing the Pax—unconsecrated bread eaten in lieu of the host—even as it underscored communal membership in the church, developed such that separate paxes were reserved for nobility (298).

(“cupidity is the root of evils,” 7.334).⁴¹ It begins with three debauched men looking for a thief named Death, whom they are told was last seen by a particular tree at the end of a lane. There the three men find bags of gold and, wanting to celebrate their good fortune, send the youngest of their party into town to buy food. At this point the older men see an opportunity to keep the money for themselves, and decide to kill the youngest when he returns. They do this, but end up dead themselves because, as the reader knows, the young man had the same plan in mind, and has poisoned the food he brought back to the wood. Thus, in the end, all three men die as a result of their own greed. The irony that comes along with the Pardoner’s edifying message about the self-destructiveness of greed, though, is the Pardoner’s own admitted *cupiditas*. The Pardoner is an unabashedly greedy hawker of forged relics and falsified indulgences, a man who glorifies in his ability to manipulate the piety of simple people for money. He is unable to receive, or consciously rejects, the moral imperative of the story he himself tells. His sermons are motivated by the very vice they denounce: “I preche of no thyng but for coveityse” (7.424). He even concludes his tale by attempting to sell some of his fake relics and dubious pardons to the other pilgrims, yet another effort to satisfy his own greed: “But sires, o word forgat I in my tale, / I have relikes and pardoun in my male” (7.920-21).

One of the subtexts that both highlights and pokes fun at the Pardoner’s hypocrisy is the contrast Chaucer establishes between the character’s vehement denunciation of gluttony (not surprisingly, one of his own favourite sins), and what the character himself implies is a eucharistic ordering of appetite. In a gesture that interestingly anticipates a trope important in *Paradise Lost*, the Pardoner even reads gluttony, rather than pride, as the motivation of Adam’s first sin in the garden:

⁴¹ All quotations from *The Canterbury Tales* come from *The Riverside Chaucer: New Edition*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

For whil that adam fasted, as I rede,
 He was in paradys; and whan that he
 Eet of the fruyt deffended on the tree,
 Anon he was out cast to wo and peyne.
 O glotonye, on thee wel oghte us pleyne! (508-512)

Not only does this sermon hyperbolically align holiness with fasting, which both during Lent and at other times of the year was a key part of preparation for receiving the eucharist, but it denounces cooks, who encourage gluttony, as the evil versions of celebrants of the Mass: “Thise cookes, how they stampe, and streyne, and grynde, / And turnen substaunce into accident / To fulfille al thy likerous talent!” (538-540). As many critics have noticed, this invective against chefs uses scholastic eucharistic terms (substance and accident) to take a jab at the theology of Lollards. Chaucer makes the Pardoner’s rant sound a lot like Lollard anti-transubstantiation polemic, which often dwelled on graphic descriptions of the repellent implications of Christ’s bodily presence in the sacrament, including the possibility of Christ being chewed, digested, and excreted.⁴² For David Williams, this oblique reference to Lollardy, which was growing in both numbers and influence during Chaucer’s life, is the poet’s way of drawing a parallel between the Pardoner’s inability to recognize and respond to the moral imperative of his own tale and the Lollard rejection of what Williams describes as the “highest category of medieval sign,” the sacrament.⁴³

In this account, it is Chaucer and not the Pardoner who makes the joke. The Pardoner, in fact, presents a perverse poetics against which Chaucer contrasts himself. The corrupt seller of indulgences, as Williams reads him, unconsciously reveals an ideological common ground with

⁴² See Paul Strohm, “Chaucer’s Lollard Joke: History and the Textual Unconscious,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995): 37: “The temporal effect of this sequence is to place the cooks at the service of the belly’s command ... its proclivity being to turn food to dung. However transformed in appearance ... the foodstuffs remain always excessively material in their nature. The analogy here is with the Wycliffite/Lollard theology of the Eucharist, in which the sacramental bread remains bread in substance.”

⁴³ “‘Lo how I vanysshe’: The Pardoner’s War Against Signs,” in *Chaucer and Language*, ed. Robert Myles, David Williams, and Douglas James Wurtele (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 160.

Lollardy's rejection of transubstantiation, which stands as the principal threat to a medieval account of the reliability of signs. (Significantly, though counterintuitively, since Lollards were dogmatic realists, Williams ascribes the same epistemological threat to nominalism as he does to the Lollard rejection of transubstantiation).⁴⁴ The Pardoner, in the tradition of Lollard polemic, is fixated on scatological description, something brought out in his bawdy discussion of the sounds "at either ende" of human bodies (6.536)⁴⁵ as well as the famously disgusting description of drunkenness at 526-528:

Mete unto wombe, and wombe eek unto mete,
 God destroyen bothe, as Paulus seith.
 Allas, a foul thyng is it, by my feith,
 To seye this word, and fouler is the dede,
 Whan man so drynketh of the white and rede
 That of his throte he maketh his pryvee
 Thurgh thilke cursed superfluitee.

In these lines, the "white and rede" varieties of wine also call to mind the white bread and red wine of communion, and in doing so parallel the material excess of drunkenness with the Lollard fixation on the host's passage through human digestive tracts. This sermon against overindulgence, therefore, ends up getting fixated on the mere vulgar physicality of the sin, rather than on actually understanding the real spiritual problem of *cupiditas*, that is, its idolatrous preference for some intermediate good over the goodness of God.

It is exactly this fixation with the fleshiness of *cupiditas* that prevents the Pardoner from hearing the moral message of his own sermon. The Pardoner does not see the body in the realist scholastic framework, i.e. as pointing to a transcendental referent, or, in eucharistic terms, as participating in the mystical body of the Church. Ironically, therefore, his account of sin superficially presents a stark division between spiritual good and fleshy perversion, but ends up

⁴⁴ See *Language Redeemed*, 8-9, qtd. on pgs. 40-41.

⁴⁵ Just three lines prior to the eucharistic reference of "substance into accident" (539).

affirming a *de facto* materialism. His sermon claims to endorse a fairly standard elevation of the spiritual over the physical. Rhetorically, we might say, his speech mirrors the very same kind of perverse inversion that he rather comically and hyperbolically accuses chefs of carrying out. Chefs' preparation of food seems to elevate the "accidents" of food (the sensory pleasure it provides) over and above its substance (its nutritional value). The Pardoner, though, as the reader already knows, is quite happy to indulge gluttonously in the accidents of food. So, just as the Pardoner condemns gluttony and embraces it wholeheartedly, he also claims to elevate the spiritual even as he indulges in the rhetorically "physical." Likewise, the Pardoner ends up performing his own contention that gluttony and drunkenness reverse the normal direction of the digestive tract, turning the "throte" into a "pryvee," since the words that come out of his mouth are so thoroughly scatological.

As Paul Strohm has argued, though, the Pardoner's hypocritical attack against cooks implicitly points to an anxiety in the orthodoxy of Chaucer's day about the materiality of the Lollard eucharist:

These excessively accidental foodstuffs [made by cooks] are a material residue, an obstinate and embarrassing remainder of the cooking process, even as the material and literal "breadness" of the Lollard Host is itself an embarrassingly untransformed remainder of the sacramental process. Thus, by metonymic inference, the embarrassing remainder of Lollard theology, the Lollard "conclusion" itself, *is dung, is shit*.⁴⁶

The Pardoner thus becomes the semiotic conclusion of the Lollard eucharist. Just as, according to the Wycliffites, the material bread cannot make literally present the body of Christ, so the tale the Pardoner tells cannot successfully communicate to its teller its moral referent. Within the logic of this tale, therefore, Chaucer sets up transubstantiation as the form of signification that grounds all others. As the Lollard denies the power of transubstantiation to make Christ literally

⁴⁶ "Chaucer's Lollard Joke," 37.

present in the Mass, so the Pardoner denies that words can actually convey real meaning. His words are empty signifiers just as, from an orthodox perspective, the Lollard elements were empty signs. Chaucer, then, implicitly distinguishes his own literary work from the Pardoner's, and suggests that the referential capability of all signs derives from the unique sign-signified coupling that occurs in the miracle of transubstantiation. In essence, he affirms theologian Catherine Pickstock's articulation that the eucharist is "such an extreme case of sign that it is no longer a sign, but that which gives signs to be."⁴⁷ He presents his own poetic work, in other words, over and against the Pardoner and his empty signification, as deriving its power from this sacramental system of meaning.

Yet Chaucer should not be thought of as naively mystical in his use of the eucharist. As Strohm points out, even in the "Pardoner's Tale," the author's provisional alignment of the Pardoner's perversity with Lollard materiality can actually resist the poetic sacramentality it appears to endorse. The Lollard insistence on the materiality of the eucharist is not fundamentally anti-sacramental, any more than the materiality of the water in baptism invalidates the sacramental work of baptism. Instead, as Strohm articulates, what it threatens is the very particular "exceptionality of the host" in the theology of transubstantiation, "its function as that point of irrationality that supports or ... 'quilts' the entire ideological system":

The Lollard functions [in "The Pardoner's Tale"], like the Jew or the Muslim at other medieval moments, as a symptom of repressed unease at and over the imaginative centre of the sacramental system. Like any symptom, the caricatured Lollard works two-sidedly. Most obviously, the Lollard stages a problem for an orthodox but contradictory centre. But, at the same time, Lollardy functions protectively, diverting attention from a centre which must remain contradictory to fulfill its symbolic mandate.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 263. Qtd. in "The Pardoner's War Against Signs," 165.

⁴⁸ "Chaucer's Lollard Joke," 40-1.

Chaucer's use of the Pardoner-Lollard connection as a semiotic model against which he defines his own poetic work, therefore, recapitulates the central paradox of scholastic realism in literary terms. On the one hand, as Chaucer invites readers to see his own poetry in contrast to the empty signification of the Pardoner, he implicitly points to its participation in the sacramental structures that govern social and literary meaning in the late medieval world. On the other hand, even as Chaucer holds out the Pardoner as a protective "other," the Pardoner manifests the ideological threat within that sacramental system, that human speech is just speech. This threat, of course, would have been felt especially keenly by authors writing in the vernacular, which was thought of as more profoundly divorced from transcendent realities than either Church Latin or the biblical languages.

The Pardoner manifests speech qua speech, and his words do not seem to refer to any reality outside themselves. Because of this, he indirectly affirms the realist system of ontological referentiality, in which the created world becomes the preferred and reliable system of signification, while human speech itself remains an always-suspect derivation from that created network of signs. Thus even as the Pardoner acts overtly as a foil for Chaucer, the character nevertheless draws attention to a broader anxiety that poetry might not really participate in or, even worse, actually stand in opposition to the reliability of the divine signification revealed in creation. Chaucer, therefore, even as he pointedly contrasts himself to the Pardoner and his "Lollard" model of signification, cannot help inviting his readers to see likenesses as well as differences. One primary example of which we can see is the way that Chaucer, rather like the Pardoner, and totally unlike the author of *Pearl*, keeps his narrative persona at a literary distance from the various spiritual lessons presented in the *Tales*. While Chaucer is comically self-deprecating in a way that the Pardoner is not, he does share the Pardoner's inclination to remain

decidedly ambivalent about any necessary moral response to the ethical propositions made by different tales or characters.

In Strohm's psychologizing of Chaucer, the Pardoner-Lollard connection in Chaucer's work is a "symptom," that is, a largely unintentional reaction to a repressed anxiety. Transubstantiation, in this diagnosis, is the irrational core of the medieval cultural subconscious. While this may be a useful way to understand aspects of medieval culture, Chaucer himself, elsewhere in *The Canterbury Tales*, hints that he is more aware of the ironic implications of his appeal to the eucharist than Strohm seems to give credit for. As Fiona Somerset has pointed out, the idea that Lollardy represented an almost unspeakable "outside" to medieval orthodoxy, an idea on which the psychoanalytic framework of Strohm's argument depends, has been drastically overstated. In the period of Chaucer's own life, before the more aggressive suppressions of Lollardy in the 1410s, "it was by no means as 'dangerous' even to allude to matters of religious controversy... as some scholars have suggested."⁴⁹ It is therefore problematic to see Chaucer's Pardoner simply as the manifestation of a repressed cultural anxiety. If we look to the appearance of another "Lollard joke," this time in "The Summoner's Tale," we find that Chaucer is able to playfully invoke the theological counterculture of Lollardy as an emancipatory model rather than as a symptomatic "other."

"The Summoner's Tale," which involves the titular character's terse retort to the Friar's slanderous narrative against him, tells the story of a greedy friar who comes to the house of Thomas, a usual source for alms, and finds the parishioner sick. Proceeding to demand a meal from Thomas' wife, whose child we find out has recently died, the friar preaches a ponderous sermon against anger, concluding it with a request for money to help build a cloister for his

⁴⁹ "Here, There, and Everywhere? Wycliffite Conceptions of the Eucharist and Chaucer's 'Other' Lollard Joke," in *Lollards and Their Influence*, ed. Fiona Somerset, Jill Havens, and Derrick Pitard (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2003), 128.

fellow local Franciscans. Irritated by the friar's presumption, Thomas tells him that if he will swear to share it equally with the other friars, he may receive a present from "Bynethe my buttoke" (3.2142). As the friar gropes underneath Thomas for the present, the sick man lets out a fart so loud that "Ther nys no capul [horse], drawyng in a carte / That myghte have lete a fart of swich a soun" (2150-1). The angry friar, chased from the house by servants, takes recourse to the local lord. Amusingly, the friar seems as annoyed by the man's impossible request as by his insult: "This false blasphemour, that charged me / To parte that wol nat departed be" (2012-13). While dismissing that the friar has any real claim to compensation, the lord plays along with the friar's rhetoric, and poses to his court the problem of how to divide the fart equally, treating it like a "scholastic *insolubile*."⁵⁰ Fortunately, the Lord's squire provides an ingenious solution:

Lat brynge a cartwheel heere into this halle;
 But looke that it have his spokes alle, —
 Twelve spokes hath a cartwheel comunly.
 And bryng me thanne twelve freres, woot ye why?
 For thrittene is a covent, as I gesse.
 ...Thanne shal they knele doun, by oon assent,
 And to every spokes ende, in this manere,
 Ful sadly leye his nose shal a frere.
Thanne shal this cherl, with bely stif and toght
 As any tabour, hyder been ybrought;
 And sette hym on the wheel right of this cart.
 Upon the nave, and make hym lete a fart.
 And ye shul seen, up peril of my lyf,
 By preeve which that is demonstratif,
 That equally the soun of it wol wende,
 And eke the stynk, unto the spokes ende. (3.2255-74)

Through this comic resolution, approved by the laughter of the court, the friar's hypocritical wrath is dismissed and undercut.

This tale, like so many in *The Canterbury Tales*, pokes fun at abuses of clerical privilege, a concern that was at the heart of the Lollard movement. In a manner that would have struck

⁵⁰ Ibid., 136.

Lollard sympathizers in Chaucer's audience as particularly humorous, the squire, by solving this pseudo-theological quibble, comically appropriates the interpretive role reserved for the clergy.⁵¹ The squire's comic solution, though, for all its ribald physicality, actually ironically enables the friar to fulfill his oath to Thomas. Thus, though obviously in an absurd way, his interpretation undergirds the possibility of truthful utterance that the Pardoner's fixation on the vulgar does not. The humorous pretension of the squire becomes even more audacious when we consider how the wheel apparatus resembles the eucharist. Firstly, the fart is shared among twelve friars, parodically representative of the twelve apostles. Secondly, the fart must be distributed to different recipients whilst remaining *one* fart, just as transubstantiation insists that Christ's body is disseminated in the sacrament, but not divided. This pseudo-sacrament goes even further in undermining the privileged position of the friar as it ironically contrasts the mendicant's earlier chastising of Thomas for giving out small amounts of money to many friars, rather than one large sum to him. As the cleric explains, during his sermon, to Thomas: "What is a ferthyng worth parted in twelve? / Lo, ech thyng that is oned in himselve / Is moore strong than whan it is toscatered" (1967-9). The rhetorical hyperbole here, that the value of the coin is somehow ontologically bound to its indivisibility, that its division (into *twelve*) makes it worthless, sounds remarkably sacramental. The bizarre use of terms associated with unity and division ("oned in himselve"/ "strong" / "toscatere"), rather than more relevant financial language, amusingly suggests that the Friar is offended by Thomas' distributed charity for the same reason that orthodox theology was offended by the Lollard sacrament. The Friar argues, though obviously insincerely, that division makes the "ferthyng" impotent and empty just as the Wycliffite insistence that material stuff is actually broken and separated in the eucharist profanes and

⁵¹ For an extended discussion of this theme, see Fiona Somerset, "'As just as is a squyre': The Politics of 'Lewd Translacion' in Chaucer's 'Summoner's Tale'," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 21 (1999): 187-207.

invalidates the sacrament. This orthodox rhetoric is ironically used, however, as a way to shake down the sick and the poor. Chaucer thus creates a playfully blasphemous inversion, in which the normative theological concern with Christ's bodily integrity becomes the rhetorical model for clerical abuse. Likewise, the Lollard fascination with the vulgarity of digestion, used as a way of critiquing both transubstantiation and the privileged role of the priesthood that came along with it, ends up resolving the conflict in the tale.

Somerset, in an argument heavily engaged with the period's eucharistic debates, points to yet another moment in the tale that invokes the Lollard critique of transubstantiation.⁵² She argues that the unusual greeting the friar gives to Thomas as he enters the house, "Deus hic!" (1770),⁵³ not only suggests a drunken hiccup, but makes reference to a local debate between Lollards and English friars over the particular meaning of *hoc* in the Vulgate version of the words of consecration: *hoc est enim corpus meum*. In the textual record of this conflict, Lollard polemics attack what they claim is semantic circumlocution in Franciscan defences of transubstantiation. Specifically, the manuscripts accuse the friars of modifying *hoc*—"this is my body"—to *hic*—"here is my body"—in order to avoid the apparent conclusion of Christ's words of consecration: that the *hoc* to which he refers, i.e. the bread, cannot be his literal body, since his literal body is already present as a distinct entity in the scene as he says the words. In order to avoid this problem, so the Lollard texts argue, the orthodox friars change the text to a more abstract insistence of Christ's presence as *hic*, "here." The result in "The Summoner's Tale" is that, just as above in the friar's use of sacramental language, the philosophical rhetoric of orthodoxy, in this case a particularly friar-ish orthodoxy, becomes the very thing that confirms the friar's hypocritical drunkenness.

⁵² "Here, There, and Everywhere?", 129-35.

⁵³ The standard and expected greeting for a Franciscan would have been *Pax Huic Domini*.

For the purposes of this discussion, the finer points of the *hic-hoc* debate are less important than the fact that Chaucer clearly invites his contemporary readers to contemplate, however guarded, a comic allegiance with Lollard heterodoxy. This gives us no reason to think that Chaucer was deeply or personally invested in the Lollard movement, but it does suggest that Chaucer was alive to the philosophical and theological oppositions Strohm and others have diagnosed as symptomatic of medieval irrationality. That the poet can use an allusion to the minutiae of contemporary semantic controversy as a way of undermining clerical privilege demonstrates that he recognizes a significant connection between the two. In this sense, Chaucer is perhaps consummately medieval, convinced that if God spoke the world into existence, understanding speech is key to understanding that existence. Chaucer's use of Lollard eucharistic theology in "The Summoner's Tale," though, also ends up recapitulating in a literary sense the nominalist critique of realism as well as nominalism's insistence on the immanent ontology of language. While the friar tells abstract allegorical tales about the nature of anger, the squire's "immanently" vulgar rhetorical flourish bears the affective weight of the tale, despite not referring to any "real" event (the cart-wheel solution is clearly not really designed to be performed). Thus the genre that is most at home in the philosophical presumptions of realism, religious allegory, is found wanting next to the vulgar rhetoric of the secular speaker, which figures so many of the same anxieties nominalism represented to philosophical conservatives. That is to say, in this tale at least, the potency of language resides in the words themselves—to use scholastic terms, their particular instantiation—not in some higher order of abstract allegorized entities outside and beyond the immanent experience of voice and text.

What is particularly odd about this resemblance is the fact that Lollards themselves were not, of course, nominalists, but rather a kind of "hyper-realists." They rejected transubstantiation

because of their commitment to the fact that in realist metaphysics, accidents must reliably refer to their substances. If this is not the case, in Lollard thought, God becomes a deceiver. If, as in the case of transubstantiation, the accident of bread is divorced from any real “breadness,” then the central sign of the Christian liturgy becomes the least of all created things, the one truly empty sign in an otherwise referential universe.⁵⁴ As Dallas Denery summarizes this understanding, “Such a miracle would undermine every system of knowledge, would render every certitude about the world worthless. Appearances would have no necessary connection to reality. Nothing could be inferred from the evidence of the senses.”⁵⁵

We can make some sense of this apparent contradiction if we consider the way that both nominalism and Lollardy have been seen as threats to an apparently universal system of meaning shared by the medieval world. This thinking is clearly operative in Strohm’s thesis, but is perhaps most prominent in the work of David Williams, who reads the “The Pardoner’s Tale” as Chaucer’s dual defence against the dangers of Lollardy *and* nominalism. In “The Pardoner’s War Against Signs” (2001), Williams posits the Pardoner’s implicitly Lollard eucharistic impiety as the source of the disconnection between his own words and the truth-reference they ought to bear. According to Williams’ more recent book, however, the Pardoner’s moral repulsiveness is manifest not only in his Lollard-like rejection of transubstantiation, but also his tacit allegiance with nominalist philosophical principles: “In the Pardoner’s worldview it is human believing, knowing, and naming that give reality to the intelligible—subjective credence (*wenyng*) that quickens the object of belief.”⁵⁶ It is by this appeal to a superficially nominalist ontology, in which the name and not the thing is real, that the Pardoner disingenuously defends his practice of

⁵⁴ Dallas G. Denery, “From Sacred Mystery to Divine Deception: Robert Holkot, John Wyclif and the Transformation of Fourteenth-Century Eucharistic Discourse,” *Journal of Religious History* 29.2 (2005): 133.

⁵⁵ This is Denery’s paraphrase of Wyclif’s own argument in *De Eucharistia*, which can be found in full on pg. 57 of his article.

⁵⁶ *Language Redeemed*, 98.

selling fraudulent relics: “Thanne shewe I forth my longe cristal stones, / Ycrammed ful of cloutes and of bones – / Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon” (6.347-9). For Williams, the Pardoner’s structurally nominalist assertion that his trinkets *are* relics because his audience thinks (wenen) that they are, reflects and parallels his pathological fascination with the body and with feces, which is a kind of rhetorical equivalent to what Williams reads as a “vulgar” nominalist focus on the immanent.⁵⁷ Thus the Pardoner manifests a Chaucerian metaphor in which nominalist ontology turns all language into excrement. Yet this seems in opposition with both Strohm and Williams’s earlier arguments, where Lollardy, which rejected transubstantiation on *realist* grounds, is the school of thought identified with the Pardoner’s scatological tirades and serves as the ideological system against which Chaucer defines his own poetic persona.

While Williams here clearly attributes to Chaucer incompatible anxieties, he inadvertently reveals the overlapping work these two theological schools—Lollardy and nominalism—perform in Chaucer’s poetry. The *Tales* are interested in both of them not so much as clearly bounded, or even clearly articulated, *positions*, but as differing models of divergence from a very loosely framed realist-scholastic mainstream. Both Lollardy and nominalism serve Chaucer’s ambiguous self-representation as, alternately, a vulgar fabulist, not to be taken too seriously, as a representative voice of the common man’s wisdom, and as a dutiful subject and pious believer. Both Lollardy and nominalism appear in some moments as negative models against which Chaucer articulates his conservatism, while at others they are useful ways of exploring playful dissidence. Thus it is that while the Pardoner’s conflation of the digestive and the sacred can be read as Chaucer distancing himself from various conceptual threats to orthodox medieval ideology, the squire of the “Summoner’s Tale” comically embodies and valorizes those very same threats. His comic sacrilization of flatulence is actually redemptive. The squire’s

⁵⁷ Ibid., 102.

scatological joke does not guard against what Strohm sees as the absurd core of medieval theology, or apply the language of excrement to “other” the Lollard insistence on materiality. Rather, the fart itself, the digestive remainder that all sides of the medieval controversy were anxious about, *becomes* the community-forming event. As a model for Chaucer’s poetics, the squire flips the normative medieval mistrust of language on its head, making a satirical-heretical apology for the poet’s own “windy” production.

Though Chaucer’s self-presentation in the *Tales* is always very self-protective, it is hard not to see, as Somerset points out, a close identification between author and squire: “[the squire] engages in something very much like Chaucer’s typical mode of political allusion, courteously flattering secular power and reinforcing its policies and decisions while entertaining it through a parody of an issue on which he remains delicately nonpartisan.”⁵⁸ The squire transforms the blasphemous and rude fart into a parody of the eucharist. As parody, his solution can playfully address the sensitive and often contradictory impulses of medieval sacramental theology and metaphysics at a rhetorically safe distance. To the extent that the squire provides a critique of and solution to the friar’s hypocritical anger, however, his narrative control over the scene invites us to consider Chaucer’s own work as a vernacular and secular poet. Acting as a model for Chaucer’s poetics, the squire is able to draw attention to the anxieties about digestion at the centre of medieval eucharistic theology, but by doing so his words end up enacting the kind of conflict resolution and community formation that is one main function of the eucharist. The sacrament in “The Pardoner’s Tale” and “The Summoner’s Tale,” therefore, becomes for Chaucer a boldly theological way of expressing his simultaneous self-deprecation and aggrandizement. An acute interpreter of his own religious and philosophical context, Chaucer pulls off this double-sided self-presentation by appealing to the duality inherent in the eucharist

⁵⁸ “Here, There, and Everywhere?”, 137.

and the overlapping issues of scholasticism. The late medieval cult of the eucharist explored and emphasized, at different times and in different ways, transcendent and immanent aspects of the sacrament. Chaucer, drawing on this eucharistic overdetermination, provides a simultaneously transcendent and immanent account of his own work. If we are invited to see the squire (or even the Pardoner) as a textual analogue for Chaucer, it suggests that his poetry is indeed rhetorically vulgar, a decidedly untranscendent expression of purely digestive wind. At the same time, though, this literary *efflatus* assumes something like the ability of the Mass to communicate a transcendent reality.

Conclusion

Both the Pearl-poet and Chaucer have a vested interest in associating their own poetic signification with the culturally central signification of the eucharist. In doing so they each present their poetry as potent presence-making media. Yet in neither case does this connection between word and sacrament naïvely appeal to an abstract mysticism. Both authors invoke the medieval sacrament as a model for meaning specifically because of its ability to encompass divergent experiences and impulses. They appeal to a fundamental friction between the transcendent and the immanent. In the case of the Pearl-poet, the eucharist is not only a figure of transcendent signification, it is also a sober reminder that, in this world, the boundaries of the self must be respected. Chaucer also, though in a more guarded way, presents his own words as functionally of a kind with the eucharist—exposing sin, breaking down abusive hierarchies, creating community, and relating the self to that community. Chaucer especially, however, draws on sacramental theology as contested ground, rife with internal conflict and contradiction. Unlike the Pearl-poet, Chaucer leaves us to decide how much his own words participate in the transcendent and immanent valences of the sacrament. Both authors' uses of the eucharist,

however, reveal several important facts about the larger history of the poetry-sacrament connection in England. First, the starting point of the eucharist as a model for poetics cannot be the early modern collapse of transubstantiation as the dominant model of sacramental presence. Second, the eucharist as a model for poetic meaning is not characteristically a way of grasping at an ideal transcendence to guard against the prospect of a universe in which signification becomes unmoored from higher orders of reality. Rather, poets present their own work as eucharistic, even in the height of the medieval world, as a way of working out fundamental problems inherent to the experience of reader and author. These problems include the relationship of the author to a reading community, the reliability and/or unreliability of the text to communicate the same thing to different people, the nature of the various kinds of presence the reader encounters (both authorial and characterly), the validity of individual interpretation, and so on. Third, the Pearl-poet and Chaucer, though particularly Chaucer, are very like subsequent early modern poets in this way: their two-sided relationship to the sacramentality of their own texts becomes an image of the reader's encounter with both the text and the reading self. To put this another way, if the text is a kind of sacrament, it is at once part of, and distinct from, both author and reader. This is why Chaucer does not force one aspect of sacramentality onto his text; he is not so much hiding his own attitude as acknowledging the reader's ongoing role in what the text means. Like the eucharistic recipient, both author and reader perform a simultaneous distance from and proximity to the presence made available in signs. To this extent, Chaucer anticipates the work of another poet famous for creating personas, John Donne, who I will argue is also deeply interested in the role the reader plays in interpreting the poet's self.

Attesting to the complexity with which the Pearl-poet and Chaucer engage the eucharist as a model for poetry, therefore, is an essential precursor to an understanding of the ways early

modern poets, in the very different contexts of the Renaissance and the Reformation, explored the same theme. The eucharist was, in the medieval world, an expression of often opposing impulses. Poetic engagements with the sacrament in the period, though, understood those divergences and put them to use. Thus any narrative that accounts for the ubiquitous textual presence of the eucharist in the work of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poets as a substitution or consolation for an abandoned social ritual becomes hopelessly problematic. It is only by seeing that subsequent work as in conversation with a thoughtful and self-aware tradition that we can begin to understand the nature and logic of the different approaches early moderns had in their treatment of eucharistic poetics.

Southwell's Mass: Sacrament and Self

Robert Southwell's life and death were remarkable and it has been a feature of literary criticism discussing his work to be as fascinated by his personal narrative as by his poetic output.¹ There is certainly some justification for this tendency. His public execution as a traitor, which moved even its contemporary Protestant audience,² played a major role in attracting Catholic as well as Protestant interest in the priest's poetic work. The rapidity with which editions of Southwell's poetry were produced after his violent end in 1595 testify to this fact.³ Yet the fascination with Southwell as the single-minded martyr of the old faith trying to win England back to Rome can obscure Southwell's literary influence on and continuity with the burgeoning poetic forms of early modern England. By making his poetry a mere vestige of an England that could have been, both his poetry and his life become insulated from the vitality and untidiness of actual history. It is precisely the ways in which Southwell does not represent a continental, or Catholic, or "old" aesthetic that this chapter is interested; rather its concern is to highlight Southwell's continuity with subsequent poets. It is that very continuity that makes this discussion of the Catholic poet so useful following a consideration of medieval English poetry.

It may seem odd to jump forward two hundred years from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, but it is not the point of this study to perform a contiguous historical survey. My discussion of Chaucer and the Pearl-poet is unabashedly strategic. Its goal is to be, to use David

¹ Pierre Janelle provides an early example of this critical tendency in *Robert Southwell, the Writer: A Study in Religious Inspiration* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1935), 287: "The chief value of his poems lies less in their music, than in what they reveal to us of his soul." See also Christopher Devlin, *The Life of Robert Southwell, Poet and Martyr* (London: Longmans, 1956), and Scott Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature 1561-1595* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). Even very recently Sophie Read has written, "For Southwell, poetry was never the principal point, and when a more extreme rhetorical gesture was required to confirm his faith, it was deeds and not words he chose," *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 68.

² See Devlin, 323-4.

³ Seven editions of *St. Peter's Complaint, with Other Poems* appear between 1595 and 1602, as well as at least three more editions of another collection of his poetry under the title *Maeoniae*, all dated 1595. As Brian Cummings points out, two of these editions were probably printed later, but retained the 1595 dating so as to associate with the year of the poet's death, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2002), 332.

Aers' phrase, "a whisper in the ear of early modernists,"⁴ to put a consideration of what are undeniably medieval texts in dialogue with a critical discussion that has always considered its starting point the late seventeenth century, usually quite specifically the figure of Donne. It is because so many of the early modernists reflecting on the relationship between the sacramental and the poetic have embarked from this starting point that their conclusions have reiterated some version of a secularizing historiography. While the disciplinary boundaries of literature departments play a role in determining this conventional point of origin (the boundary between medieval and early modern continues to be well-guarded), an exclusion of the medieval from consideration of the eucharist's interaction with poetry makes it easier to see eucharistic poetics as one more symptom of a nascent modernity, whether considered in relation to the rise of secularity, or the apparent birth of the subject.⁵ In this telling, the medieval is either expressly or implicitly transformed into a "homogeneous and mythical field which is defined in terms of scholars' needs for a figure against which 'Renaissance' concerns with inwardness and the fashioning of identities can be defined as new."⁶ More careful attention to the voices—poetic and otherwise—that actually come out of the medieval period, as we have seen, makes such mythologizing untenable. Chaucer's work in particular reveals a world not of static homogeneity, but of social, political, theological, and epistemological flux. Any serious consideration of the various kinds of "newness" of early modern English poetry must therefore have a robust sense of the life of the "old." As we have seen, Chaucer's poetry, and his treatment of the eucharist in particular, is in many ways less alien than early modernists seem to suggest.

⁴ See "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists" in *Culture and History 1350-1600*, 177-202.

⁵ Ibid., 196: "If someone wants to tell a linear story about the development of the 'subject' ('liberal', 'humanist', 'bourgeois' or whatever) it will seem necessary to begin with a transition from the 'other', the totally alien or different in which this entity definitely did not exist, indeed against which the entity in question can be defined."

⁶ Ibid., 192.

Robert Southwell, then, is useful to an understanding of literature and sacrament much the same way that Chaucer and the Pearl-poet are. He represents another kind of ideological “other,” particularly in a narrative that identifies the emergence of eucharistically informed notions of signification in poetry with a rejection of transubstantiation. Usually, like that of medieval writers, his role within history has been ignored. In the little work that has addressed Southwell’s sacramentality, his commitment to transubstantiation has been read as the clear evidence of his foreignness from the succeeding “metaphysical school” of English poetry. In two recent critical accounts of Southwell’s work, the Jesuit’s Catholic theology has been treated as the ground of a complex set of stylistic, psychological, and thematic features that are essentially medieval. The first of these critical appraisals is a recent article by Teresa Kenney,⁷ who argues that Southwell’s Catholic understanding of the eucharist accounts for a notion of time not as strictly linear, but as a collapsible fabric that can weave back into itself, a model of time that is sometimes called “kairotic.” She discusses Southwell’s “Burning Babe” as her primary example, in which the infant Christ experiences the suffering of his crucifixion as an adult. For Kenney, this “collapse of time” reflects the doctrine of transubstantiation, which itself asserts a kairotic quilting of history, since Christ’s historical body is believed to be physically present again at each celebration of the Mass and, more importantly, because Christ’s historical sacrifice is recapitulated with each offering of the host. Kenney cites Southwell’s use of the “proleptic passion” approvingly, seeing it as a distinct reworking of a medieval trope not available in the same way to English Protestant poets who rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, and in whose writing this figure became significantly less common.⁸ Sophie Read’s recent treatment of

⁷ “The Christ Child on Fire: Southwell’s Mighty Babe,” *English Literary Renaissance* 43 (2013): 415-55.

⁸ Kenney does point out, however, that versions of the “proleptic passion” are present in Donne’s, Crashaw’s, and Milton’s nativity poems (415 n.1). I would also add that this kairotic concept of time evident in the use of this trope appears in other forms throughout the work of English Protestant poets in the seventeenth century. George Herbert’s

Southwell pursues a similar argument to Kenney's, but reaches a far less approving estimation of the poet's quality. She positions Southwell within a broader claim that the various and vying theologies of the eucharist in the seventeenth century undergird competing conceptions of poetics, and that the movement away from transubstantiation in England also led to a distinctly post-metaphysical understanding of signification itself.⁹ For Read, though Southwell clearly shares with subsequent poets an understanding of the eucharist as a model for the representative work of poetry, his investment in Catholic doctrine ultimately hobbles the resulting work, since he is unable to take the imaginative leap she implicitly ascribes to Donne, Herbert, and most especially Milton, of elevating the text to the level of the sacrament. Southwell's inability to allow that poetry could fulfill the profound presence-making role of the eucharist, in the end, accounts for the features of the poetry judged unsatisfying in comparison to later poets.¹⁰

Though these two critics disagree about Southwell's poetic success, they agree that Southwell is an outlier in the early modern tradition of English devotional poetry, and that his marginal status is tied directly to his belief in transubstantiation. Both also agree that Southwell's doctrinal beliefs represent a distinctly pre-modern ideology, and so fit implicitly into a secularization narrative that identifies Protestant ideas about the eucharist with a nascent modernity. This chapter, in contrast, aims to consider Southwell not as a writer whose style and theology represent the last gasps of a moribund aesthetic, but rather as a writer who, in and through his distinctly early modern Catholicism, was able to write poetry that would both influence and anticipate the great devotional poets of the seventeenth century. Moreover, it will

"Easter," to provide one useful example, asserts that it is a misapprehension to think the year is made up of distinct days each following the last; "there is but one [day]," the speaker claims, "and that one ever" (30). This and all subsequent quotations of Herbert come from *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁹ *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

locate that influence precisely where recent criticism has said it is not to be found, in Southwell's sacramentalism. Southwell's poetic application of Catholic sacramental theology, I argue, actually engages and provides poetic models for dealing with issues often thought particularly modern or especially Protestant in the literature of the period: the question of the value of religious poetry, the difficulty of performing an authentic interiority, and the concern that human language might be unable to reliably signify reality, especially divine reality. It will make this argument by focusing on two key senses in which Southwell's poetry may be considered sacramental: because it works in lieu of the sacrament for those who do not have access to the Mass, and also because, performed rightly, it acts like the celebration of the eucharist to blur the subjective distinction between believer and Christ. Southwell's work will thus serve as a necessary point of focus for re-articulating how the eucharist informs seventeenth-century English poetics and, more importantly, how that sacramental understating of poetry relates to both early modern theories of signification and the apparent rise of modernity. Insofar as it belies a straightforward connection between transubstantiation and a decidedly pre-modern account of signification, Southwell's writing provides an essential point of reference for understanding the poetic implications of sacramentality, both as it pertains to the work of Donne, Herbert, Crashaw and Milton, and as it relates to an account of literary history, particularly the literary history of the subject.

The argument that Robert Southwell's poetry had a significant influence on the religious poetry of early modern England is not a new one. Louis Martz's 1954 monograph, *The Poetry of Meditation*, claims that Southwell introduced to England a particular poetic application of Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* that had a lasting effect on the seventeenth-century religious lyric. Though he considers much of Southwell's poetry to be aesthetically deficient,

Martz nevertheless names Southwell rather than Donne as the formal model for the “meditative poetry” of the period.¹¹ More recently, Allison Shell has described Southwell as “the invisible influence” of English devotional poetry, providing a breadth of textual evidence for his poetic influence on the likes of Spenser, Herbert, and Vaughan.¹² John Klause, in a 2008 book, makes a compelling biographical case for Southwell’s direct influence on Shakespeare, particularly in *The Rape of Lucrece*,¹³ while Brian Cummings describes Southwell as introducing to “Calvinist England ... a literature of sentiment which it could not produce for itself.”¹⁴

Of these accounts, Martz’s was most influential in attempting to lay out the specific qualities Southwell is responsible for introducing to England, which he sees primarily as a Jesuit meditational rubric. As Frank Brownlow points out in his biography of Southwell, though, Martz not only fails to meaningfully distinguish the differences between poetry and Ignatian meditation as media, but also ignores the way that Southwell’s poems, not to mention Herbert’s and Donne’s, do not fit into Loyola’s instructive models, for example his insistence on the careful mental composition of a specific imagined place.¹⁵ My account of Southwell’s influence is not as narrowly formal as Martz’s, nor does it seek to posit Southwell as a kind of repressed Catholic subconscious in Protestant England. Though it is important to acknowledge that Southwell’s poetry has aesthetic and formal features different from the other poets in this study, and that those differences are sometimes related to his Catholicism, I will argue that the influence Southwell *does* have on the English poetic tradition challenges any notion of those distinctions corresponding straightforwardly to particular doctrinal disagreements (particularly if those

¹¹ *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study of English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 3.

¹² *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 55-58.

¹³ *Shakespeare, the Earl, and the Jesuit*, (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2008).

¹⁴ *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 333.

¹⁵ *Robert Southwell* (New York: Twayne, 1996), 127-8.

disagreements are tied to a progressive notion of history). If Southwell is aesthetically distinct from Donne, he is equally distinct from Chaucer, despite the fact that Chaucer's set of creedal commitments might seem more superficially similar to the Jesuit's. Indeed, Southwell's Catholicism might be more similar to Donne's religious experience than to Chaucer's (especially considering Donne's Jesuit education). What this chapter aims to present, then, are three distinguishable qualities evident in Southwell that remain traceable in the "metaphysical" poetry of the seventeenth century. Firstly, Southwell, like Chaucer and the Pearl-poet before him, presents poetry as a fundamentally eucharistic activity. Secondly, Southwell exhibits a sacramentalism that is closely tied to his working out a theological account of the poetic subject. Lastly, and relatedly, Southwell develops a self-examining interiority modeled on the reception of the eucharist. It is this eucharistic interiority—one that responds to erotic lyric poetry in a way that the medieval authors do not—that Southwell genuinely introduces to the subsequent metaphysical school.

Sacramental Representation

Southwell's eucharistic hymn, "To The Blessed Sacrament of the Aulter," if addressed at all in criticism, has been censured for its didactic tone. And indeed, it is a poem designed both to teach the doctrine of transubstantiation and to anticipate Protestant critiques of that doctrine. It is self-consciously pastoral, written to encourage devotion to the eucharist amongst Catholics in England. In a manner typical of Jesuit literature, it attempts to arouse the senses as a part of the experience of the sacrament, but it also anticipates Protestant objections to the doctrine of transubstantiation so clearly cherished by the poet and his imagined reader:

What god as auctour made he alter may,
No change so harde as making all of nought;
If Adam framed were of slyme claye,

Bredd may to Christ's most sacred flesh be wrought. (85-90)¹⁶

Here the poem responds to Protestant arguments (ones that we saw prefigured in Wyclif) about the apparent impossibility of transubstantiation, of a substance not manifest in its accident. The poem counters, "if God can create the world *ex nihilo*, and make Adam out of clay, then surely the change of bread into body cannot be impossible for God." In its concern to present such arguments, and to provide instruction to its readers, the poem does privilege its pastoral goals over prosody and literary cohesion, but Sophie Read's recent conclusion that the poem's failures are actually a result of the literal minded-ness of Southwell's eucharistic doctrine is unwarranted.¹⁷ Not only do we encounter moments of linguistic play that make this poem far more engaging to read than Hebert's tediously didactic prefatory poem, "Perirrhanterium" (such as the pun on "alter" in 85), but an ongoing subtext in which poetic language acts in parallel to the ritual the author is extolling. God is "auctour" of the world and sacrament, both a creator and writer. Southwell thus presents himself as imitating God's originary creative act, but also his alteration (and "altar"-ation) of material creation in the sacrament. His dependence on punning, in fact, both explains the nature of the sacrament itself and suggests a connection between his poetic signification and the sacrament. This is most clear when he describes the kind of spiritual response the consecrated elements of the eucharist inspire:

Selfelove here cannot crave more than it fyndes,
Ambition to noe higher worth aspire,
The eagrest famyn of most hungry myndes
May fill, yea farre excede their owne desire:
In summ here is all in a summ expressd
Of much the most, of every good the best. (26-30)

¹⁶ This and all subsequent excerpts of Southwell's poetry come from *The Poems of Robert Southwell, S.J.*, ed. James H. McDonald and Nancy Pollard Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

¹⁷ See *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 67: "The strain of militant literalism that runs through ["To the Blessed Sacrament"] accounts for ... a quality of abstraction bordering automatism."

The language here is eucharistic in terms of operation as well as vocabulary. “Summ” enacts a paradox of Thomistic theology, as it refers to both a discrete chunk of matter, a “sum” of mass, and to the totality of Christ’s transubstantiated presence, the “sum” of divine presence. The word is material in accident, but its substance, the divine “I Am,” is hinted at in its pun on the Latin *sum*. This punning is not just an ingenious defense of the eucharist through linguistic analogy, but intimates a more foundational connection between poetry and the sacrament’s ability to mean more than it first appears to mean. The pun here helps explain the duality of the sacrament, its double-identity as body/bread or wine/blood, but in doing so it conversely posits sacramental ritual as a model for reading. If the pun can elucidate the nature of the eucharist, the eucharist may also elucidate the nature of poetry. For all its stilted didacticism at other moments, therefore, in this stanza at least, the poem frames the reception of the eucharist, and the parallel practices of reading, not in terms of their effectiveness in communicating discreet units of doctrinal or intellectual assertion, but rather in terms of desire and satisfaction: “The eagrest famine of most hungry myndes / May fill, yea farre exceede their own desire.” Pre-empting Donne and Herbert, Southwell makes the poetic word a sacramental sign not via some ostensibly Catholic insistence on the static immanence of divine presence, but in the sense that the kind of presence made available in poetry, like that of the sacrament, elicits an intimacy in which longing and gratification dynamically interplay.

For Southwell, this logic of eucharistic signification as a model for poetry begins in the practical responsibilities he had as a Catholic priest. As a minister to an embattled Recusant community, the first and intended readers of his poetry, Southwell would have known that his primary duty in England was to administer the sacraments, particularly the eucharist. He was among very few men in the country able to bring the physical presence of God to Catholics from

whom that presence was legally prohibited.¹⁸ For Southwell's Recusant audience, even as their Jesuit mentors were stressing the centrality of Catholic ritual in the devout life, the political context meant infrequent access to the eucharist. Mass was only celebrated on those few occasions when a clandestine priest like Southwell happened to be passing through. Thus Southwell's poetry strives to do pastorally what he could not in the flesh, to extend through his poetry not only Christ's body, but also his own mediating authority as confessor and priest. It is evident from the way that Southwell's poetry passed around English Catholic communities, most often in manuscript miscellanies that thematically mirrored breviaries,¹⁹ that his work was received as he intended, as at least a temporary substitute for the transubstantiated host. Southwell's translation of Thomas Aquinas' Corpus Christi hymn, for example, calls to mind for its readers an absent liturgical context, in which the community of believers sings before the present host:

A speciall theme of praise is redd
 A Livinge and lifegivinge bredd
 Is on this day exhibited
 ...
 For now solemnize wee that daye
 Which doth with joy to us display
 The prime use of this mistery

 At this borde of our newe Ruler
 Of newe lawe new Paschall order
 The ancient rite abolisheth. (7-21)

The spatial and temporal markers here — “this day,” “this borde,” “now”—in the Recusant context, allow the poem to act in lieu of the consecrated bread and wine, so that the words, rather

¹⁸ In one account of his trial, in contrast to the prosecution's accusation of treason, Southwell specifically defines his primary role in England as a minister of the sacraments: “... I never intended, God Almighty knoweth, to commit any treason to the Queen or State. Only to minister the Sacraments to those that seemed willing to receive them.” In Devlin, 307.

¹⁹ Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. B.5 is the best surviving manuscript of such a collection. As well as a significant amount of Southwell's poetry (including “Blessed Sacrament”), it contains a variety of versified scriptural narratives, carols to be sung at various points in the liturgical year, devotional meditations, and an Ave Maria, as well as hymns.

than bread, invoke the divine presence and comfort of the sacrament. That this poem is a translation provides further evidence of this function since, even as Southwell asserts his commitment to an Aristotelian understanding of the eucharist, he presents the Latin hymn in English, implicitly connecting the spiritual intimacy of the Mass with the familiarity of the vernacular.

Thus Southwell's poetry is clearly designed to make God present in the absence of a priest able to celebrate the Mass. Yet Southwell also anticipates in his poetry another kind of absence, his own death. He was from an early age a man on a mission, whose zeal for a martyr's death is evident in his *Spiritual Exercises*. He would have been keenly aware of the capture and execution of many of his Jesuit brothers, including Edmund Campion, Alexander Briant, Philip Evans, and David Lewis, none of whom lasted more than five years on the English mission before apprehension. Knowing the probability of his own demise, and the ritual dismemberment it was likely to involve, Southwell is anxious to present his writing as a sacramental token of his own body. This is both as a way to ensure the legacy of his sacrifice, and also to counteract the violent performance of dissolution the state enacted on the scaffold. His poetry therefore reflects a theological account of representation intimately connected to a devotional model of self-representation. This is a fact that the critical focus on Southwell's biographical narrative, for all its privileging of life over art, actually brings to the fore. Yet Southwell's written work is not simply a textual relic that he uses to insulate some representation of himself from the real and rhetorical violence of the state. Southwell, in fact, more often attributes to writing itself the qualities of the sacred violence suffered by the martyr. Just like the martyr's body, the text is able to signify because of the way it participates in the life and suffering of Christ.

Southwell appropriates this metaphor of the text as a body suffering sacred violence in his *Epistle of Comfort*, an open letter to the imprisoned Earl of Arundel. The *Epistle* provides an instruction manual for suffering Recusants, but also quite clearly has in mind its own writer's end at Tyburn. In one remarkable passage, describing the example of St. Paul's suffering as a model for faithful Catholics, the letter explicitly connects the duty of the Christian to suffer in the manner of Christ with the act of reading:

The effect of Christ's passion on St. Paul, who being enflamed with the force of so unusual an example laboured himself to be a perfect scholar in this doctrine, [was to esteem] it the highest and most needful point of Christian knowledge to understand the value, necessity and manner of patient sufferance. He would have no other university but Jerusalem, no other school but Mount Calvary, no other pulpit but the cross, **no other reader but the crucifix, no other letters but his wounds, no other commas but his lashes, no other full points but his nails, no other book but his open side**, and finally no other lesson but to know Jesus Christ and him Crucified.
(34, my emphasis in bold)

In these lines, Christ's passion is a text to be read. In a way that obversely recollects the *Common Book of Prayer's* figuration of reading as a kind of sacramental consumption,²⁰ Southwell represents Christ's propitiatory suffering as a written inscription. Instead of word becoming sacrament, here, the act recalled in the sacrament becomes word. Paul reads Christ's suffering as a text and "writes" his own. Christ's suffering is not only his source text, though, but his language, punctuation, and grammar. As a model for other Christians, Paul thus demonstrates the way that all forms of textual self-representation are subsequent to and dependent on the Passion. Here, though, the sacred transformation of a very bodily and bloody violence into a mystical rubric for the Christian believer to repeat is strikingly similar to the appropriation of violence in the Catholic sacrifice of the Mass. If Southwell aspired through his martyrdom to a recapitulation

²⁰ The Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent: "Blessed lord, which hast caused all holy Scriptures to bee written for our learnyng; graunte us that we maye in suche wise heare them, read, marke, learne, and *inwardly digeste* them." 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, 272.

of Christ's death, his writing aspires to repeat the same kind of violent sacrifice performed in the eucharist.

The main point to draw out here is that Southwell's turn to the eucharist, exactly because of his polemic commitment in transubstantiation, produces an account of poetic signification and expresses a poetic interiority that is not at all alien to the Protestant devotional poetry written in the years after his death. This continuity reflects not some subconscious acceptance of Protestant understandings of signification, but draws on the complex cultural developments of the sixteenth-century Catholic revival. Southwell's vigorous training as a member of the Jesuit order, the shock-troop of the Counter-Reformation, insisted on a simultaneous recommitment to the traditional doctrines of the Roman Church and a humanist emphasis on linguistic training. He was not only educated in the classical languages of Greek and Latin, but underwent much of his spiritual training at Douai, where the famous Douay-Rheims English translation of the Bible was produced. Add to this the unique place of Loyola's instructional manuals in the life of the Jesuit, and it is easy to see why for a Catholic such as Southwell, his account of linguistic efficacy would reflect, rather than replace, eucharistic theology. Southwell's particular role as a minister of the sacraments to Recusant England comes together with his desire to present his work as both anticipating and participating in his final imitation of Christ's suffering through martyrdom. Thus Southwell presents his poetry as eucharistic in the two ways I introduce above: it acts as a substitute "host" for those who do not have access to the Mass, and it models a practice of self-analysis that seeks to identify within the self its own role as a sign of Christ.

Transubstantiating Poetry

Robert Southwell begins the prefatory epistle to his poetry with a censure of erotic verse: "Poetes by abusing their talent, and making the follies and faynings of love the customary

subject of their base endeavors, have so discredited this facultye that a Poett a lover and a lyer, are by many reckened but three words of one signification” (1). The rhetoric of this introduction, as it makes its *apologia* for sacred poetry, reveals a significant anxiety about the possibilities of poetic signification. The erotic mode, the “faynings of love,” not only discredits the art of poetry, but actually threatens to make meaning equivocal. If a poet is always a liar, then not only does this particular set of terms (poet, lover, liar) become equivalent, but all poetic acts of signification are called into question. Being a poet must mean being a dissembler, or at least a malicious equivocator (not incidentally, of course, exactly what Southwell was accused of at his trial). As Alison Shell elucidates at length, Southwell’s solution to this poetical aporia is a project that would become a staple of seventeenth-century religious verse: the consecration of poetry for divine ends.²¹ Southwell makes quite clear that he sees his work inaugurating a new kind of sacred poetry in English verse, both more serious and more truly poetic than the courtly eroticism dominant in the sixteenth century. Most of the poets of his age, Southwell claims, “in lieu of solemne and devout matter, to which in duety they owe their abilities, ... now busy themselves in expressing such passions, as onely serve for testimonies to how unwoorthy affections they have wedded their willes.” Nevertheless, “the vanity of men, cannot counterpease the authority of God,” who demonstrates his approval of poetry by “delivering many parts of scripture in verse,” and by extolling his faithful “to exercise our devotion in Hymnes and spirituall Sonnetts.”²² Christ himself, Southwell asserts in a moment of exegetical creativity, was a poet, and his choice to conclude the Last Supper with a hymn, as recorded in Matthew 26:30

²¹ *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination*, 64-77. There Shell considers specifically Southwell’s call to other writers: “a call not simply to contrition” for the dominance of secular poetic themes, “but to the creativity of contrition” (69). His admonition, in other words, was not only that poets change the subject matter of their poetry, but that they transform their style to reflect that new and better content.

²² Southwell refers here to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, which both list Paul’s tripartite distinction of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.”

and Mark 14:26, instituted a poetic model all true poets should follow. Jesus, by “making a Himme, the conclusion of his last Supper, and the prologue to the first Pageant of his Passion...gave his spouse a method to imitate.” Significantly here, Christ’s institution of a poetic legacy is interwoven with his institution of the eucharist and is a prelude to his sacrificial death. In Southwell’s reading of Christ’s life, therefore, poetry appears at the climax of the gospel narrative and is charged with all the meaning-making potential of Jesus’s ritual founding of the communion.

This connection develops such that Southwell’s project for transforming erotic poetry into Godly poetry is not figured as baptism, but the physical change of the elements in the Mass.²³ What was worldly before becomes a conduit for divine presence. Thus he quite literally transforms profane poetry into divine, most famously in his reworking of Edward Dyer’s “A Fancy” as “A Sinner’s Complaint.” Here, unsurprisingly, we find Southwell contrasting a poetry of sacramental participation with the empty signification he associates with erotic poetry. Dyer’s original version presents its mournful lover in the throes of passion, sacrificing his heart to the pagan deities of love:

As one that lives in shewe
But inwardly doth die,
Whose knowledge is a bloody field
Where all hope slaine doth lie;

Whose harte the aulter is,
Whose spirit, the sacrifice
Unto the Powers whome to appease
Noe sorrowes can suffice. (25-32)

Southwell, as well as changing the theological register of Dyer’s poem from pagan to Christian, reimagines the kind of “sacrifice” that is offered. Southwell’s speaker is one,

Whose hart the Altar is

²³ Another key way, as I show in the subsequent chapter, that Southwell provides a model for Herbert.

And hoast a god to move
 From whome my evil doth fear revenge
 His good doth promise love. (29-32)

His heart, like the speaker's in Herbert's famous poem, is a sacrificial altar to God. Unlike that speaker, however, this one is also a eucharistic "hoast." This is a striking rhetorical move for a Catholic like Southwell, in which, despite the poem's spiritual abjection, the speaker boldly assumes the identity of the transubstantiated elements. The speaker's feelings of guilty alienation become the sacrifice of the Mass. Thus even at the moment that he fears divine "revenge," his invocation of the host, and his own identification with that host, necessarily recall the "promise" of divine love and forgiveness. In this way, the very word "hoast" acts sacramentally, in stark opposition to the psychology of the speaker even in the moment of its articulation, not only making Christ present to the despairing sinner, but even *in*-corporating him in Christ. The boundary between sinner and savior is blurred.

We encounter again, therefore, a correlation between Southwell's sacramental account of poetic signification and a speaker whose self-representation is inseparable from that same symbolic network. This interdependency is based on the fact that the eucharist is a ritual in which the bread and wine have a representational relationship to the recipient as well as to Christ's body. The subject position of the recipients, in other words, is not a static vantage point with an absolute interpretive authority over the objective signs. Instead, the recipients themselves are as much the objects of interpretation. As we were reminded before by McGrath's breakdown of the four functions of the eucharist, the celebration of the sacrament necessarily involves an understanding of time, place, and subjectivity as simultaneously present and deferred.²⁴ The bread and wine, even under the terms of transubstantiation, at once make Christ present now, remember his former physical presence on earth, and promise his bodily return at the

²⁴ See chapter one, 5-6.

resurrection. In the Tridentine ordinary in particular, the celebration of Mass overtly presents a paradoxical understanding of simultaneous presences and absences. When we pay attention to the account of place in the liturgy—“where” exactly the events of the celebration are described as taking place—we find an ongoing dissonance between claims of God’s presence manifest in the immanent context of the material elements of the ritual (a movement from the transcendent to the immanent) and an insistence that the Mass requires a transportation of the elements and the participants themselves into the heavenly realms (a movement from the immanent towards the transcendent). Thus, as the celebrant begins the Mass with the annunciation *Introibo ad altare Dei* (“I will go in unto the Altar of God”), or later when he asks on behalf of the communicants *ut ad Sancta sanctorum puris mereamur mentibus introire* (“that we may be worthy to enter with pure minds into the Holy of Holies”), he liturgically transforms the space of celebration into an extension of the heavenly realms. At the same time, by announcing his movement *towards* the altar of God, into the *sancta sanctorum*, he reveals a gap that remains between the immanent “here” and the transcendence of God’s physical presence. This distance is later quite explicitly acknowledged in the Oblation of the Victim to God (which follows the consecration): *Supplices te rogamus, omnipotens Deus, iube haec perferri per manus sancti Angeli tui in sublime altare tuum, in conspectu divinae maiestatis tuae* (“We most humbly beseech Thee, almighty God, command these offerings to be borne by the hands of Thy holy Angels to Thine altar on high, in the sight of Thy divine majesty”). The space both becomes the throne-room of God *and* represents it. Likewise, as Catherine Pickstock has argued, even the “I” of the Roman Rite (which appears far more often than in the *Common Book*) is a “borrowed identity... whose decentered nature distends through the earthly and transcendent regions.”²⁵ Developing this idea somewhat, I would assert that the Tridentine Mass performs the theological assertion that the

²⁵ *After Writing*, 201.

celebrant is most himself when he understands himself to be representative. The Roman Catholic priest's subjectivity in the Mass is deferred, in fact, in two directions. Most obviously, he stands in semiotic relationship to Christ, as the mediator and consecrator of the sacramental elements, but he also represents the whole community of the faithful, the universal body of Christ. This representational position is underscored in Catholic practice by the fact that the priest can communicate alone.

These liturgical movements indicate that the eucharist, if understood as a model of the subject, posits a subject that does not exist in a distinct order of being from the realm of signification. The eucharist insists that the believer as subject is always also a sign of some higher reality. It performs the notion of human-ness as the *imago dei*: an image, a representation of the divine. This idea of the subject as sign means, however, that the process of expressing the lyric "I" in Southwell's work is not a fundamentally distinct activity from his effort to discover a sacramentally efficacious form of signification. The sacramental transformation of poetry, announced in Southwell's preface, involves an analogous transformation of self, and a recognition of the self's position within an ontology in which the material world, language, and subjectivity itself are all, read rightly, the syntax of a divine grammar.

What Southwell develops here is an ontology that goes back at least as far as Augustine,²⁶ in which all of creation is an act of divine self-signification. Southwell merely extends the implications of this ontology to the exploration of human interiority in poetry, but in doing so transforms subjective self-alienation into an interpretive possibility. This transformation occurs precisely when the subject's distance from God and estrangement from himself, through sin, is reinterpreted as the very location of divine presence, as the very moment in which the speaker

²⁶ See *De Trinitate*, 3.4.10: "...need we be surprised if God produces visible and sensible effects as he pleases in sky and earth, sea and air, to signify and show himself as he knows best." *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1990), 133.

and reader are able to participate in or imitate the suffering of Christ. This shift in self-understanding is analogous to the felicitous “surprise” so common to the experience of writing, that the best lines of poetry seem to appear in excess of, or even despite the immediate intention of the poet. This experience is possible, of course, because language is not the spontaneous manifestation of an individual will, but a system that always presses its structures, history, and limitations on its users in ways they are seldom fully aware of. Southwell’s appeals to the eucharist position the experience of self as similarly contingent. We see this at work in Southwell’s experimentation with concrete form, most evidently and successfully in “Christ’s Bloody Sweat.” Anticipating poems like Herbert’s “Easter Wings,” or “Coloss. 3.3,” the shape of the poem draws attention to its immediate and concrete presence, which in turn affects both the meaning of the text and our understanding of the lyric voice that produces it. In “Bloody Sweat,” this happens through a directional double-movement:

Fatt Soyle,	full spring,	sweet olive,	grape of blisse
That yields,	that streames,	that powrs,	that dost distil
Untild,	undrawne,	unstampe,	untouched of presse
Deare fruit,	cleare brooks,	fayre oyle,	sweete wine at will
Thus Christ unforc’d prevents in shedding bloode			
The whippes the thornes the nails the speare the roode. (1-6) ²⁷			

Like Southwell’s puns, and concomitant with the vocabulary of consumption, the multi-directional movement of this stanza models the recognition of an analogous “doubleness” in the consecrated elements. There is, firstly, an oral way of reading this poem, in which the sense of the passage moves from left to right. The organization of the noun phrases into distinct columns, however, an arrangement exhibited in the best manuscript and printed versions of the poem, allows for a simultaneous vertical reading of the text. This downward movement makes possible

²⁷ I follow Davidson and Sweeney’s arrangement of the text into columns here, which highlights the vertical as well as horizontal axis of meaning. The text is presented in the same manner in the Waldegrave MS (Stonyhurst MS A. v.27 – now in the Jesuit Archives in London), the most authoritative of the five surviving manuscripts. *St. Robert Southwell: Collected Poems*, ed. Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007), 17.

a visual metaphor in which the words, which roll down the page, represent the bloody drops of sweat that stream down Christ's body. Thus the concrete structure of the poem suggests a parallel between understanding the full range of meaning in the text and recognizing the true content of the sacraments. The standard left to right reading of the text mirrors the readily apparent reading of the identity and function of bread and wine as food and drink. The vertical reading, especially since it results in an identification of the words with Christ's sacrificial blood, acts like the faithful Catholic's ability to affirm the sacramental identity of the elements. A horizontal reading can recognize the "accidents" of the poem; a reading from top to bottom encounters its substance, that is, Christ's blood. But this double-orientation also hints at the relation of the eucharist to language as such. The bloody flow of words, whose identity it is possible to recognize because of the verticality of the first four lines, directs the eyes to the word "Christ," where the normal reading direction, from left to right, resumes. Here, then, the eucharist is not to be seen as an absurd expression of divine power or even an isolated miracle, but as the paradox which grounds the possibility of regular sign-signifier relations. The point of "Bloody Sweat," of course, is not to get readers to permanently replace their profane horizontal readings with sacred vertical readings. This would make nonsense out of most poetry, including the remaining three stanzas of this poem. Rather, the vertical movement of the poem makes readers more attentive to the richness of language, even after the poem resumes a standard left-right movement. Of course, there is a sense in which the literary defamiliarization exhibited here is a common feature of most good poetry, indeed, of most good art. What is significant is that Southwell understands and represents that poetic estrangement in eucharistic terms. That is why, in "Bloody Sweat," the vertical orientation of the text *is* what identifies words of the poem with sacramental blood. The process of interpretive defamiliarization is grounded on the estrangement

celebrated in the doctrine of transubstantiation. Bread is not flesh, words are not blood, and yet, they are. Only when this apparently absurd truth is affirmed, which in the poem is manifested in the name of “Christ,” is the normal order of literary apprehension restored.

The sacramental weight given to the concrete text of “Bloody Sweat,” though, is not primarily about transforming the poem into an enchanted object. As the rest of the poem makes clear, the purpose of the concrete structure is not to reify the text for its own sake, but to model in the recognition of the text’s sacramental bi-directionality a way to read the paradoxical duality of the Christian subject. This becomes apparent when, as the speaker moves from speaking about Christ in the first stanza to speaking about himself in the fourth and final stanza, he does so by first introducing a mediating narrative, the life of the prophet Elijah:

Elias once to prove gods soveraigne powre,
By praire procur’d a fire of wondrous force.
That blood and water and wood did devoure,
Yea stones and dust, beyonde all nature’s course:
Such fire is love that fedd with gory blood,
Doth burne no lesse then in the dryest woode. (13-18)

Southwell refers here to the episode in 1 Kings 18, in which Elijah and the priests of Baal vie to see whose God is more powerful. After mocking his opponents’ inability to stir their god, Elijah calls on Yahweh to send down fire and consume the sacrificial bull presented on his altar of stone, which he had had repeatedly doused in water to make it less flammable. Here, in contrast to the figure of Christ “that powrs” out tears (2), God shows his “powre” by sending down fire, consuming not only the bull, but the stone itself, as well as the soil under the altar, and the trench of water that had been dug around it.²⁸ Anticipating Herbert’s “Altar,” the poem’s allusion to Elijah’s altar leads into an argument, aimed at God, in which the speaker’s sinful and therefore

²⁸ The variant spelling in the Waldegrave MS of “powre” (13) as “poure” highlights this auditory echo, and suggests a synergistic relationship between God’s mercy (which “pours”) and his authority (his “powre”).

“stone-like” heart becomes the ideal material for both the construction of an altar and for immolation as a holy sacrifice:

O sacred Fire come shewe thy force on me
 That sacrifice to Christ I maye retorne
 If withered wood for fuell fittest bee
 If stones and dust, yf fleshe and blood will burne
 I withered am and stonye to all good.
 A sacke of dust, a masse of flesh and bloode. (19-24)

As Louis Martz has pointed out, Southwell uses here the Ignatian trope of closely identifying the speaker’s spiritual suffering with the suffering of Christ,²⁹ but he reaches this devotional end through the explicitly sacramental invocation of a sacrificial altar. This establishes both the logic of the speaker’s request and a typological progress in which Old Testament sacrifice anticipates the eucharistic altar of Southwell’s own ministry. Thus the sacramental set-up of the first stanza finds its fulfillment in the final line of the poem, where the play on the word “masse” confirms that the earlier identification of words with eucharistic blood is designed to make way for a more significant identification: of the speaker with the consecrated elements. At its surface, the meaning of “masse” is pejorative; the sinner is abject to the point of becoming inert matter. Yet the doctrinally charged description, “a masse of flesh and bloode,” quite explicitly invokes the doctrine of transubstantiation, with its rigid insistence on the corporeality of the elements. The pun, therefore, conflates the speaker’s bodily abjection with holy ritual, and ironically confirms the divine acceptance of the speaker’s sacrifice. So, just as his stony-ness makes his heart apt material for the construction of a divine altar, so his fleshiness makes him perfect for consecration as a material manifestation of divine presence. This identification, even as it hints at the Catholic doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass, also reverses the normal action of the eucharist, as it is Christ who consumes the real “flesh and bloode” of the speaker.

²⁹ *Poetry of Meditation*, 30-6.

The typological mediation that brings this identification about, however, further elucidates the content of Southwell's sacramental account of subjectivity. The speaker interprets himself as performing a repetition of the story of Elijah, and in doing so associates himself both with Elijah (like the prophet, he calls down divine fire) and Elijah's altar. Elijah's shaming of the priests of Baal serves firstly to figure the context of religious opposition experienced by Southwell's Catholic readers, but the story also points out how Southwell construes typological metaphors as one more expression of a eucharistic understanding of signs. Typology, we can say, reiterates the coherence of sacramental signification in that it posits an apparent and a hidden meaning, though the hidden meaning is in fact the "real" one. The sacrifice of Isaac, for example, is a type of the truer and better sacrifice of Christ. Yet it is the eucharist, in fact, that is the miraculous reminder in the daily lives of Christians of the logic of typology, in which signification operates through and above history, since, especially in Catholic theology, the communion makes immediately present the historical event of the Passion. The movement in "Bloody Sweat" from the bloody words of the first stanza to the speaker's self identification with the elements of the Mass is mediated by a typological metaphor. The poem thus demonstrates a logic in which the signification of the eucharist is what makes typology possible.

The poem presents a lyric persona who understands his own subjectivity in typological terms, and who appeals to that self-understanding to make sense of the related problems of sin and signification. As in so many of Herbert's poems, the speaker's characterization of himself as "stonye to all good" (23) expresses both spiritual alienation from the presence of God and the poetic problem of self-articulation. A stone, we need hardly be reminded, is not only disinclined to burn, it is also disinclined to speak. Just as the consuming fire of God in 1 Kings 18 makes the incombustibility of stone exactly the evidence of God's power, and metaphorically asserts the

speaker's sin as the appropriate precondition for divine presence, the poem also implicitly appeals to Christ's declaration in Luke 19:40 ("I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out"), more explicitly referred to in "The Altar," where stones *are* the medium of efficacious speech. Thus, in the final stanza of this poem, when the lyric persona discovers his despair has a typological significance he did not at first recognize, he also retroactively affirms his own poetry as participating in, and originating from, the divine grammar in which he discovers himself. This is, essentially, a consideration of subjectivity through the lens of typology. It is as if Southwell is re-writing, with a lyric voice, a version of what it might be like for Isaac to encounter, through a process of self-examination, some sense of his own symbolic position within Christian history. (The speaker of "Bloody Sweat" undergoes just such a process in examining his own relationship to Elijah and his altar). This process of typological self-discovery quite radically re-conceptualizes what it means to be a human agent, since such self-discovery would always indicate that one's own meanings and actions are in excess of intention. For Southwell, though, this is exactly the kind of discovery that sacramentalizes human subjectivity, and makes it a site of hope rather than despair. The subject's experience of its own strangeness to itself—the dissonance between different desires, the self-division inherent in every act of interiority, the gap between intention and meaning—is thus not a threat to subjective integrity, but the evidence of the subject's not yet fully understood representational function within a universe of signs. What is for Southwell so central about the eucharist to this account of subjectivity is the way it provides a devotional rubric for moving from self-examination (confession) to the intimations of one's own symbolic position within Christian history, creation, and the Church.

This is an essential point to bring up because, since the publication of Barbara Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics* thirty years ago, the idea that typology and interiority are somehow particularly Protestant devotional qualities has continued to wield significant influence, especially when it is implicit rather than overtly defended in literary criticism. According to Lewalski, while scriptural typology certainly operated in pre-Reformation poetry and some "basic Christian tropes, especially the marriage and pilgrimage metaphors and the light-darkness antithesis, had considerable currency in medieval religious lyrics," nevertheless, "Protestant poets ... exploited biblical metaphor even more intensively, and in characteristic[ally] Protestant ways" (103-104). Lewalski does rightly identify seventeenth-century poets' fascination with the particular implications of typology. Typology is God's metaphor revealed in the text of history; it reveals God as poet, and potentially, redeems poetry as God's work. As we have seen, however, Lewalski is wrong to identify this poetic consideration of typology narrowly with Protestantism. Southwell's "Bloody Sweat" is just one example of the central place typological metaphor takes in the early modern Catholic imagination. "Bloody Sweat" is, more importantly, indicative of the way typology is reapplied in early modernity to reflect on subjectivity and agency, since typology depends on the work of God to overwrite people and events with a significance that is not immediate to their own experience. Isaac does not make himself a type of Christ, in fact he does not even know that he is one, but God "writes" him as such. Similarly, the speaker of "Bloody Sweat" must discover his typological relation to Elijah and his altar, and through that his own participation in God's authorial expression of himself in phenomena. This felicitous encounter with a symbolic self is performed in and understood by the experience of the communicant receiving the eucharist. Especially in relation to the Tridentine insistence that the

host is both Christ and an effectual sign of Christ, it is possible to see the self both as an agent and as a sign within a symbolic order.

If we turn to “The Circumcision,” from Southwell’s series of poems on the life of Christ, we find here also an evident parallel between sacramental reception and the interpretive work of the speaker and the reader. Again, typology and sacrament set up the terms for interpreting both the text of the poem and the “text” that is the speaker:

The head is launst to work the bodies cure,
 With angring salve it smarts to heal our wound
 To faultless sonne from all offences pure,
 The faulty vassals scourges do redound;
 The Judge is cast the guilty to acquit,
 The sonne defac’d, to lend the star his light.

The vein of life distilleth drops of grace,
 Our rock gives issue to a heavenly spring;
 Tears from his eyes, blood runnes from wounded place,
 With showers to heaven of joy a harvest bring,
 This sacred dew let angels gather up,
 Such dainty drops best fit their nectared cup. (1-12)

Not only does Christ’s circumcision, like his bleeding sweat, act as a type of the crucifixion (“The head is launsted to work the bodys cure”), it produces a hybridized eucharistic element. The blood caused by the circumcision is gathered like sacramental wine into a “nectared cup” (12) and implicitly attributed the qualities of eucharistic bread, since its description as “sacred dew” (9) connects it with the miraculous appearance of manna, itself a type of the sacrament, recorded in Exodus 16.³⁰ Again, much of the richness of the poem draws on metaphors that complicate the agency of the speaker. Like the word “mass” in “Bloody Sweat” and “hoast” in Southwell’s “Fancy,” the “harvest” that is fertilized by Christ’s circumcision blood provides for

³⁰ Exodus 16:14-15: “And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness *there lay* a small round thing, *as* small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw *it*, they said one to another, *It is* manna: for they wist not what it *was*. And Moses said unto them, this *is* the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.”

the reader an oblique entry point into the scene, through which the speaker's descriptions move beyond the immediate content of his apostrophe, and apply to the reader's own self-understanding. Thus, in its most obvious sense, the "harvest" gathered by the angels is simply the spilled blood of Christ. Yet it also suggests, on the one hand, a harvest of grain to be made into communion bread and, on the other, a spiritual harvest of saved souls.³¹ The reader, as the intended "harvest" of Southwell's poems, is gathered up in the eucharistic chalice, drunk as the blood of Christ at the same time that he drinks it.

"The Circumcision," particularly as it risks a devotional rumination on the genitals of the infant Christ, sets up a dissonance between the evident limitations of the speaker to consider the implications of his own meditation and the eroticism of the spiritual intimacy his terms clearly invite. The words of the speaker frequently produce meanings that exceed his immediate intentions, even meanings that he seems to actively suppress. We see, for example, that even as the speaker is concertedly euphemistic in his description of Christ's "wounded part," the Latinate double-meaning of *semen*, that is, both of seed and ejaculate, is clearly a sub-text to the "harvest" in line ten.³² Like Donne's "Batter My Heart" and "Show me, dear Christ," or perhaps even more like Crashaw's "Blessed be the Paps," the metaphor here flirts with the pornographic. The blood from Christ's penis is, somewhat startlingly, both a procreative and an imbibed fluid; it is both the seed that brings forth a harvest of souls, and the heavenly drink of the angels and the saved. The arrestingly oral nature of this image of sexual intimacy, however, underscores the inextricability of sacramental consumption with spiritual generation. Christ's act of feeding and his creation of new life, the "harvest of joy," are rhetorically conflated. Eating Christ and being

³¹ Considering these agricultural metaphors, it is not too surprising that John Busby's 1595 printed texts change "vein" (7) to "vine," emphasizing Christ's role as the stalk out of which grow both the branches and the fruit of the church.

³² Southwell, as a result of his Jesuit training and years on the continent, was almost certainly more fluent in Latin than in English. See Frank Brownlow's biography, 80.

born of him become one and the same thing. Reaching this reading of the poem, however, though the speaker sets up exactly the terms requisite to get there, actually requires the reader to accept the sexual metaphors the speaker himself can't quite fully imagine or articulate.

This invitation to the reader to see poetic meaning as in excess of the speaker's intention, it is important to make clear, is not designed to perform an illusory abdication of authorial control, in which Southwell tricks the reader or himself into believing that because the speaker is clearly not in total control of the text that God—or at least some divinely sanctioned impetus—somehow must be. Rather, the point of creating this dissonance between text and speaker is to draw out from the reader analytical tools that are ultimately to be turned inward. The point, in other words, is not to reveal a static divine message hidden behind the inadequate words of the speaker, but to model a devotional process of reading in which each re-reading of the poem, and of the reading self, discloses newly excessive foliations of meaning.

The insistence here on the text's ability to exceed the speaker, therefore, importantly nuances the very common portrayal of early modern devotional poets, including Southwell, as undertaking a program of total self-effacement. Brian Cummings, for example, describes this as a process of "emptying ... the self from the self."³³ This self-dissolution through poetry is generally suggested as a spiritual solution to the problem of writerly subjectivity as a product of original sin. How can the fallen poet write anything that is not always already tainted by and reflective of his fallen nature? He must, it is argued, create an account of poetic production in which the speaking self is wholly and utterly effaced in relation to the transcendent power of God. This is a program that many critics have seen as particularly active in Herbert, though the concerns it seeks to allay are clearly anticipated by Southwell. According to Stanley Fish, who gives the most comprehensive account of this argument, a poet such as Herbert goes about

³³ *Grammar and Grace*, 353.

fulfilling this program by making his poetry always superfluous to the work of God.³⁴ While Herbert would certainly acknowledge the idea that God does not need his poetry in any way (As “Jordan (II)” insists: “*There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn’d*”), the idea that self-annihilation is a primary poetic goal fails to explain poetry itself except as the product of a sinful inclination on the part of poets to supererogation. As I discuss in greater length in the next chapter, such a critical model flies in the face of Herbert’s stated desire to purify verse for divine purposes, a desire he inherits from Southwell.³⁵

Southwell, in fact, gives to Herbert a eucharistic model in which subjectivity itself, fallen though it is, is recognized as an expression of divine locution. It is only when the self is understood as constituted through and not against signification that language has the potential to be redeemed from the Fall and from what Southwell sees as the equivocal predication of erotic poetry. The eucharist models an understanding of the self’s relation to signification because, in it, the bread and wine are always reflexively operating on their recipients, pointing out to them their own narrative and signifying functions. Certainly at times this requires God’s active opposition to the work of the speaker and poet, but for both Herbert and Southwell, the work of the divine in language is just as often to perform a redemptive reading of the speaker’s ignorance or unfaithfulness. Thus in Herbert’s “A True Hymn,” the speaker’s phrase “Oh I could love” (20) is not scoldingly rejected, but instead adjusted by completion. God answers “Loved.” Only one letter is new. Similarly, in what could easily seem Southwell’s most obvious expression of a desire for self-annihilation, “I Dye Alive,” the long list of oxymoronic inversions of life and

³⁴ See pgs. 124-5 of chapter three for a fuller examination of Fish’s reading.

³⁵ Announced in both Southwell’s preface to his own poetry and in Herbert’s famous letter to his mother, (“I... reprove the vanity of those many love-poems that are daily writ and consecrated to Venus... For my own part, my meaning (dear mother) is in these sonnets, to declare my resolution to be, that my poor abilities in poetry shall be all and ever consecrated to God’s Glory.” Walton, 69-70).

death do not constitute an absolute dissolution of self as much as a reconstitution of self in terms of desire rather than substance:

I live, but such a life as ever dies,
I die but such a death as never ends;
My death to end my dying life denies,
And life my loving death no whit amends.

...
Not where I breath, but where I love, I live. (5-8, 13)

The desire for death, in this poem, is accompanied by the resurrection of the “I” in the action of loving God. Here Southwell does not model a pure self-annihilation, but a movement from one version of self-understanding to another, a movement he explores in more depth in his longer works.

Magdalene, Peter, Self

Southwell’s most influential works, his prose narration *Mary Magdalen’s Funeral Tears* and the long poem *St. Peter’s Complaint*, both dramatize a disciple’s encounter with Christ in order to develop an account of devotional interiority. In these works, we do not encounter spiritual models who present total self-abnegation as the spiritual ideal. Instead, both model a redemptive reading of text and self. In the climactic scene of *Funeral Tears*, for example, when the resurrected Christ appears to Mary Magdalene, the narrator intimates that her misrecognition of Christ as a gardener has symbolic significance beyond what she herself is able to recognize:

But thy mistaking hath in it a farther mystery. Thou thinkst not amisse though thy sight bee deceived. For as our first father, in the state of grace and innocency, was placed in the garden of pleasure, and the first office allotted him, was to be a Gardener: so the first man that euer was in glorie, appeareth first in a Garden, and presenteth himselfe in a gardeners likenes, that the beginnings of glory, might resemble the entrance of innocencie and grace. (46r)³⁶

The narrator models for the reader an interpretive process in which even Mary Magdalene’s misapprehension becomes itself symbolically significant, as it points to the typological

³⁶ *Mary Magdalen’s Funeral Tears* (London: Printed by John Wolfe for Gabriel Cawood, 1591).

completion of Christ's work to undo the sin of Adam. Here, Mary performs what would become a conventional feature of early modern representations of the Magdalene figure: a propensity for "religious error," what Gary Kuchar describes as "her penchant for making interpretive mistakes predicated on openness and love rather than selfishness."³⁷ As the narrator of *Funeral Tears* is clear to point out, though, this typological fulfillment—the connection between the garden of Eden and the garden in which the resurrected Christ appears to Mary—finds its consummation in the eucharist:

In a Garden *Adam* was condemned to earn his bread with the sweate of his browes. And after a free gift of the bread of Angels in the last supper in a Garden Christ, did earne it us with a bloudy sweat of his whole body. By disobedient eating the fruite of a tree, our right to that Garden was by *Adam* forfeited, and by the obedient death of Christ upon a tree, a farre better right is nowe recouered.
(46v)

Thus Mary's misrecognition of Christ as a gardener actually reveals Christ's identity as the source of spiritual food under the new covenant, and in so doing redeems even her inability to recognize the immediate presence of Christ.

Later on, after Mary has recognized her master, she makes another "holy error." Expanding on the scriptural account in John 20, Southwell's narrator explains both Mary's deep desire to touch Christ, and his strange refusal to allow her to do so. This enigmatic denial of what seems both morally and spiritually appropriate, Southwell treats as another felicitous spiritual misapprehension, since it provides a model for devotional self-evaluation. In literary terms, Mary's desire to grab hold of her master and express her affection mirrors the devotional impulse of so many poets in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England. Yet Christ's prohibition, *Noli me tangere*, also reminds Southwell and his readers of the need to critically examine even apparently appropriate devotional desires. In Southwell's prose narrative, therefore, when Christ forbids

³⁷ *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 37.

Magdalene to touch him, he does so to encourage Mary to have a more intimate inward encounter with Christ's presence. As the narrator interpolates on behalf of Christ:

It is now necessary to weane thee from the comfort of my externall presence, that thou maist learne to lodge mee in the secretes of thy heart, and teach thy thoughts to supply the offices of outward senses. (62r)

To a Recusant readership, these lines could have been read as an exhortation to an internalized devotion in the absence of the real presence made available in the host. They remained legible to Protestant readers too, though, because of their insistence that Christ's presence must be found "inside" rather than outside. For both its Catholic and its Protestant audience, however, Southwell presents the gap between sign and signified as a yet to be translated reservoir of literary meaning. Mary falls short of understanding the truth, but even her falling short inadvertently reveals something about it.

What we see Southwell introducing here to the English tradition is a particular set of tools for navigating the poet's dual identity as sinful human and divine *imago*. While we saw in the last chapter both Chaucer and the Pearl-poet understanding their own poetic self-creation through sacramental models, what we encounter in Southwell is an appeal to the sacrament as a way of reconfiguring the subjective "I" of erotic Renaissance lyricism, through a process of analytic interiority, into a sacramental subject. In the same generation that Sidney's muse tells him to "look in thy heart and write," Southwell's *St. Peter's Complaint* begins with an exclamation, "Fly not from foreign ills, fly from the heart" (11). We see in this contrast a sense that erotic lyric poetry requires a radical transformation not just because it treats worldly rather than spiritual matters, but also because it generates a sinful subjectivity. We see Southwell juxtaposing his own work with erotic verse, which defines its speakers by an unfulfilled libidinous desire always resisting its own authentic expression. In the early English

appropriations of the Petrarchan tradition, the male lover tries and fails to convince his beloved to consummate his desire based on the sincerity of his disconsolation, and so treats self-representation as perpetually illusory.³⁸ Even self-knowledge is often impossible for the speakers of this tradition. This is why sonnet sequences like *Astrophil and Stella* constantly re-begin, always looking for a perfect expression of the lyric “heart,” while their very need to continue writing belies such a possibility. Ironically, though, even as Astrophil and erotic personae like him may express this failure of language as a threat to their own authenticity, they assert their desiring subjectivity as prior to and distinct from the realm of signs. In Southwell’s work the opposite is true. It is precisely the discovery of the lyric persona’s contingent existence in an order of divine sacramental signification that makes possible a version of authentic subjectivity and, in turn, meaningful speech. It is only by being both flesh *and* sign that the apparent fissure between speaker and spoken can be re-understood as a divine gift. It is just this movement that *St. Peter’s Complaint* charts.

The poem is a 136-stanza dramatic monologue in which Peter mourns his triple denial of Christ. It becomes quickly clear, however, that Peter’s grief is insufficient, in and of itself, to remedy the alienation his sin brings about. The opening lines of the poem, where Peter first exhorts himself to mourn for his sin, already hint at this:

Launche forth my Soul into a maine of teares,
 Full fraught with grief the traffick of thy mind;
 Torn sailes will serve, thoughts rent with guilty feares :
 Give Care the sterne: use sighs in lieu of wind:
 Remorse, thy pilot: thy misdeed, thy card,
 Torment thy haven: Shipwracke, thy best reward. (1-6)

³⁸ Rhetoric exemplified in Sidney (“I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,” 1.5), but also in other early sonneteers such as Henry Constable (“In vain my wit doth tell in verse my woe; / Despair in me, disdain in thee, doth show / How by my wit I do my folly prove.” 4.1.2-5)

Peter, in this introductory lament, uses terms and imagery from his former occupation as a fisherman. His remorse, it seems, is supposed to function as the impetus for spiritual movement (“sighs in lieu of wind”) and as the guide for directing it (“Give care the sterne”; “thy misdeede, thy card [map]”). Peter is under the impression that he already possesses the tools necessary to achieve true repentance. He simply has to focus his attention on his own wretchedness and sin in order to begin the process of *metanoia* that is the ultimate goal of the poem. The fact that Peter leans on language drawn from his vocation before the calling of Christ reflects this self-directedness. Peter’s draws his metaphors and his devotional strategies out of himself and his own experience, *his* life and *his* sin. As the poem progresses, however, Peter’s self-accusation, though it is capable of producing sorrow, is unable to move him beyond self-hatred toward any kind of reconciliation with Christ. Even forty-three stanzas later, when Peter addresses the crowing rooster, we find him in basically the same situation as when he started. In the gospel narratives, the sound of the bird’s call makes Peter suddenly remember Christ’s prophecy that he would deny his lord three times before morning.³⁹ In Southwell’s poem, Peter is already painfully aware of his denial of Christ, and so the rooster’s call provokes no sudden realization. Instead, Peter reads its crowing as a manifestation of the perpetual cyclicity of his grief:

O bird, the just rebuker of my crime,
 The faithfull waker of my sleeping feares,
 Be now the dayly clocke to strike the time,
 When stinted eyes shall pay their taske of teares. (265-8)

Rather than acting as the singular revelation of sin to Peter, the bird’s dawn cry announces a perpetual daily ritual of tearful matins, a kind of anti-sacrament marked by its inefficacy.

If the evident inertia of Peter’s spiritual grief weren’t enough to indicate something insufficient in his methods, then the fact that Peter repeatedly lashes out against others for being

³⁹ See Matthew 26:33-35, Mark 14:19-21, Luke 22:33-34, and John 13:36-38.

at least partially responsible for his sin ought to. First, he blames John, for leading him to the court of the Sanhedrin:

O John, my guide unto this earthly hell,
 Too well acquainted in so ill a Court,
 ...
 Why didst thou lead me to this hell of evils,
 To shew my selfe a fiend among the devils? (199-200, 203-4)

Later, in an obviously misogynistic misapprehension of the scene as it appears in the gospels, Peter accuses the two women who ask him about his affiliation with Jesus of seducing him into betraying his master. In this clichéd castigation, which attacks women in general as well as his interrogators, Peter flails to place the blame for his sin anywhere but where it belongs:

O women, woe to men: traps for their falls,
 Still actors in all tragicall mischaunces:
 Earth's necessarie evils, captiving thralls,
 Now murthering with your tongues, now with your glances,
 Parents of life, and love: spoylers of both.
 The theeves of Harts, false do you love or loth. (319-324)

Thus, the ultimate failure of Peter's systematic self-rebuke is evident in the way it leads him to the hypocritical accusation of others. It is significant, then, that the very next stanza initiates the central turn in the poem, the one hundred and twenty line apostrophe to Christ's eyes. Here, Peter is shaken out of his devotional solipsism and blame-casting by the powerful intrusion of a direct glance from his master:

In time, Lord, thine eyes with mine did meet,
 In them I read the ruines of my fall;
 Their chearing raies, that made misfortune sweet,
 Into my guilty thoughts powrde flouds of gall. (325-8)

The change here is subtle but significant. Though the encounter here with Christ's eyes pours "gall" into Peter's "guilty thoughts," even the feelings of accusation that Peter experiences are potentially redemptive; Christ's eyes send forth "chearing raies," which make Peter's misfortune "sweet." As Peter continues to meet the gaze of Christ, the eyes grow to become an overflowing

source of simultaneous wonder, holy fear, and nourishment. In their plenitude, Christ's eyes generate in Peter a similarly abundant poetic exuberance. Peter, thrilled in his effort to depict them, describes Christ's eyes, to provide just a partial list, as "raies" of light (327), piercing "darts" (330), watery "springs" (331), "volumes" of knowledge (337), kindling "flames" (349), "soul-feeding meets" (351), "blazing Comets" (361), "sweet crumbs" (366), "living mirrours" (367), "pooles" (379), "bathes" (379), mouths (385), and "textes" (388). This catalogue of metaphors vacillates between identifying Christ's eyes as visual spectacles to be gazed upon, as nutritive elements to be consumed, and as forces of creative and destructive power. The metaphors also alternate between characterizing Peter as active and as passive in relation to Christ. The disciple is overcome with a paradoxical desire to act *on* the eyes—to read them, to observe them, to drink them—whilst at the same time submitting himself to their action *over him*—to be bathed by them, to be burned by them, to be struck, to be pierced, to be reflected. This rapturous devotional encounter with the eyes, though, quite evidently appeals to the practices of Catholic eucharistic devotion, not only in the way that it repeatedly describes Christ's eyes as food and drink, but also in the way that it leads Peter into a new model of relational self-understanding and self-analysis.

To understand this second aspect of the *Complaint's* appeal to sacramentality, it is important to make clear the connections between confession and eucharist at work in it. For Southwell, poetic sacramentalism places an increased demand for personal reflection on both poet and reader, since, in the Catholic understanding of the Mass, simply receiving the eucharist does not mean receiving God's grace. For the wicked and the unshriven, the consumption of the eucharist brings about condemnation, or even physical harm.⁴⁰ Receiving the eucharist rightly is

⁴⁰ In various medieval stories, the host even enacts violence on the unfaithful, sometimes swelling in the throat of the communicant, or revealing itself as a grotesque chunk of bleeding flesh, or the like. See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*.

as important as receiving it at all. Southwell reiterates this caution in his translation of Thomas Aquinas' Corpus Christi hymn, "Lauda Sion Lavatorem:"

Both the good and the bad receive him
But effects are divers in them
Trew life or dewe destruction
Life to the good death to the wicked. (49-52)

Thus, any appeal on Southwell's part to a sacramental conception of poetic language recalls the Catholic requirement to submit to priestly confession and whatever acts of penance the priest required. The problem for Southwell's audience, though, was that it did not have access to a priest to perform that confession. Thus, just as Southwell's work stands in lieu of the eucharist, *St. Peter's Complaint* provides its Recusant readership a model for performing the work of self-analysis and confession. That it does so accounts in part for the popularity of the poem among Protestants, who had no recourse to priestly confession for doctrinal rather than political reasons. Southwell here is not capitulating to a Protestant devotion out of necessity, but provides the spiritual tools to do what Session XIV of the Council of Trent endorses: in the absence of a priest, reconciliation with God was possible through a perfect act of contrition.⁴¹ Such perfect contrition, however, was only possible through an intense process of religious self-diagnosis.

St. Peter's Complaint uses dramatic monologue to engage readers in exactly this process of self-analysis, not only because it allows the readers to imitate Peter, but also because it allows them to recognize when Peter's devotional strategies have been off the mark. The poem invites readers to mistrust the ways their own acts of reading had been emulating the sinfulness of the speaker. On the one hand the presence of Peter, the founder and figurehead of the Roman Church, under the same pressure as Elizabethan Catholics to renounce his faith, makes clear the

⁴¹ See Session 14.4: "it sometimes happen[s] that this contrition is perfect through charity, and reconciles man with God before this sacrament be actually received." James Waterworth, ed. and trans. *The canons and decrees of the sacred and ecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Burns and Oates, 1896). See also Pollard Brown's introduction to *Poems*, lxxviii-ix and Cummings, *Grammar and Grace*, 338.

poem's mimetic offer to English Recusants. For these readers, isolated from the institutions of Roman leadership and absolution, Peter's laments of spiritual alienation and paralysis would have struck a particular chord.⁴² On the other hand, Peter is not a faultless devotional model. Not only does he deny Christ three times (exactly what Southwell is imploring his audience not to do), his own process of repentance, as we have seen, is often stilted and self-obstructed. As Gary Kuchar puts it, *St. Peter's Complaint* ought to be read "symptomatically," that is, with the understanding that its speaker can be mistaken in his judgments and practices:

Southwell's poems train readers to listen for ... internal "disorder" by having his saints enact such sin even as they analyze and confess it. By enacting as well as confessing sin, Southwell's poems possess a rhetorical dimension that is necessarily absent from both his and Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*. His poems demand an active, even critical, response from readers. [Readers] are being encouraged to recognize how the Spirit signifies in excess of Peter's knowledge.⁴³

In other words, though Peter is the voice of the poem, the poem welcomes the reader's critique of Peter's devotional practices. Yet if Peter, on whose authority the whole Roman Church is based, falls short of devotional perfection, then readers, who put themselves in his place (as clearly they are supposed to do), are encouraged to engage in an even more rigorous self-critique.

As the opening fifty-four stanzas of the poem show, the model of self-examination the poem ultimately promotes is not the circular self-accusation Peter first undergoes. It is only when Christ turns his gaze on Peter that the disciple finds a passage out of his despair. Importantly, though, both the language and effect of this encounter connect Peter's response to his master's eyes with analogous practices surrounding the reception of the eucharist. Christ's eyes, which at once mark the presence and interpretive gaze of Christ, become themselves eucharistic elements,

⁴² This self-shriving model is one that made the poem extremely popular amongst a Protestant readership as well, though perhaps some of Southwell's more particularly Catholic concerns may have been missed or, perhaps even more likely, conscientiously ignored. See *Grammar and Grace*, 333-34.

⁴³ *Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, 34.

“soule feeding meats” (351) that satisfy “hungrie wishes” (345), while their tears are “sweet crumbs” for “pined thoughts” (366). The same eyes are also “sweet volumes, with learning fit for saints” (337) and “textes” that “to faithful hearts need little glosing” (388). As in Southwell’s apostrophes to Christ’s sweat and circumcision blood, the conflation here of reading and consuming alerts the reader not only to the sacramental activity of Christ’s eyes and tears, but also to the potential sacramentality of the text itself. Christ may be present, looking at them as well as Peter, not through his gaze, but through the poet’s words.

What effect this appeal to eucharistic devotion has on the reader’s self-understanding becomes clearer when we see what it is about Christ’s eyes that allows Peter to break out of the feedback loop of his self-focused despair. When the disciple’s eyes meet Christ’s, his perspectival frame, which had been governed by an interminable solipsism, begins to breakdown. This interruption occurs because of Peter’s sudden awareness of his visual relation to Christ. When he sees his own reflection in the eyes of Christ he understands his own position as an object of Christ’s gaze. The recognition of his visual subjection to Christ makes way for a more profound submission to Christ’s interpretive authority over him. When he finally sees himself through Christ’s eyes he is able to see things rightly, especially himself:

O living mirrours, seeing whom you shew,
Which Equall shadows worths with showered things:
Yea make things noble then in native hew,
by being shap’d in those life-gyving springs;
Much more my image in those eyes was grac’d,
Then in my selfe, whom sinne and shame defac’d. (367-372)

In these lines, the sacramental fluid from the “springs” of Christ’s eyes not only nourishes Peter to life but also acts as a reflective surface for self-examination. The language of reflection here is particularly important because it underscores that Peter’s experience of *metanoia* comes about through a recognition of his position as a representation of Christ, that is, of his semiotic relation

to the presence he desires. This is why the poem makes such a radical distinction between Peter's recognition of himself as a reflection in Christ's eyes and his formerly inward consideration of his sin, his image "in my selfe." Christ's ophthalmic reflections are quite different from what the text introduces as Peter's previous model of narcissistic self-consideration, a difference that is figured by Southwell's contrasting presentations of the figure of Echo. The first time we encounter her is in the fourth stanza of the poem, where Peter's mourning, like Echo's cry for her lover, is an empty signifier that fails to achieve a desired union: "Flie mournfull plaints, the Ecchoes of my ruth; / Whose screeches in my freighted conscience ring" (19-20). In the context of the poem's repeated insistence on tears and eyes as pools, though, it becomes clear that Peter also takes on the qualities of Echo's mythological counterpart, Narcissus, who falls in love with his own reflection and, depending of the version of the story, either withers away or commits suicide in despair. Yet when Peter looks into the reflective eyes of Christ, we encounter a very different version of pool gazing,⁴⁴ and a very different presentation of Echo. Peter apostrophizes:

O pooles of *Hesebon*;⁴⁵ the bathes of grace,
 Where happy spirits dive in sweet desires,
 Where saints reioice to glasse theyr glorious face.
 Whose banks make Eccho to the angel's quires;
 An Eccho sweeter in the sole rebound,
 Then Angels musick in the fullest sound! (379-384)

These lines, which quite consciously recall the earlier implications of Peter as a despairing Echo and a self-engaged Narcissus, transform the connotations of these figures from negative to positive. As Louise Vinge's exhaustive study on the theme of Narcissus reminds us, in the mystical Christian tradition, the idea of reflection expressed in the stories of Narcissus and Echo

⁴⁴See Kuchar, *Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, 43: "This mutual gazing makes Peter and Christ appear as Christian counterparts to Ovid's Narcissus and Echo, who are being contrasted throughout the sequence as part of an opposition between Christian inter-mutuality and classical egoism... While Narcissus looks into the mirror, sees himself, and drowns, Peter looks into Christ, sees his own true image, and is given eternal life."

⁴⁵ From Song of Solomon 7:4, "Thy neck *is* as a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bathrabbim: thy nose *is* as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus." As in "The Circumcision," Southwell presents intimacy with Christ, particularly with Christ's consumed eucharistic body, as erotic.

was often taken up as an image of positive theological truths, especially of Christ as a Narcissus figure who becomes enamoured with an image of himself (i.e. humanity).⁴⁶ Thus, though the mirror-pool in the Narcissus story can represent “vanity,” it may also symbolize “purity” and “wisdom.” So, as Peter begins to see himself as both an “echo” and a reflection of the image of Christ, the figure of Echo takes on a version of this mystical reading and, like Peter himself, becomes a model of union with Christ instead of a picture of interiorized despair.⁴⁷

The entry of Christ’s eyes as sacramental objects into the text, however, does not negate introspection, or dissolve Peter out of the text, it simply changes the kind of introspection going on. Christ’s eyes, as Peter suddenly recognizes, “by seeing things ... make things worth the sight” (377). Thus the theological turn in *St. Peter’s Complaint* is not to self-annihilation, but to a truer kind of self-reflection, away from a solipsistic subjectivity defined by self-hatred, itself understood as of a kind with the unfulfillable erotic desire of Echo. Repentance becomes the discovery of the self in the other and as a representation of the other. This transformation to repentance ennobles Peter (369) and makes his formerly corrupt body the reflection of divine grace (371-372), a turn that is marked by Peter’s renewed ability to cry:

Come sorrowing teares, the ofspring of my grieve
 Scant not your parent of a needfull aide
 In you I rest, the hope of wish’d reliefe,
 By you my sinfull debts must be defraide
 Your power prevailes, your sacrifice is grateful,
 By love obtaining life to men most hatefull. (465-70)

Peter’s tears here are quite different from the “maine of tears” that appear in the first line of the poem; they begin to take on the sacrificial quality of Christ’s own tears. They become part of

⁴⁶ *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature*, trans. Robert Dewsnap et al. (Lund: Gleerups, 1967), 189-90.

⁴⁷ As Maggie Kilgour has recently pointed out, this mystical reading of Narcissus was particularly at work in Jesuit thinking, though reveals itself in Protestant contexts in the later seventeenth century; see *Milton and the Metamorphosis of Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 193n.4. The question of Southwell’s role in introducing this reading to Protestant writers is one that certainly invites further research.

Southwell's repeated motif in which the guilt of the sinner is transformed from the evidence of spiritual alienation into the activity that most closely imitates Christ's own suffering. It is for this reason that Peter begins to express much more hope in the power of his tears to lead to his reconciliation with Christ: their "power prevailes" and he is confident that their sacrificial work is "grateful," i.e. graciously received. If we place the lines above in contrast with the poem's fifth stanza, in which Peter describes himself loathingly and with a striking self-distance, the kind of change that the apostrophe to the eyes ushers in becomes plain:

[I am] A sorrie wight, the object of disgrace,
 The monument of feare, the map of shame,
 The mirrour of mishap, the staine of place,
 The scorne of Time, the infamy of Fame,
 An excrement of Earth, to heaven hateful,
 Injurious to man, to God ungrateful. (25-30)

At this early stage of the poem, Peter is no image of God, he is abject excrement. Following his confrontation with the gaze of Christ, though Peter retains for himself the description "hateful" (24, 466), hate is not ascribed as it was to "heaven" or any other synecdoche for God. Instead his tears seem sacramentally effective, they "defray" his sinful debts. In fact, Peter's own tears become so sacramentally charged that the language he uses to describe them makes it hard to clearly distinguish his tears from Christ's:

O beames of mercy beat on sorrowes clowd,
 Poure suppling showres upon my parched ground;
 Bring forth, the fruite to your due seruice vowde,
 Let good desires with like deserts be crownd. (475-8)

Here, though "beames of mercie" seems to refer exclusively to Christ's eyes, "suppling showres" may refer either to Christ's tears or to Peter's. Peter's own tears are now nutritive and generative like his masters, and are therefore the medium of his passage from a longing for atonement with Christ, his "good desires," to the fulfillment of that longing, the good "deserts" that crown and sanctify his repentance, "deserts" which are none other than the affirmations of Peter's manifold

participation in the sacramental life of Christ. Thus there are three parallel transformations going on as Peter repents: by seeing Christ's eyes Peter begins to see through them, by receiving Christ's tears as food and drink (crumbs, meete, cisterns, springs) Peter's own tears become eucharistically changed into Christ's tears, and by witnessing himself in Christ's weeping eyes Peter is able to weep like Christ.

The parallels between seeing and eating above are not only important to the narrative of the story, in which Peter describes what he *sees*, but also to the broader work of the poetry, which, as a medium that is read, must be seen to be understood. That is to say, if poetry must be encountered in a way that models itself on the eucharist, especially by an audience without frequent access to the eucharist, seeing must be able to do the same kind of work as eating. For Southwell, Catholic practice would have provided a ready to hand understanding of the connection between a visually apprehended text and the sacrament: the adoration of the host. Unlike Protestants, Southwell and his Catholic readership would have understood reception of the eucharist as a visual as much as an alimentary activity. Because of the claim, in Catholic theology, that the host really was Jesus himself, it was devotionally appropriate to gaze on and worship the consecrated host.⁴⁸ In fact, for Catholics, the visual aspect of the eucharist was almost as important as the actual consumption.⁴⁹ This communion by sight, though, as Southwell's poetry makes clear, does not act in opposition to what has normally been identified

⁴⁸ See the canons of the Council of Trent XIII.5: "Wherefore, there is no room left for doubt, that all the faithful of Christ may, according to the custom ever received in the Catholic Church, render in veneration the worship of latria, which is due to the true God, to this most holy sacrament. For not therefore is it the less to be adored on this account, that it was instituted by Christ, the Lord, in order to be received: for we believe that same God to be present therein, of whom the eternal Father, when introducing him into the world, says; And let all the angels of God adore him; whom the Magi falling down, adored; who, in fine, as the Scripture testifies, was adored by the apostles in Galilee."

⁴⁹ The cult of the eucharist, which would have been emphasized in Southwell's counter-Reformation training, "often emphasized seeing the Eucharist rather than eating it... Crowds [in medieval Europe and in Catholic countries after the Reformation] were known to rush from one church to another on important feast days in hopes of seeing the elevation of the host several different times." Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 74.

as Protestant emphases on introspection, of seeing oneself. The fact that Catholic theology emphasizes a visual engagement with an object outside the self does not mean that such object-oriented devotion implies a diminished role for reflective interiority. Rather, just as right reception of the eucharist requires self-examination and confession, the right kind of seeing in eucharistic devotion requires a careful re-orientation of how one sees. Adoring the host, after all, cannot simply be looking at it, since what can be literally seen is not what is being adored. Similarly, for Peter, seeing and adoring Christ is part and parcel with internalizing Christ's claims on his self-image. Transubstantiation, therefore, sets up a useful paradigm of "visual eating" applicable to the kind of devotional interiority Southwell encourages in his readers. The practice of reading the poetic text rightly, even Southwell's reading of his own poetry, models itself on the dual modes, visual and consumptive, of the Catholic reception of the eucharist. But this eucharistic model always had a reflexive effect on the communicant who, though he seems to be incorporating bread into his body, is really being incorporated by Christ into his. In Southwell's poetry, this is the experience of subjectivity: poet, speaker, and reader all encounter their own subjectivity, when it is rightly read, as a representation of Christ's, and it is only through this recognition that writing or reading can become reliably meaningful. Yet this sacramental presence always faces the interference of the sinful self trying to reassert its spiritual and metaphysical autonomy, just as Peter's solipsistic narcissism at the start of the *Complaint* prevented him from moving beyond a crippling sense of despair. Southwell, therefore, remains conscious of the fact that sacramental signification can never simply be read and known, but must always be rediscovered with each new reading.

Southwell for Protestants.

The qualities of Southwell's poetic sacramentalism—his presentation of language as a consumed sacramental body, his insistence that poet and reader encounter language with an awareness of their own semiotic subjectivity, and his insight that such poetics make a perpetual demand for introspection—create a rich tension between poetry and poet. The right kind of reading requires, like the eucharist, an incorporation of the sign. The ability of poetic language to perform this act of incorporation, however, depends on the ontologically prior act of God's signification in the sacrament. As Christ replaces Adam in defining the Christian concept of what defines humanity, so Christ's institution of the eucharist as a perpetual act of divine signification defines and enables human acts of speech and writing. Indeed, the sacrament reframes poetic subjectivity itself as an act of signification always needing to be re-encountered and reinterpreted.

Understanding Southwell in this way, we get a sense of what is lost in critical studies of the connections between eucharist and poetry in early modern England that ignore him. His omission often ends up being in the service of a thesis that sees the formal and thematic developments of seventeenth-century devotional poetry as stemming from a rejection of transubstantiation, implicitly understood to reflect a naïve or magical way of thinking in which sign is always identical to signified, and an acceptance of Protestant understandings of the eucharist, which supposedly anticipate a more sophisticated modern insistence on the illusiveness of meaning. When, quite recently, Southwell has been considered within the rubric of eucharistic poetics, he has been set up as a foil to the achievements of subsequent devotional poets, with his stubborn insistence on the truth of transubstantiation cited as the source of his

aesthetic failures.⁵⁰ Perhaps the most frequently cited of these aesthetic failures is Southwell's tendency to write with what has been called an impersonal style. What is meant by this is Southwell's propensity either to use an abstracted lyricism in which the voice is not given a particular set of spatial or temporal circumstances, or to "ventriloquize" his poetic voice through the persona of a saint, as in *Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears* and *St. Peter's Complaint*. These predispositions to abstraction and projection are seen as deficiencies in contrast to the more particular lyric subjectivity of Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan, in part because they are characterized as hangovers from a more medieval and communal sense of the self.

As we saw in the last chapter, however, such an account of the medieval world is a fiction, particularly if it is accounted for in terms of a universal medieval sacramentality. What Southwell's abstraction really represents, though, is an ingenious application of a particularly Jesuit, and therefore necessarily early modern poetic preference for regulating what are seen as the idiopathic emotive impulses of the individual by the conscious composition of an ordered corporate voice.⁵¹ But this Jesuit tendency is itself a feature of Counter-Reformation efforts to understand and express subjectivity. It is not a vestige of medieval communitarian sociality, but rather a calculated response to concerns about the limits of human reason, the fallenness of human emotion, and the work of sin to conceal the self from its own analytic powers. It is precisely because Southwell's poetic voices provide a way of confronting these concerns that they were so widely and frequently copied in Protestant manuscripts and printed for Protestant

⁵⁰ See Read, in *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, who suggests that Southwell's poetry is often marked by "a strain of militant literalism" (67), and argues that his mystical investment in the miracle of transubstantiation makes him less invested in the rhetorical and spiritual power of poetry: "...that the poet's attention is divided between type [poetry] and truth [the sacrament] accounts for the momentary failures as well as the powerful achievements of this work" (68).

⁵¹ See Kuchar, *Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, 34, and Janelle, 121-3 for further discussion of Southwell's relation to this Jesuit poetic.

audiences.⁵² It is also why his work became useful to poets like Herbert who, under the Calvinist consensus of early seventeenth-century England, had overlapping suspicions about subjectivity and self-knowledge. Yet Southwell's Jesuit tendencies are by no means purely impersonal. The particular pastoral needs of his audience, his position on the political and religious margins of England, as well as his undeniably singular martyrdom, create a productive interaction between individual and corporate expression. For its Catholic audience, Southwell's poetry must remind these first intended readers of their membership in the one true Catholic Church (and so also their representative role as Christ's body on earth) at the same time as it gives them strategies to perform that identity in an individualistic way, without easy access to the communal apparatus of the Mass. For his Protestant audience, Southwell provides the first poetic model of the consecration of lyric poetry, a model that acknowledges a need to transform not only lyric subject matter, but the lyric subject.

⁵² For a more detailed consideration of the print history of Southwell's work, see Robert S. Miola, "Publishing the Word: Robert Southwell's Sacred Poetry," *The Review of English Studies* 64 (2013): 410-432, esp. 419-429.

Herbert's Eucharist: Giving More

In an early letter to his mother, George Herbert declares his intention to carry out a project of literary transformation. Like Southwell before him, he laments “the vanity of those many Love-poems... consecrated to Venus,” and announces that his own “poor Abilities in *Poetry*, shall be all and ever consecrated to Gods glory.”¹ The “consecration” that Herbert announced is only recorded in Izaak Walton’s biography, but its provenance has never been seriously questioned, perhaps primarily because *The Temple* so obviously fulfills the poet’s promise to his mother. Indeed, the hallowing of poetry became the paradigm by which Herbert’s myriad readers and imitators understood him. “Consecration,” though, is a theologically broad term. It can refer to any act of religious “setting-apart,” including marriage, ordination, founding a church, or baptism. All these appear in *The Temple*, and each one goes some way toward explaining and enriching the poetic “setting-apart” that goes on in Herbert’s collection: marriage shows up in “Virtue” and “The Search,” ordination in “The Priesthood” and “Man,” church-founding in “The Altar” and “The Church-floore.” Baptism acts as an especially crucial form of consecration in *The Temple*, and is particularly important as the subtext of the two “Jordan” poems. Using baptism as a metaphor for transforming one kind of poetry into another, the Jordan poems recapitulate the biblical “baptisms” performed in the Jordan River: the figurative baptism of Israel’s first passage into the promised land and Jesus’ literal baptism by John. The passage in “Jordan (I)” from “fictions” and “false hair” to “truth” (1, 2), as well as the more vexed movement from “trim invention” to “*a sweetness readie penn’d*” in “Jordan (II)” (3, 18) reiterate these scriptural baptisms. They each recall the personal repentance and public commitment to a life of belief that every Christian baptism announces. Given the longstanding recognition of the

¹ Izzak Walton, *Lives of Donne and Herbert*, ed. S.C. Robertts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 69-70.

centrality of the “Jordan” poems,² it would be tempting to see baptism as the central or structuring ritual of *The Temple*.³

The obvious weakness of baptism as the organizing motif of Herbert’s collection is that baptism happens only once in the life of the Christian. Its efficacy is derived from its singularity, the fact that its transformation is not incremental. *The Temple*, however, enacts an almost constant re-performance of spiritual transformation, which is why titles of poems closer to the beginning of the collection so often reappear further along, reprising and revising the activity of the first version of the poem. The *Jordan* poems themselves, ironically, are perhaps the most powerful example of this need for poetic amendment, but they are not unique. Nearly one fifth of the poems in “The Church” share their title with another. Many more return to the same ideas or problems. So, if baptism becomes the *key* figure for understanding Herbert’s poetry, it appears necessary to read these poems as fundamentally about the failure of spiritual transformation. Each successive poetic baptism seems to reveal the former’s falsity. The new poem must displace the old as Anabaptist immersion obviates Anglican sprinkling. Despite the obvious fix in which it places poetry, this “failure to baptize” interpretation of Herbert’s work has reappeared, in a number of different forms, throughout the last century of Herbert criticism, even when baptism has not expressly been named as the paradigm that informs it. Stanley Fish’s 1972 reading of Herbert in *Self-Consuming Artifacts* provides perhaps the most radical example. According to Fish, *The Temple* is a collection of representational failures, though for him this is a good thing. “Herbert’s poems are undone,” he argues, “when the insight they yield renders

² As early as 1954, Joseph Summers characterizes “Jordan (I)” as “Herbert’s personal declaration of intent.” *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (London: Chatto, 1954), 86.

³ All quotations of *The Temple* come from *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

superfluous the mode of discourse and knowing of which they themselves are examples.”⁴ The logical conclusion, in other words, of the poems’ failure to achieve a complete “baptismal” success is the recognition of their ultimate uselessness. The closest they come to achieving a baptism is in their falling silent, in their ceasing to be, since only in that undoing do they enact something like the “done-ness” or singularity of baptism. Like baptism, *The Temple* only demonstrates its success by ceasing to occur. “The poem itself,” Fish claims of Herbert’s work, “tends to disappear.”⁵

Fish’s argument is by no means unique in taking as its starting point the idea of Herbert’s poetic failure. This approach goes at least as far back as William Empson, who enjoyed “The Sacrifice” not because it expressed the theological truths Herbert would have desired it to, but because it dissolves into so “high a degree of ambiguity.”⁶ Empson, of course, does not characterize this as a “failure” to communicate, but as the expression of a “unique” division within the mind of the author. Empson, though, anticipates Fish’s tendency to see quintessential contradictions in Herbert’s texts, as well as Fish’s inclination to treat those contradictions as undermining any poetic expression that would aspire to the singularity or internal consistency intended by baptism. And if Empson paved the way for Fish, Fish’s influence continues to make its mark on Herbert studies. As Sophie Read points out, many critics still see Herbert’s defining impulse as a desire to “lapse into silence.”⁷ Robert Shaw calls this his “aspiration to muteness,” while Elizabeth Clarke describes it as Herbert’s attempt to “use words to create the effect of silence.”⁸ Even when critics have not read *The Temple* as one long effort to shut up, they have

⁴ *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 158.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 383-4

⁶ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1966), 227.

⁷ *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 115

⁸ Robert B. Shaw, “George Herbert: the Word of God and the Words of Man,” in *Ineffability: Naming the Unnamable from Dante to Beckett*, ed. Peter S. Hawkins and Anne Howland Schotter (New York: AMS, 1984), 82;

still often treated Herbert's words as a site of loss. For some critics, this loss occurs as the self tries and fails to fully express itself in poetry. Barbara Leah Harman, for example, sees Herbert's poetic representation as requiring a "cost," a partial but necessary "dissolution" or failure of the poet to fully and perfectly embody himself within a poem.⁹ For Richard Strier, who reads Herbert with almost exclusive reference to the doctrine of justification by faith, it is not the self that must be lost or occluded, it is poetry. As Strier understands things, Herbert's primary goal is the expression of a faithful and perfect sincerity, the very kind of faithful sincerity, in fact, that baptism is supposed to publicly affirm. In Strier's reading, the difficulty is that the artifice of poetry gets in the way of honesty. Thus, despite some significant methodological and rhetorical differences, Strier ends up sounding a lot like Fish when he treats a poem like "The Forerunners" as performing "the rejection of the value of poetry."¹⁰ Strier differs from Fish in that, for him, Herbert's poetry is "undone" to make room for an authentic self, while for Fish the self dissolves along with the poem. Both Fish and Strier, though, along with Harman, see poetry as aiming at some form of perfect expression—"perfect" here particularly in the senses of complete, comprehensive, and singular. Because poetry simply cannot achieve this kind of perfection, it must always necessitate loss, a falling-short of the perfect once-only expression of faith that, in Christian theology, takes the form of baptism. It is no coincidence, therefore, that though Fish, Strier, and Harman do not explicitly ground their readings in the theology of baptism, all three lean rather heavily on Herbert's two "Jordan" poems to present their arguments.¹¹ The fact that these poems appear as a pair, after all, has often called into question their "baptismal"

and Elizabeth Clarke, *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 234. Both are quoted in Read, 115.

⁹ *Costly Monuments: Representations of the Self in George Herbert's Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹⁰ *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 217.

¹¹ See *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 189-219; *Love Known*, 31-40 and 195-200; *Costly Monuments*, 30-62.

achievement. If the baptism of “Jordan (I)” didn’t work, what guarantee is there that the baptism of “Jordan (II)” will?

The recurrence of criticism that reads Herbert as “failing to baptize” poetry should be surprising. This is because, even as critics have wrestled with Herbert’s inability to achieve a once-and-for-all consecration within *The Temple*, there has been a broad consensus that the eucharist is the ritual of consecration truly at the centre of Herbert’s collection. C.A. Patrides asserted that “the Eucharist is the marrow of Herbert’s sensibility,” and his assessment has often been quoted.¹² Yet critics have produced remarkably different interpretations of how exactly this sacramental core ought to be understood, and until recently, very few in a systematic manner. For critics such as Patrides, “eucharistic” is mostly a way of naming a rather vague, mystical investment Herbert expresses in the power of language. For others, the eucharist features in Herbert’s poetry as a way of revealing his otherwise imprecisely expressed theological commitments.¹³ Much polemic ink has been spilt on this project, yet there remains no consensus on the exact characteristics of Herbert’s personal theologies. More recently, it has been proposed that the eucharist guides Herbert towards a particular rhetorical trope,¹⁴ or undergirds a singularly Protestant version of poetics,¹⁵ or models an idiosyncratic account of desire.¹⁶ None of these critical approaches, though, has recognized the most important feature of the eucharist as a ritualistic model for Herbert’s poetry: its repeatability. Unlike baptism, the eucharist is the *only*

¹² *The English Poems of George Herbert* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 17.

¹³ See Elizabeth McLaughlin and Gail Thomas, “Communion in *The Temple*” *SEL* 15 (1975): 111-24; Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1985), 214-16; Jeanne Hunter, “‘With Wings of Faith’: Herbert’s Communion Poems,” *Journal of Religion* 62.1 (1982): 57-71; and Heather Asals, *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert’s Way to God* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

¹⁴ See Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 98-126. Here, Read argues that Herbert’s Anglican eucharistic theology expresses itself in a particular attraction to the trope of *metanoia* or *correctio*, his “characteristic trick of assertion and retraction” (101).

¹⁵ Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics*, 87-107 and Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh*, 34-62.

¹⁶ Ryan Netzley, *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist*, 23-65.

form of consecration in Protestant theology that can and must be re-performed.¹⁷ It is this repeatability, this chapter will argue, that makes the eucharist so central to the continual work of poetic consecration that Herbert performs.

But why does the unique repeatability of the eucharist matter so much to Herbert? The repetition of the sacrament, I claim, allows Herbert to understand why he should bother writing at all. As many of the critics in the “failure to baptize” strain have pointed out, and as I discuss in the previous chapter, there is a fundamental sense in which the theology of grace poses a problem for poets. This is especially so in Calvin’s development of *sola gratia*, where the insistence on the total depravity of fallen humanity prevents human action from “earning” God’s gifts of salvation and sanctification. Human agency is thoroughly impotent in this regard, and apart from the direct intervention of God himself, all human actions are inextricably bound up with each person’s naturally sinful nature. As Calvin’s *Institutes* articulate this notion, “only damnable things come forth from man’s corrupted nature.”¹⁸ Thus all human actions seem either to be sinful, because they are the product of a totally depraved human nature, or totally superfluous and unnecessary, since any “good” human action can only be the direct result of God’s own intervening agency. This theology seems to place the religious poet on the horns of a similar dilemma. On the one hand, it is surely the calling of the Christian poet to write Christian poetry; on the other, if faithful poetry is just a mark of an already complete saving act of God, what can the poet add to that act by writing? Does it not even risk blasphemy to try and write “in excess” of the command of God? Extrapolated as a model for poetry, the absolute Protestant insistence on *sola gratia* seems to negate the need for human signification. At the heart of Calvin’s theology is an insistence upon the unqualified sovereignty of God, which manifests in

¹⁷ Of the seven Catholic sacraments, penance and anointing the sick are also repeatable.

¹⁸ *Institutes*, 2.3.289.

the categorically singular act of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. This act, itself an act of representation (Christ "stands in" for fallen humanity), is utterly complete, totally perfect, thoroughly finished. It cannot be repeated, improved, repaid, or even, really, resisted. It is on account of this singularity, in fact, that Protestants rejected the Catholic concept of sacrifice in the Mass. As Protestants understood it, the claim that some kind of representative propitiation happens again in the eucharist necessarily denigrates the distinctiveness of the cross. The uniqueness of the sacrifice at the centre of Christian theology, therefore, threatens to do to signs more generally what it threatens to do to human agency: to efface them. There simply does not seem anything else left to be signified apart from divine signification revealed in Christ, God's singular and unrepeatable Word. All signs other than Christ himself must "disappear" in one of two ways. If they are the product of human agency, they will "disappear" along with all sin, incinerated in the lake of fiery judgement at the end of time. If they are the product of divine agency, they must already gesture at the one true signification of the incarnation. In that instance, signs are only important insofar as they point beyond themselves and their particular content. Their "meaning," as we experience it, dissolves into the eternal action of Christ "subduing all things to himself" (Philippians 3:21). Words, it appears, are either evil or extraneous.

Herbert, who wrote in a period when Calvinism dominated the theology of the English Church, is deeply concerned by this problem, as we see in "The Holdfast." In the lines of this poem, the speaker feels a great deal of anxiety when he realizes everything he does seems to be useless. "I threatned to observe," the speaker begins, "the strict decree / Of my deare God with all my power & might" (1-2). The unusual use of the verb "threaten" here already suggests something might be wrong with the speaker's attitude or approach. It hints at an antagonism between God and the speaker, as if somehow the speaker's very observance of God's law could

injure the unapproachable holiness of God. Any goodness the speaker lays claim to, his verb implies, must be taken from God. An unnamed interlocutor thus interrupts the speaker, and reminds him that only God can inspire moral actions: “But I was told by one, it could not be; / Yet I might trust in God to be my light” (3-4). God, not the speaker, must be the doer here; the speaker can only “trust.” Yet though he cannot *do* anything, the speaker promises to believe instead: “Then will I trust, said I, in him alone” (5). But it does not end there. Even this believing, it turns out, cannot belong to the speaker: “We must confesse,” the interlocutor insists, “that nothing is our own” (7). The speaker has nothing left but words. He cannot *do*, he cannot *trust*, but he can confess, and record that confession in a poem: “Then I confesse that he my succour is” (8). And here the most astonishing claim in the poem appears. Even the speaker’s words, even his confession of depravity, cannot really be his. As the interlocutor tells him, “But to have nought is ours, not to confesse / That we have nought” (9-10). The speaker’s response is a profound example of Herbert’s plain style: “I stood amaz’d at this, / Much troubled” (10-11). The “amazement” here is not primarily admiring wonder, but “mazy” confusion, perplexity at what seems to be the speaker’s total exclusion from his own experience of faith.

The ambiguity of the poem’s title suggests two different attitudes a reader might have in response to the speaker’s amazement. As a noun, “holdfast” may refer to a bolt or clamp that binds or supports a structure (OED 4a). Read in this sense, the title may suggest the speaker’s failed attempt to “hold fast” to his own agency, or it might suggest, as Helen Wilcox reads it, that Christ is the “support of the faithful.”¹⁹ But a “holdfast” could also refer to a “miser,” someone who “holds fast” to their own goods rather than being generous with them. Read piously, this sense of the title might just amplify the reading above, in which the miserly speaker tries to retain what really belongs to God. But the title of “miser” could just as equally apply to God,

¹⁹ *The English Poems of George Herbert*, 499.

who seems greedily to refuse the speaker everything he desires: his desire to act, his desire to trust, and even his desire to signify. This last sense of “holdfast” is important for clarifying the significance of Herbert’s theological problem. For the speaker, grace might seem to be the opposite of a divine gift, even a kind of greed. God “holds fast” to agency, to belief, and even to signification, excluding all others from any real participation in these actions. If this reading is true, then even the apophatic “undoing” that Fish attributes to Herbert does not resolve the issue. Herbert’s “consumption” of his poem or himself would only confirm God’s miserliness. The poem, though, does provide a response to the speaker’s troubled amazement, but it is not Fish’s response. “I stood amaz’d at this, / Much troubled,” the speaker writes, “*till* I heard a friend expresse, / that all things were more ours by being his” (10-12, my emphasis). Somehow, this unnamed friend tells us, God’s possession of something does not exclude our possession of it. In fact, the opposite is true; nothing is fully “ours” at all unless it is first God’s. For some critics, this response has seemed unsatisfying, a little “rhetorical” in the pejorative sense. A.D. Nuttall, for example, claims that “Herbert piously blurs his own reasoning to make God seem better.”²⁰ Nuttall, besides failing to consider seriously the reasoning of the friend’s claim, underestimates the power of “mere” rhetoric to articulate a theological truth that resists easy logical predication. Even in its own rhetoricity, the poem performs the very thing it tries to describe, since the particular voice, and the quintessentially Herbertian persona that speaks it, emerge exactly *by means of* its coming to terms with a dispossession of agency and language. From the reader’s perspective, in other words, the poem’s voice does not consume itself; rather the poem’s apparent “undoing” makes that voice *appear*. The poem is more particular, more idiosyncratic, more itself, in fact, *because* its speaker strives not to be exclusively himself. Read from a Nietzschean perspective, this effect could seem an example of Herbert’s Christian deviousness;

²⁰ *Overheard by God: Fiction and Prayer in Herbert, Milton, and Dante* (London: Methuen, 1980), 142.

he asserts his own poetic strength by disguising it as impotence.²¹ The weakness of this reading, though, appears if we frame Herbert's poetic problem as a problem of *influence*. God is, within the logic of "The Holdfast," *the* great poet who precedes Herbert, and who appears already to have said everything that Herbert might "confesse." Christ has written the great text of himself, and his Word is so all-encompassing that it eclipses all other words. Thus God's influence on Herbert produces an anxiety that fits Harold Bloom's famous articulation, that "influence-anxieties are imbedded in the agonistic basis of all imaginative literature." The only problem is, for Herbert, Bloom's program for becoming a great writer is completely unachievable. He cannot perform an "agonistic misprision ... upon [his] powerful forerunner," because his forerunner is poetically *all-powerful*.²² All Herbert's *agon* would already be God's. As many critics of Bloom have pointed out, however, one does not have to read poetic influence as a conflict between literary parents and their children. It is just as possible to see poetic influence as love, rather than strife. As Stephen Guy-Bray claims, "declarations of love" may serve better than conflicts as the "paradigmatic representations of poetic influence," especially because love does not posit a zero-sum conception of agency.²³ My friend does not love me to the exclusion of reciprocation, rather just the opposite. My friend's love draws out and amplifies my love for him. There is a kind of weakness in this experience, a certain giving up of control, but there is simultaneous empowerment, a sense that I was not really myself at all until I knew and loved my friend. Only because I have now become that true loving self am I free to be myself. Herbert expresses this idea in "Love (II)," where the "greater flame" of God's love, rather than destroying the speaker,

²¹ One of Nietzsche's chief objections to Christianity was that he thought it pretends to value weakness or impotence only as a way for the weak and the impotent to assert themselves against the more honest and open power of the strong: "Christianity has as its basis the rancune of the sick, the instinct opposed to the healthy, opposed to healthfulness." The hidden logic of Christian faith, according to him, is as follows: "All that suffers, all that hangs on the cross is divine. We all hang on the cross, consequently *we* are divine." "The Antichrist," in *Twilight of the Idols and The Antichrist*, trans. Thomas Common (Dover: New York, 2014), 120.

²² *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xxiv.

²³ *Loving in Verse: Poetic Influence as Erotic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), xii.

actually “Attract[s] the lesser to it” (1-2). God’s *agape* does “consume our lusts” (5), but it also “kindle[s] in our hearts . . . true desires” (4). This kindling is poetically and artistically productive: “Then shall our hearts pant thee; then shall our brain / All her invention on thine Altar lay, / And there in hymnes send back Thy fire again” (6-8). The love of God multiplies itself by inspiring the thankful return of poetic “invention.” God loves, and as part of that gift of love, inspires “hymnes” of praise. Like the eucharistic gifts, these hymns are consecrated “on thine Altar,” just as, in fact, all Herbert’s poems are consecrated “upon” the poetic “Altar” that begins the central section of *The Temple*.

The “friend” who appears in line 11 of “The Holdfast,” by his very name, harkens back to the idea of love as inspiration in “Love (II).” It is only because he is the speaker’s *friend*, and not the niggardly “one” (3) who speaks for most of the poem, that his claim makes sense. Herbert’s ambiguous pronouns, moreover, give us good reason to think this “friend” is Christ himself. When the speaker claims “I heard a friend expresse, / that all things were more ours by being *his*” (11-12), the “his” seems to refer back to the “friend.” It may thus be God himself who modifies the speaker’s understanding of God. God first appears to be a poetic antagonist, but then God corrects the speaker, and reminds him that they are friends, not enemies. Because the speaker and God are friends, God gives the speaker those things that “belong” to God—agency, belief, signification. Because he loves the speaker, the “friend” is careful to introduce a new key verb in the final lines of the poem, one that shifts away from the paradigm in which possession and agency are exclusively God’s or entirely man’s: “What Adam had, and forfeited for all, / Christ *keepeth* now, who cannot fail or fall” (13-14, my emphasis). In place of an antagonistic “holding fast,” Christ now “keepeth.” This verb does imply a form of ownership, but it also has a number of opposite or nearly opposite senses. As a complementary verb, “keep” can indicate

continuity or perseverance, to “keep on” doing something. As a base verb, “keep” may also mean holding in trust, that is, “keeping” for the sake of another, as a trustee cares for property or grows invested capital so that it may be given to an intended beneficiary (in this case, the speaker himself). “Keep” has even more senses appropriate to the context here, of preserving, beholding, caring for, desiring, even celebrating or *ritually repeating*, as one “keeps the Sabbath”²⁴ or, in early modern usage, “keeps Holy Communion.”²⁵ In “The Holdfast,” *what* exactly “Adam had” and “Christ keepeth now” is not explicitly specified. At the very least, Herbert means eternal life, but he also means the different kinds of agency to which the speaker had been initially “holding fast”: his moral agency, his believing agency, and his verbal agency. Christ responds to the speaker’s anxious stupefaction by being a friend, and reminding the speaker that he does not “hold fast” the speaker’s agency but “keeps” it, in all the senses above: he preserves it, he continues it, he grows it, he desires it, he *loves* it. This kind of “keeping” endorses rather than obliterates poetry, as it calls out from the poet a responsive and repeated “keeping” of his own, the texts of each new lyric in *The Temple*.

It is the eucharist, however, that shows Herbert how to perform this recursive “keeping” poetically. It alone provides a theological framework by which the poet does not “fail or fall,” but instead acts as “Secretarie of [God’s] praise” (“Providence,” 8), who “in hymnes send[s] back [God’s] fire again” (“Love (II),” 8). Herbert finds in the eucharist God’s answer to the petition that concludes “Praise (III)”: “That thou mayst yet have more” (6). From the perspective of Calvinist soteriology, giving God more of anything is impossible. For Herbert though, the

²⁴ OED, “keep” 14, 4, 9, 9c, 10, and 13 respectively.

²⁵ See Richard Baxter’s use of “keep” in his catechism: “...all that by Baptism visibly Covenant, and that continue to profess Christianity and Holiness, are the universal visible Church on Earth; and *must keep holy Communion* with Love and Peace in the particular Churches; in the Doctrine, Worship, and Order Instituted by Christ.” *The grand question resolved, what we must do to be saved* (London: 1692), 38, accessed June 6, 2016. <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>.

eucharist is the place where God gives human beings the freedom to give back, and where Christ as Word gives Herbert words of his own for loving Christ. It will be useful here to borrow the language of contemporary theologian and phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion, whose consideration of the implications of the eucharist for theological speech reflects the sacrament's operation in Herbert's poetry. For Marion, theology is never perfect or complete, but not because it continually fails to fully "capture" some object or meaning, but actually *because* it expresses God's own "infinite reserve of meaning (as one speaks of 'the reserved Eucharist')." ²⁶ Though Marion never addresses Herbert, he describes perfectly what motivates the continuous theological rearticulation that marks Herbert's poetry. The ongoing re-expression required of theological language "indicate[s] less an undetermined, ambiguous, and sterile groping, than the absolutely infinite unfolding of possibilities already realized in the Word but not yet in us or our words." ²⁷ Most helpfully of all, Marion reminds us that, "The multiplicity of theologies"—and I would add here the multiplicity of Herbert's poems—"ensues as necessarily from the unspeakable infinity of the Word as does the infinity of Eucharists." ²⁸ For Herbert, in fact, poetry *is* a kind of theology, though not in the sense that it is only another way of expressing a set of doctrinal predications. Good poetry, for Herbert, does not dissolve into doctrine any more than the eucharist dissolves into eucharistic theology. Rather, Herbert's poetry is theology in the same sense that celebrating the eucharist is theology: it is an embodied, repeatable practice by which he may discover more of God, and through which even God "mayst yet have more."

²⁶ *God Without Being*, 156.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

Thanks Giving More

Because the eucharist provides Herbert a sacramental understanding of repetition and multiplicity, it reappears continuously throughout in *The Temple*. When Patrides claimed that the eucharist is the “marrow of Herbert’s sensibility,” his metaphor helpfully pointed to the sacrament’s *structural* function within the collection. Holy Communion does indeed act as the bones of Herbert’s poetic corpus, providing it shape and stability. The sacrament begins and ends *The Temple*. “The Church-Porch,” the long poem of aphoristic advice that prefaces “The Church” proper, carries the enigmatic subtitle “Perirrhanterium.” This is the Greek name for an aspergillum, a sprinkling brush used in Roman Catholic worship for ritual cleansing before the celebration of a High Mass. Herbert’s choice to use the Greek rather than the Latin name for this liturgical tool, the use of which was formally forbidden in the 1549 Act of Uniformity, may suggest a desire to downplay its associations with Roman Catholicism. The presence of the subtitle, though, clearly analogizes Herbert’s “sprinkling” of aphoristic moral advice in “The Church-Porch” with a ritual preparation for receiving communion. As readers pass into “The Church” proper, they do so via *The Temple*’s poetic “Superluminare,” its lintel. There Herbert makes explicit that eucharistic practice ought to inform a reading of the collection. Readers are exhorted to “approach, and taste / The churches mysticall repast” (3-4). Reading should be, for Herbert’s audience, a kind of sacramental tasting. And once readers enter “The Church,” they immediately come before “The Altar,” the liturgical furniture upon which the sacrament is consecrated. As “The Church” begins with a eucharistic consecration on “The Altar,” it ends with the consumption of the elements in “Love (III),” where the speaker will “sit and eat” (18). “The Church” then appropriately concludes like the communion liturgy in the *Book of Common*

Prayer, with the proclamation of the *Gloria in excelsis*.²⁹ Following this same liturgical model, the two poems that act as epilogue to “The Church,” “The Church Militant” and “L’Envoy,” imitate the benedictory blessings that sent English communicants back into the world after receiving Holy Communion.³⁰

But the eucharist is more than just a structural “frame” in *The Temple*. It certainly provides the “marrow” of *The Temple*’s poetic skeleton, but it also furnishes the collection’s “fleshy” surfaces, appearing directly or indirectly in the vast majority of its lyrics. This means that, within the limits imposed by this chapter, it would be impossible to catalogue and address all the appearances of the sacrament in Herbert’s poetry. That kind of parsing would take volumes, which is actually part of Herbert’s point. In the following pages, however, I will focus my reading on a number of poems that helpfully illustrate Herbert’s use of the eucharist to sanction and privilege not only temporal repeatability, but a broader preference for multiplicity. To do this, as well as examining the eucharistic logic that motivates Herbert’s poetic repetitions, I will explore two other key ways in which the eucharist emphasizes the many over the one: as it makes God personally and intimately known to each different communicant and as, in Protestant understanding, it treats the materiality of the elements as something distinct from and in addition to the presence they signify. These forms of eucharistic multiplicity—temporal, experiential, and material—model and consecrate three interrelated features of Herbert’s poetry: the tendency of his poetry to return again to the same words, phrases, themes, and problems; the personal and

²⁹ Martin Elsky, “The Sacramental Frame of George Herbert’s ‘The Church’ and the Shape of Spiritual Autobiography,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 83 (1984): 318.

³⁰ “L’Envoy” in particular, with its prayer for peace and strongly Trinitarian language (“Blessed be God alone,/ Thrice blessed Three in One,” 17-18) recalls the final benediction of Cranmer’s service: “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, kepe youre hartes, and mindes in the knowlege and love of God, and of his Sonne Jesu Christe, oure Lorde. And the blessing of God almyghty, the Father, the Sonne, and the holy Ghost, be among you, and remayne with you alwaies. Amen.” 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, 139. All subsequent references in this chapter are to the 1559 text of this edition.

intimate tone of his poetic voice; and the special self-consciousness Herbert has of his work's "material" qualities in excess of its mere denotation. The repeated re-appearance of the eucharist in these lyrics, this chapter will argue, demonstrates that Herbert treats such multiplicity as a gift. Just as the eucharist is always a new gift each time it is celebrated, so too is each poem in *The Temple* a new celebration. This of course does not mean that all Herbert's poems express joy or pleasure. The liturgy of the eucharist itself involves numerous expressions of personal affliction. Rather, Herbert's poems, like every iteration of the eucharist, "celebrate" in the older senses of the word: each "effects" something distinct, each "consecrates" a new experience (OED 1d and 1c).

Herbert's sacramental poetics of repetition arise from an understanding of the eucharist expressed in its very name, but that so far has been ignored in literary-critical appropriations of eucharistic theology. *Eucharistia* (εὐχαριστία) is, quite simply, the ancient Greek word for thanksgiving, gratitude, or gratefulness. It is a cognate of *charis* (χαρις), grace. In the New Testament, *eucharistia* follows from and is the appropriate response to God's prior act of *charis*. Far from negating or precluding a human response, *charis* necessarily calls forth the human return of *eucharistia*. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, "... all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace (*charis*) might through the thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) of many redound to the glory of God."³¹ The Church's adoption of this term to refer to Holy Communion indicates just how central the notion of thanksgiving is to the eucharist. By means of the sacrament, the gift of divine grace "redounds" to God as the gift of thanks and gratitude. Even Calvin, who retains the term "eucharist" in his *Institutes*, sees the sacrament as the primary way human beings are in fact given a space to respond to God. In his attack on the Roman Catholic notion of sacrifice in the Mass, he highlights precisely why thinking of the sacrament as a form of thanksgiving allows it

³¹ 2 Corinthians 4:15.

to genuinely return something to God. Calvin distinguishes two senses of “sacrifice” that appear in the Old Testament, “propitiatory” sacrifices that are “intended to appease God’s wrath,” and sacrifices of “thanksgiving” that “testify [to] gratefulness of heart for benefits received.”³² Calvin pointedly calls this second class of sacrifice a “εὐχαριστικὸν [eucharistikon], since it is exhibited to God by none but those who, enriched with his boundless benefits, *offer themselves and all their actions to him in return.*”³³ Herbert would have been intimately familiar with this idea of the eucharist as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, all the more so since it was an idea stressed by Lancelot Andrewes, under whom he studied ancient languages as a teenager at Westminster School, and with whom he retained a friendship all his life.³⁴ According to Andrewes, “that great mystery which is the complement and perfection of all our service on earth, is called a εὐχαριστία [that is, a thanksgiving]; for what is it but a solemne commemoration of that grand mercy and benefit of our redemption by Christs sacrifice upon the crosse.” This is why, he explains, the English Church’s eucharistic liturgy “ends with a gloria, Glory be to God on high &c.”³⁵ Like Herbert’s “Church,” Holy Communion ends with an expression of thanksgiving because the whole purpose of the liturgy is to give thanks. The positioning of the *Gloria* at the end of the eucharist, it bears pointing out, was one of the major changes Cranmer made to the Roman order of service, and was thus a uniquely English way to wrap up the ceremony. Cranmer’s purpose was to emphasize the eucharist’s function as what Calvin calls a *eucharistikon*, a sacrifice of thanksgiving rather than a sacrifice of propitiation. Thus Andrewes

³² *Institutes*, 4.18.1441.

³³ *Ibid.*, my italics. For a discussion of the way Calvin’s eucharistic theology articulates the possibility of the human response to divine grace, see B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) and Thomas Davis, *This is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 42-90.

³⁴ John Drury, *Music at Midnight: The Life and Poetry of George Herbert* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), esp. 60 ff.

³⁵ *Lancelot Andrewes: Selected Sermons and Lectures*, ed. Paul McCullough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19.

intimates that the eucharist does *not* attempt to “repay” or re-enact the singular propitiation of the cross; it responds to the expiatory sacrifice of Christ with an entirely different kind of sacrifice, the offer of *thanksgiving*. It is only in this way that the eucharist can meaningfully “add” something to God:

Now here [in our act of thanksgiving] we give some thing to God, and there is nothing els we can give or return to him for his benefits...[I] offer the sacrifice of praise. That’s all I can return. God esteems it an addition to his honour, and therefore it is called magnifying, glorifying and sanctifying of his name.³⁶

Herbert echoes this notion of thanksgiving throughout *The Temple*, and gives it robust expression in “Gratefulnesse,” the title of which provides one possible translation of the Greek *eucharistia*.³⁷ There, the speaker asks God to give him “a gratefull heart” (2) because doing so “makes [God’s] gifts occasion more” (5). Though a “thankful heart” is a gift that the speaker “must obtain from” God (27), the nature of this gift is that it allows the speaker to return something to God, and to return it again and again. As in Andrewes’ sermon, God “esteems” the speaker’s praise as “an addition to his honour.” Even though God has “above / Much better tunes,” his “love / Did take” (i.e. accept or receive) what Herbert humbly calls his “countrey-aires” (22-24). God’s choice to “take” what the speaker offers is itself a kind of gift, since it allows the speaker to add something to God, his perpetual return of gratefulness. God’s gift is indeed infinite, but not in the sense that its immensity reduces everything else to a relative nothing. Rather just the opposite, God’s immeasurable giving allows and inspires an infinite response of thanksgiving—“Gift upon gift” (15). *Because* God “takes” Herbert’s grateful poetic praise, he is free to offer it again and again. “Wherefore,” the speaker insists, “I crie, and crie again; / ... Till I a thankfull heart obtain / Of thee (25, 26-8). The logic of Herbert’s causal

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ An especially apt translation, in fact, as “Gratefulnesse” still bears a resemblance to its cognate “grace,” much as *eucharistia*, in Greek, reminds us of its derivation from *charis*.

“wherefore” here is intentionally paradoxical. The speaker repeatedly asks God for a thankful heart, but his request is a response to God’s prior acceptance of the speaker’s thanksgiving, the Father’s choice to “take” Herbert’s “countrey-aies” as his “joyes” (24, 23, 20). The speaker asks again for what has already been obtained, and so his requests are both a petition for more gratefulness and the evidence of gratefulness itself. “Gratefulnesse” thus describes a positive feedback loop. God gives gratefulness so that its receiver may “crie, and crie again” (25) for yet more gratefulness. What the speaker receives, he gives again to God, though this does not mean he simply “returns” it, as if what the speaker gives to God were strictly identical with what God gave him. God’s gift and the speaker’s thankful response work together so that both giver and receiver (and indeed both are both) add to each other and “occasion more” (5).

In the poem’s final image, Herbert elegantly represents this reciprocation. The speaker’s final request to God is for “such a heart, whose pulse may be / Thy praise” (31-32). By using the word “pulse” here, Herbert gives flesh to the idea of “a thankfull heart” as a mere attitude or disposition. Gratefulness is for Herbert a spiritual organ, as essential to the flow of words as the cardiac muscle is to the circulation of blood. God’s gift of a grateful heart is the gift of poetic life; God offers the organ that beats life into Herbert’s poetic corpus, and Herbert responds to that gift by returning each pulse as praise. This image of the heart pulsing with thankfulness, though, is not just an image of complementation, but a picture of repetition. The heart must beat with thanksgiving again and again. Within the body of “The Church,” though, we know the heart is also the “broken Altar” (“The Altar,” 1) upon which Herbert offers up his poetic sacrifice. It is the site consecrated to the celebration of the eucharist, the holy table where God’s propitiatory sacrifice is received and the sacrifice of thanksgiving offered in return. If the heart is also an altar, then, the eucharist is its liturgical heartbeat. And indeed, Holy Communion figures the

same positive feedback loop “Gratefulnesse” describes. The sacrament is a gift Christ gives to his Church, the ritual whereby he makes himself present to the community of believers, but it is also the gift they repeatedly give to him in return, the “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving” named in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The eucharist thus redeems repeatability within *The Temple*, but that does not mean Herbert’s work is repetitive in the sense of doing the same thing over and over. In fact, an understanding of how the eucharist informs Herbert’s poetry is just what rescues us from having to read it according to Stanley Fish’s rubric, in which every poem really is the same, since every poem always “means” the same thing: its own undoing, its own nothingness.³⁸ The sacrament is for Herbert rather a figuration of multiplicity and variety; it corrects the notion that God’s absolute sovereignty swallows everything up into a singularity. If for Herbert Reformed soteriology privileges the one—the “once-only” propitiation of the cross, the “sole” work of grace, the “singular” sovereignty of God—his eucharistic theology emphasizes the many. We have already seen this emphasis as it appears most obviously in its temporal sense. Because the eucharist is the only repeatable sacrament, it sanctions and encourages poetic thanksgiving occurring again and again. For Herbert, though, the eucharist also privileges the many both experientially and materially. Let me explain “experientially” first. From the perspective of communicants, the eucharist does not generate a uniform or singular encounter with God. In Protestant observation, the bread is always broken and distributed to multiple communicants who not only experience that reception differently from each other, but differently each time they receive it. This is not to say that the experience is merely private, or that there is no continuity between one reception of the elements and another, simply that the “communion” performed in

³⁸ As Harman puts it, “What Fish’s work cannot ... account for is the difference *between* poems—even the difference between poems in his own (different) categories.” *Costly Monuments*, 33.

the eucharist is not a homogenization. Rather, the sacrament acknowledges and depends on the distinction between communicants. In fact, according to Herbert's friend and mentor Lancelot Andrewes, Holy Communion was exactly the place where God makes himself known in particular ways to each distinct member of the Christian community.

In a sermon on 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, for example, Andrewes is at pains to stress that though the eucharist is a corporate practice, it is also the means by which communicants feel God's presence most personally and uniquely. He pays special attention to Paul's exhortation that Christians ought to observe the eucharist without discord or dissention: "Let us keep the feast," the Authorized Version translates it, "not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Andrewes spends a great deal of his sermon reflecting on the Greek verb here translated "keep the feast": ἐορτάζωμεν (*heortazomen*). According to Andrewes, the English translation accurately reflects two valences in the Greek: on the one hand, of "celebrating" or "keeping" the sacrament and, on the other hand, of "feasting on" or "tasting" the sacramental elements: "ἐορτάζωμεν, the word is one, but two ways it is turned. Some read *celebremus* ["let us celebrate/keep"]. Some other, *epulemur* ["let us feast/taste"]." Andrewes extrapolates from these two senses two distinct but complementary theological functions of the eucharist. For Andrewes, "*celebremus*" designates the representational work of the eucharist, the way it marks and repeats a memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ. "*Epulemur*," in contrast, describes how the sacrament communicates the effect of those past events to each individual believer in an ongoing way. The communicants *observe* Christ's death in the "celebration" of the eucharist, but they experience it personally by tasting. "*Epulemur*," according to Andrewes, names how "the sacrifice in general, *pro omnibus*" becomes "The Sacrament in particular, to each several receiver, *pro singulis*." Only by tasting

does “that which is common to all” become “proper to each one, while each taketh his part of it.”³⁹ It is significant for my consideration of Herbert that Andrewes compares these complimentary eucharistic functions to two different human senses. *Celebremus* is the aspect of the eucharist that “sees” Christ; *epulemur*, not too surprisingly, the aspect that “tastes” him. As Andrewes makes clear, however, taste takes precedence over sight in sacramental theology:

Thus, *celebremus* passeth with the representation; but here, *epulemur*, as a nourishment, abideth with us still. In that we “see,” and in this “we taste, how gracious the Lord is,” and hath been to us.⁴⁰

The “seeing” that goes on in the eucharist only lasts as long as the ritual is being performed; its representational work only occurs while the sacrament is being observed. For Andrewes, though, the “taste” of the sacrament lingers and its nourishment “abideth.” Andrewes means by this that, while the visual spectacle of the eucharistic ritual represents the impersonal fact of the atonement (what he calls the “sacrifice in general”), it is the physical taste of the sacrament that communicates God’s grace and presence to each particular individual. Taste, we might paraphrase, is the personal idiom into which the sacrament translates God’s universal grace.

Thus, for Andrewes, the eucharist acts as a counterpoint to that mode of theological thinking according to which all human agency and subjectivity must “dissolve” into God’s. According to the eucharistic theology Herbert would have heard from his teacher, human beings do not disappear into or become identical with God in the sacrament. Instead, God makes himself known *to* each individual human by it, and incorporates each particular person into the heterogeneous unity that makes up the body of Christ. In the eucharist, at least as Andrewes understands it, the Church celebrates the multiformity of its members. God is not some metaphysical black hole that expands by swallowing all things into itself. Rather than

³⁹ *Ninety-six sermons by the Right Honourable and Reverend Father in God, Lancelot Andrewes*, ed. John P. Parkinson (Oxford and London: J. Parker and Co., 1874), 1:305.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

swallowing or consuming, God gives himself as nourishment, offering his own body to the individual “taste” of each believer. Thus, even as Andrewes discusses the communal or corporate function of the eucharist, its “gathering” Christians into “one body,” he clarifies that this does not mean the loss of individuality. Christ “gave His natural body” for the “Temple of his body mystical,” Andrewes writes, “Of which mystical body *we are parts*, and the whole cannot be without his parts.”⁴¹ It is only because God condescends to the “taste” of each communicant that they are “gathered” together as a communion of distinct though mutually dependent members. It is only because the general sacrifice of the cross becomes particular in the sacrament that each communicant enters into communion with God and with each other. In *The Temple*, Herbert expresses a very similar understanding of the eucharist as an experience by which the general truths of faith are communicated intimately and personally. Also like Andrewes, Herbert uses “taste” to describe the individual and intimate encounter each communicant has in the eucharist. In “The Banquet,” for example, “taste” is the way God makes himself known personally to each fallen communicant. “Having rais’d me to look up, / In a cup,” the speaker says of God, “Sweetly he doth meet my taste” (37-9). Here, as in Andrewes sermon, “taste” figures the personal and the particular. God “doth meet *my* taste,” says the speaker, that is, he reveals himself to *my* imperfect sensory powers and appeals to *my* particular experiential capacities. Herbert describes something similar in “The Agonie,” where the speaker attempts to fathom the inimitable passion of Christ. “Philosophers have measur’d mountains” (1), he writes, “But there are two vast spacious things / The which to measure it doth more behove: / Yet few there are that sound them; Sinne and Love” (4-6). Expressing a sentiment common in *The Temple*, the speaker here worries that it simply may not be possible to “sound” Christ’s sacrifice in poetic language. The sum of human sin is vaster than the mountains, and the love Christ showed by bearing the

⁴¹ *Ninety-Six sermons*, 365.

burden of that sin greater still. Yet though the atoning love of Christ cannot be “measur’d,” that does not mean it cannot be expressed or known. In fact, Herbert gives specific instructions to those who wish to “know” love:

Who knows not Love, let him assay
And taste that juice, which on the crosse a pike
Did set again abroach; then let him say
If ever he did taste the like. (13-16)

In this final stanza of the poem, the speaker’s metaphors have shifted subtly but significantly; they are now experiential rather than quantitative. He does not enjoin his listener to “measure” or “sound” God’s love, as if it were some discreet quantity, he exhorts his reader to “know” and “taste.” Just as Milton is fond of doing in *Paradise Lost*, Herbert here recalls the connection between “knowing” and “tasting” in the Latin verb *sapere*, which can be translated as either English verb. Understanding God’s love thus becomes less a matter of accounting, of recording quantity or volume, and more a matter of taste. Knowledge of God becomes a mode of personal and qualitative appreciation, a spiritual readiness to savour “that juice.” Quantitatively, the love of God may indeed be impossible to measure. Herbert says as much in the “The Reprisal,” where he resigns himself to what seems an inescapable conclusion: “I have consider’d it, and finde / There is no dealing with thy mighty passion” (1-2).⁴² Herbert’s claim that Christ’s passion cannot be “dealt with” means first of all that it cannot be “handled effectively” or “grappled with” poetically in any complete or exhaustive way (OED 16a), but Herbert also employs other more expressly quantitative senses of the verb. Christ’s passion cannot be “dealt with” as one “carries out commercial transactions” (OED 13a); one cannot fix it some specific price or account its value in relation to some amount of other goods. Herbert’s use of “deal” even carries something of its obsolete senses, of “dividing” (OED 1) or “apportioning” (OED 3a) something

⁴² Herbert says nearly the same thing in “Love (I)”: “Thou art too hard for me in Love: / There is no dealing with thee in that Art” (1-2).

into measurable parts. In “The Reprisal,” as in “The Agonie,” God’s love is simply beyond all such forms of quantitative parsing. In “The Agonie,” however, the immeasurable and ineffable magnitude of what Andrewes calls “the sacrifice in general” may be “tasted” and “known” through “the Sacrament in particular.” According to the final lines of “The Agonie,” “Love is that liquor sweet and most divine, / Which my God feels as bloud; but I, as wine” (17-18). Part of what Herbert means here is that human beings cannot experience God’s love as God experiences it. Their capabilities simply fall short of understanding or “feeling” the magnitude of Christ’s experience in the passion, where an infinite and immortal being shed mortal blood. Yet Herbert also means that the experiences of each individual Christian do not simply “disappear” in relation to the immeasurably greater experience of Christ. Rather, Christ’s passion is an infinite reserve of divine love that, though impossible to “sound” or “deal with,” proportions itself “as wine” to the innumerable “tastes” of particular human beings. It does this most flavourfully in the eucharist. For Herbert, though, the fact that the eucharist privileges an individual and particular experience of God is of special significance to his project of lyric poetry.⁴³

In *The Temple*, as we have seen in “The Holdfast,” Herbert is often concerned that his personal voice, his unique experiences, and even his particular use of language may stand as obstacles to a genuine encounter with God. This concern is what leads critics like Fish to see Herbert’s poetry as striving after a radical form of what the Greek philosophers of late antiquity called *henosis*, complete union with the divine monad that is the source of all other life. According to Fish, Herbert’s paradigmatic expression of this desire comes in “The Flower,” where the speaker posits, “We say amisse, / This or that is: / Thy word is all, if we could spell”

⁴³ Again, it is important to stress that I do not mean “private” or “solitary” here. The experience of the eucharist for Herbert is personal and intimate, not isolated. It is individual, not individualistic.

(19-21). Fish interprets this to mean that any distinction, any separation of a this from a that, especially of “I” from “thou,” stands opposed to a true understanding of God. Any assertion of difference, even as a conceptual category, fails to grasp the utter transcendence of divine presence. “To stop saying amiss,” Fish claims, “is not only to stop distinguishing ‘this’ from ‘that,’ but to stop distinguishing oneself from God, and finally to stop, to cease to be.”⁴⁴ The eucharist, though, acts as a reminder that this need not be the case.⁴⁵ Herbert does not think that true devotion requires the individual to disappear any more than it demands that his poems must “cease to be.” In fact, just as the eucharist allows Herbert to conceive of each poem as “something more,” it also sanctions for Herbert an understanding of the individual as something of unique value to God. God does not “undo” Herbert; he “meets his taste.”

Thus far I have highlighted two key ways the eucharist emphasizes for Herbert multiplicity over singularity—repeatability and experiential particularity—and discussed how that emphasis models for his poetry a similar preference for the multiple and various. Yet if Herbert’s poetry turns to the eucharist as a way of understanding and privileging these temporal and experiential senses of multiplicity, it also finds in the sacrament a related affirmation of multiplicity in material terms. This is because, in Herbert’s Protestant sacramental theology, there is a special emphasis on the consecrated elements’ dual-identity as both sign and thing. On the one hand, the bread and wine are effectual signs, material signifiers of God’s presence. On the other hand, the elements are also simply themselves, nutritious and pleasing alimentations that feed the body and gratify the senses. In the English theological milieu of Herbert’s day, it

⁴⁴ Ibid. 156-157. Heather Asals echoes the same sentiment when she writes that “what we find in the poetry of Herbert” is “Holy Equivocation,” a “renaming all things and all the world into the name of God.” *Equivocal Predication*, 112.

⁴⁵ It bears mentioning that Fish’s interpretation does not even really make great sense of “The Flower,” since the poem seems insistently to refuse doing what Fish claims is its own advice. The poem does not stop at line 21, and the speaker does not resign himself to poetic silence. In fact, just a few lines later, he describes a sudden and new efflorescence of poetic inspiration: “Many a spring I shoot up fair, / Offring at heav’n, growing and groaning thither” (24-25).

was a commonplace critique of Catholic eucharistic theology that it seemed to efface the elements' distinction from what they signify. According to the establishment theologians of Herbert's day, the doctrine of transubstantiation absurdly insisted that, though the "accident" or appearance of bread persisted, in reality no real substantial bread remained. According to doctors of the English Church, not only was this assertion "repugnant to nature," it undermined the whole point of the sacramental elements. The material qualities of the bread and wine are designed to demonstrate something about the presence of Christ. Like the body of Christ ought to be for Christians, bread is a staple nourishment, it pleases the senses, and it is shared as a way of showing goodwill and peace. For theologians like Thomas Cranmer, transubstantiation made these functions impossible, since the bread wasn't really there at all. As he understood the doctrine, transubstantiation turns bread into an arbitrary place-holder that simply disappears to make way for a divine content that utterly displaces its signifying medium. This is why it was so important for Cranmer, in *The Book of Common Prayer*, to stress that communicants should take pleasure in the physical elements of communion. One of his guidelines for the celebration of the sacrament was that the consecrated bread should be "*suche as is usual to be eaten at the table.*"⁴⁶ The bread, in other words, should be presented as bread, and enjoyed for its own sake *as well as* for the way it mediates the presence of Christ. Unless the bread was actually enjoyed as bread, unless its own particular qualities were recognized, so the logic went, its didactic *likeness* to Christ would actually disappear. It is only in the Catholic logic of transubstantiation, where bread supposedly ceases to exist, that the pleasing breadyness of the host is intentionally downplayed, and the communicant receives a flavourless waxed wafer. From the middle ages onward, Catholic communicants were even discouraged from chewing the host, and instead had to let it dissolve in the mouth, just in case any physical pleasure might distract from the ritual's spiritual

⁴⁶ 140. Original italics.

meaning.⁴⁷ For the same reason, Cranmer insisted that the cup be offered to all communicants. Catholics worried that laypeople might get distracted by the pleasure of drinking wine, that the sensory gratification registered in the element might get in the way of its “true” substance. For Cranmer, in contrast, the pleasure *was* the point. The bread and wine are supposed to be nourishing and pleasant because that pleasure defines their likeness to Christ, rather than their identity *as* him.

In both versions of “The H. Communion,” Herbert registers exactly the same concerns that Cranmer and other theologians had about the apparent dissolution of the elements in the doctrine of transubstantiation. In the earlier version of the poem, which does not appear in *The Temple*, the speaker’s address to Christ playfully jibes at the Catholic notion of material change in the elements:

Then of this I am also sure
That thou didst all those pains endure
To’ abolish Sinn, not Wheat. (19-21)

This critique is not merely an attack on how the apparent sophistry of transubstantiation distracts communicants from the goals of the sacrament, it also rejects what Herbert sees as the anti-material prejudice motivating Catholic eucharistic theology:

Creatures are good, & have their place;
Sinn onely, w^{ch} did all deface
Thou drivest from his seat. (22-24)

In an effort to guarantee the literal and tangible presence of Christ, Herbert implies, transubstantiation actually confuses sinfulness and materiality. But “Creatures are good” and have an important “place” in the work of the sacrament. In fact, it is precisely because the

⁴⁷ John F. Romano, “Priests and the Eucharist in the Middle Ages,” in *A Companion to Priesthood and Holy Orders in the Middle Ages*, Ed. Greg Peters and C. Colt Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 208.

creatures themselves remain present and distinguishable from what they signify that they are of particular value.

Now, it may seem problematic to make an argument that depends on an early draft of a poem that Herbert ultimately heavily revised before including in *The Temple*. In a number of ways, after all, the later version of “The H. Communion” is a very different poem from its earlier counterpart. The text in *The Temple* is far less polemic, and far less invested in trying to systematically articulate a eucharistic metaphysics. Nevertheless, despite its significant shift in tone, the newer version of “The H. Communion” remains deeply concerned with distinguishing the elements from the presence they represent. It also retains the older version’s insistence that the elements are valuable for their own sakes as well as for what they signify. In the poem’s second stanza, Herbert pointedly highlights the analogy between the material properties of the elements and the presence of Christ that theologians like Cranmer saw as essential to the sacrament: “...by the way of nourishment and strength,” the speaker addresses God, “Thou creep’st into my breast” (7-8). God is made present to the speaker *through* the material nourishing properties of the bread, he does not make them disappear. The elements themselves, though, Herbert is at pains to point out, cannot be conflated with the presence of Christ they mediate. “Yet can these not get over to my soul” (13), he writes. The consecrated elements can only “control / My rebel-flesh” as a first wave of besiegers might capture “th’outworks” of a fortress (16-17). “Onely thy grace ... / Knoweth the ready way / And hath the privie key” to the soul (19-21). Herbert is clear, however, that though the bread and wine are not identical to grace, grace “*with* these elements comes” (19); not *as* these elements, but “with” them and in addition to them. They are a supplement to Christ’s grace. The communicant’s enjoyment of the bread expresses and amplifies his enjoyment of Christ, who is like the bread and who comes along *with*

it. In the later version of “The H. Communion,” then, just as in the earlier version, the elements of communion represent a particularity that does not “reduce” to what they signify or “disappear” into the univocity of divine grace. The elements are given above and beyond the presence of Christ, as an addition to it and a reflection of it. Both poems push back against what Herbert would have seen as the antimaterialist logic built into transubstantiation. Both reject the idea that “creatures” are inherently unable to communicate the presence of Christ and must be abolished to make way for a reified presence unwilling to bear the co-existence of anything other than itself. In this “Catholic” way of thinking, because transubstantiation is so concerned with trying to perfectly capture the infinite presence of Christ in the sacramental signifier, and because that signifier cannot help but fall short of that task, the signifier itself has to be “undone,” transubstantiated into a substance that has no tangible body. Because of this, according to Herbert, the material becomes confused with the sinful, and consecration with evacuation, not only of “Wheat,” but of all material “creatures.” The bread, as bread, must cease to be. God simply displaces it.

At this point it should be clear the analogy I am making between Herbert’s critique of transubstantiation and what I have called the “failure to baptize” reading of Herbert. It should also be evident that I see the same errors made by Fish and company as Herbert sees motivating Catholic theology: a tendency to confuse the material with the sinful. When I speak of the “material” in the context of poetry, though, I do not use the term strictly literally, but to refer to those concrete features of poetic language that, like the elements of communion, cannot be reduced to the signified propositional content: rhyme, meter, punning, metaphor, the shape of the text on the page, etc. Essentially, I mean the poetical qualities of poetic language. Herbert does at times express a genuine concern that such features might be dangerously “decking the sense” he

aims to communicate (“Jordan (II),” 6), just as Catholics worried that the material pleasure of the elements might get in the way of experiencing Christ’s body. Ultimately, though, Herbert does not respond to this concern by trying to evacuate the material substance of poetry to make room for the spiritual realities it aims to express. Herbert’s poetry is much more interested in discovering how the materiality of his texts might function like the elements of communion, as a supplement to and picture of God’s grace. Herbert’s work is deeply conscious of the danger that poetic language might become an idol; it is profoundly aware that the pleasures of language could take the place of the pleasures of God. The poet is always at risk of becoming a kind of alcoholic priest at communion, addicted to the medium and forgetting its purpose. But Herbert does not respond to this threat by becoming a poetic teetotaler. Indeed, it is because Herbert understands poetry as a eucharistic consecration that the pleasing materiality of his texts, like the iterability of his lyrics and the particularity of his voice, may be read as satisfying Herbert’s desire that both he and God “mayst yet have more” (“Praise (III),” 6).

As Christopher A. Hill has persuasively argued, the key word in Herbert’s oeuvre that describes this eucharistic sense of poetic materiality is “sweet.” As he helpfully highlights, “around fifty of the poems in *The Temple* include some form of the word ‘sweet,’ (including words such as ‘sweetness,’ ‘sweetning,’ or ‘sugared’).” For Hill, the ubiquity of “sweetness” in Herbert’s poetry reflects the delight he takes in the aesthetic materiality of language in addition to its referential function, i.e. its “meaning.” The material delight of poetry “is not important merely on its own terms—because it feels good—or solely because of what it can be made to signify; the aesthetic of sweetness, Herbert emphasizes, is important for both reasons at the same time, especially when coming from and being returned to God.”⁴⁸ “Sweetness,” describes a vision of beauty in Herbert’s poetry that is at once accessible, pleasing, witty, quotidian,

⁴⁸ “George Herbert’s Sweet Devotion,” *Studies in Philology* 107.2 (2010): 244.

epigrammatic, direct, and wholesome. “Sweet,” in other words, is the central adjective in Herbert’s particular expression of the plain style. “Sweetness,” though, also designates for Herbert a pleasure that comes from poetry in addition to what it signifies, just as the “sweetness” of a food occurs in addition to its nutritional content. Hill explores “sweetness” only in what I have called material terms, and he does so compellingly. I would add that “sweetness” pertains not only to the material, but to all three forms of eucharistic multiplicity I have described. It names a way of thinking about poetry as genuinely offering something “more:” temporally, since it treats Herbert’s poetic iterations as flavours instead of failures; experientially, as it privileges the particular “taste” of Herbert’s unique voice; and materially, because it treats the aesthetic qualities of poetic language as supplements that “sweeten” the devotional encounter with God.

It is in all these senses that Herbert uses “sweet” in “The Banquet,” where its specifically eucharistic associations are quite plain. It means the sensory gratification provided by the elements: “O what sweetnesse from the bowl / Fills my soul”; “[the] sweetnesse in the bread ... subdue[s] the smell of sinne.” It denotes the intimacy of the speaker’s personal encounter with Christ: “Welcome *sweet* and sacred cheer/ ... *With me, in me*, live and dwell” (1, 3, my italics). “Sweet” even figures the repeatability of the eucharist itself, both because so many different forms of the word keep reappearing in the poem (“sweet” [1], “sweetnesse” [7, 13, 21], “sugar” [6], “sweetly” [39]), and also because the poem itself is a new iteration of the sacrament within “The Church,” a poetic re-expression of “The H. Communion.” In “The H. Communion,” almost one hundred lyrics earlier in the collection, Herbert concludes by saying that the eucharist is the sacrament “Which I can go to, when I please” (39). This expression is beautifully confirmed by Herbert’s “sweet” return to the eucharist in “The Banquet,” and its own final rephrasing of his desire to praise God again and again in perpetuity: “Let the wonder of his pitie / Be my dittie, /

And take up my lines and life.” Herbert’s lines and his life are not effaced or dissolved, they are “taken up” (i.e. “filled”) with wonder even as they are “taken up” and accepted as sacrifices of thanksgiving. For Herbert, of course, there is perhaps no more profound sense in which he can say of God, “Sweetly he doth meet my taste” (39). If Herbert has a taste for anything, after all, it is a taste for poetry.

Sweet Sacrifice

Thus far I have been arguing that the eucharist, as treated in Herbert’s poetry, privileges three forms of “multiplicity”: temporal repeatability, experiential particularity, and the material goodness of the signifier over and above its signifying function. These forms of eucharistic multiplicity, I have also been stressing, each point to and explain the importance of three key aspects of Herbert’s poetry: its tendency to repeat itself in new ways, its very particular and intimate voice, and its proclivity to relish in its own “material” qualities. I have presented this argument as a corrective to a stream of Herbert criticism that sees supplementation or addition as threats rather than blessings in *The Temple*. Critics who have read Herbert in this way have usually read him quite strictly in relation to Reformed theologies of salvation, which insist that, when it comes to atoning for sin, nothing at all can be done “in addition” to or in repayment for the work of grace performed by Christ on the cross. Mistakenly seeing Herbert’s poetry as one more form of works righteousness or supererogation, these critics have also mistakenly seen poetry itself as a problem for Herbert. Fish is only the most systematic and consistent of this group when he claims that both Herbert and his poetry are always striving to “undo” themselves. Taking as their credo the Protestant assertion that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross cannot be earned, equalled, or repaid in any commercial sense, and seeing Herbert’s own frequent identification of his poetry as a kind of “sacrifice,” critics as diverse as Fish, Strier, Asals, and

Return to thee” (26,28), “This breathing” means both God’s initial “call” to the speaker, and “this breathing here,” the speaker’s breath recorded as words on the page. God’s breath “inspires” the speaker, but he also “exhales” it back to God as poetry. This is an offering made “with gains,” as a genuine addition to God. We have already seen this same idea expressed in “Gratefulnesse,” but it appears all over “The Church.” In “An Offering,” the speaker tells God, “... thy favour / May give savour / To this poore oblation; / And it raise / To be thy praise ” (37-41). In “Prayer (I),” the words of prayer are “Gods breath in man returning to his birth” (2). In “Providence,” “Man is the worlds high Priest: he doth present / The sacrifice for all” (13-14). Thus, to see poetry itself (or even the poet’s subjectivity) only as a threat, or always in conflict with grace, is simply to ignore the text of *The Temple*. It is true that Herbert has real concerns about the dangers of poetry, that its “fictions ... and false hair” (“Jordan (I),” 1), might obfuscate “*a sweetnesse readie penn’d*” (“Jordan (II),” 17). But this is really a concern that poetry be understood as a eucharistic rather than a propitiatory sacrifice. The challenge is to recognize poetry’s proper role, as a gratuitous response to the “fair though bloudie hand” (“The Thanksgiving,” 16) Christ “penn’d” on the cross rather than an attempt to capture, repay, purchase, or “deal with” that divine script.

In their recent monographs, both Ryan Netzley and Kimberly Johnson have, like me, turned to the eucharist as a model for understanding Herbert’s poetry. Also like me, they have seen in Herbert’s treatment of the eucharist evidence that his relationship to poetry is not defined by antagonism or struggle. In their attempts to do so, they helpfully end up clarifying the theological metaphor that undergirds what I have called the “failure to baptize” school of Herbert criticism. Though neither clearly states the metaphor in these terms, Johnson and Netzley both implicitly seem to recognize it runs thus: in Herbert’s poetry, signification is a failed propitiatory

sacrifice. According to this metaphor, because signs “take the place” of what they signify, signification performs the same kind of exchange that occurs in expiatory sacrifice, such as the Old Testament practice of “scapegoating,” where the banished animal takes the place of the guilty. If we see Herbert as accepting this analogy, a serious problem emerges. In Protestant theology, Christ is the ultimate “scapegoat,” who on the cross put an end to all other forms of propitiatory sacrifice. As I mention above, this is of course the reason that Protestants objected to the sacrifice of the Mass, because it seems to posit a version of propitiation that would threaten the singularity of the cross. Thus, if Herbert sees poetic signification as a form of sacrificial exchange, it always appears to rival the one true and perfect signification, where Christ “signs” for humankind. This problem becomes especially acute in the case of devotional poetry, where what Herbert wants to signify is Christ, the very entity whose perfect act of signification seems to preclude any signification at all. For Fish, Herbert responds to this paradox by abandoning poetry and relying solely on God to communicate himself, just as the sinner in Calvinist soteriology must depend entirely upon God. The great irony of Fish’s reading is that it ends up repeating exactly the kind of sacrificial “purchase” it intends to guard against. Signs, after all, in his articulation of Herbert’s poetry, must consume themselves in order to “mean” God. Signs, in other words, acquire meaning just as the Old-Testament sin-offerings “acquire” atonement, by being banished, burned up, or consumed. It is against this sense of meaning or signification as a propitiatory immolation that Netzley and Johnson both intervene. Both authors rightly see Herbert’s treatment of the eucharist as evidence that his ultimate goal is not the dissolution of poetry or the undoing of his self. Both critics, though, fall into the trap of unconsciously accepting the terms of the metaphor articulated above, that “meaning” has to be understood as a

propitiatory sacrifice. They differ from Fish only by denying that Herbert is interested in “meaning” at all.

Ryan Netzley pays special attention to what I have called the “experiential” aspect of the eucharist, and contrasts what he calls “work,” that is, the temptation to treat devotion as a means rather than an end, with sacramental “desire,” the “attentive response to a present divinity that does not seek to achieve an extraneous goal.”⁴⁹ For Netzley, the eucharist is so important to Herbert because, in a Protestant understanding, the sacrament does not “work,” which for him means that it does not acquire or purchase salvation (or any other end). As Netzley understands the sacrament, it celebrates desire for its own sake. The communicant, if he behaves rightly, enjoys love apart from any “telos,” whether “salvation, communion, [or] pleasure.”⁵⁰ In making this claim, though, Netzley not only misconstrues early modern Protestant understandings of the sacrament, he makes the problematic leap of conflating “work,” in its most pejorative sense, with signification, as if recognizing the signifying function of a word necessarily treats it as a “mercenary instrument.”⁵¹ Herbert’s poems, he maintains, ought to be thought of sacraments in the sense that they are “gifts without strings attached, including,” he adds, “designating strings.” “For Herbert,” he continues, “the attention that reading demands entails abandoning an interpretation that would extract meaning or communication from verse and treating the verse itself as worthy of love.”⁵² God’s presence, in other words, is an event that occurs in the act of reading, and has absolutely no reference to anything outside the experience of the moment. Any such reference, meaning, or “work,” would be mercenary, a sacrifice of the sign in exchange for the signified:

⁴⁹ *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist*, 25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 55.

The poem as a [eucharistic] gift is in this sense purposeless: it does not ensure salvation or lead one to faith. And most importantly, it does not prompt reciprocation.... God, after all, does not give the gift for mercenary reasons, to extract gratitude or a return gift, and to treat the offer of grace in this fashion is to misunderstand love.⁵³

The first obvious problem with this reading is that Herbert has no concerted aversion to the idea of “use” in his poetry. In fact, in explicit contradiction to the claim above, “The Church Porch” expresses its direct desire that *The Temple* will “lead one to faith.” The “sweet youth” (1) to whom the preface addresses itself is told to “Hearken” (3) to the poetry precisely because “A verse may finde him, who a sermon flies, / And turn delight into a sacrifice” (5-6). The second and more substantial problem with Netzley’s reading is its retention of the notion that sign and signified cannot exist together; either the sign must be sacrificed for the sake of the signified, or the signified, which for him includes any experiential “telos,” must be banished for the sake of a purely immanent encounter with the poetic signs. Netzley has no sense that the intimate experience of desire one reads in poetry might be a supplement to or an amplification of a poem’s “telos.” He retains Fish’s metaphors of conflict and displacement, rather than applying Herbert’s own eucharistic metaphors, according to which sacrifice denotes an addition rather than an exchange.

Kimberly Johnson echoes this same basic error in her recent work, though her focus is quite specifically on what I have called the “material” aspects of the eucharist. According to her argument, when Protestants rejected the absolute identity of bread and body in the eucharist, they made it possible for a devotional encounter with bread as bread. As I have pointed out above, this is perfectly true; Johnson simply misconstrues this to mean that Protestants were *only* interested in the elements for their own sakes, not *as well as* for what they mean. Thus Herbert’s emphasis on taste, as she understands it, stands in contrast to what she calls “absorption,” the

⁵³ Ibid., 54.

opposition here being between an enjoyment of poetry's materiality for its own sake, and a digestive "absorption" of signs that desires only to extract the alimentary "meaning" behind them:

[Herbert's] objection [in poems such as "Jordan (I)" is] not to poetic language per se but to the view that would reduce poetic language to a mere referential vehicle, valuable not for its own sake but for the "two removes" of mediation between the object and its meaning. Herbert complains against an art that would privilege the "fictions" (1) of content over the word which does "plainly *say*" (15, emphasis added)—that is, the word that asserts itself as bare utterance, as sign that refuses to be sublimated transparently into content.⁵⁴

Like Netzley's, Johnson's reading has theological as well as literary problems. Theologically, her reading of the eucharist explicitly rejects Calvin, Vermigli, and Cranmer's explanation of the sacrament: that there is a natural connection between the nutritive function of the elements and the spiritual sustenance provided by Christ's body. Literarily, her moral dichotomy between "taste" and "absorption" does not map easily on to Herbert's poetry. *The Temple* version of "H. Communion" explicitly celebrates the sacrament's operation "by way of nourishment," that is, by its activity as a thing consumed and digested. "Faith," elsewhere in the collection, is described as a true eating ("Faith," 8), while *The Temple* famously ends with the speaker's decision to "sit and eat" ("Love (III)," 18). In all of these cases, the "sweetness" of both sacrament and poetry comes as something "more," a pleasure that comes alongside the nourishment, telos, or meaning of poetry.

"This One More"

Netzley and Johnson, like many of the "failure to baptize" critics who precede them, misread Herbert by forcing him to fit one metaphor, and ignoring the features of his work that do not fit that structuring idea. I am aware that my own reading of Herbert has the potential to fall into this same trap, and in its own way to treat all the lyrics in *The Temple* as if they mean one

⁵⁴ *Made Flesh*, 62.

thing or simply “reduce” to eucharistic theology. It is not my intention, however, to distil Herbert’s eucharistic theology from his poetry, as if the poetry could then be discarded as dregs. Rather, my claim is that Herbert turns to the eucharist as a model for his poetics precisely because it does not mean one thing, but a multiplicity of things, and perspectives, and temporalities. In what follows I will therefore explore a number of key poems that not only significantly differ from each other, but quite differently appropriate the eucharistic multiplicity I have been articulating. Almost immediately, moreover, “Sacrifice” takes on yet another sense, since it becomes the title of the next poem in *The Temple*. “The Sacrifice” is an extremely important poem in “The Church,” particularly as it explores the complex interaction between the singularity of propitiatory sacrifice and the multiplicity of eucharistic sacrifice. The poem, spoken by Christ during the passion, insists on the uniqueness of Christ’s passion. His repeated refrain, “Was ever grief like mine?” is explicitly answered in the final line “Never was grief like mine” (252), the theological inference being that Christ’s gift cannot be repaid or earned. No suffering or penance could equal, balance, or cancel out Christ’s suffering. The poem echoes this theological singularity by being singular in a number of other ways. It is, quite strikingly, the only poem written exclusively in the voice of a character other than Herbert’s lyric speaker. In this regard, it is much more similar to Southwell’s poems than any of Herbert’s other lyrics. It is the only text written entirely from a divine perspective, and the voice it creates is more authoritative and less ironically self-reflexive than the speaker of the other lyrics. It is by far the longest poem in “The Church,” and its unrivalled length reflects the “greatest grief” (39) it aims to describe. In all these ways, “The Sacrifice” performs the uniqueness and inimitability of Christ:

*O all ye who passe by, behold and see;
Man stole the fruit, but I must climbe the tree;*

The tree of life to all, but onely me:
 Was ever grief like mine? (201-4, original italics)

Christ “onely” can perform this sacrifice, and “onely” he experiences the cross as death, while to everyone else it is “the tree of life” (a statement echoed in the final lines of “The Agonie,” where love is a “liquor” that “my God feels as blood; but I, as wine”). Thus, the one thing Herbert does not repeat in *The Temple* is another poem like “The Sacrifice,” where Christ narrates his own experience of the passion. Whenever Herbert returns to the passion in *The Temple*, and he does so frequently, it is from a human perspective.

The uniqueness of “The Sacrifice” makes a theological point, but it also has hermeneutic and stylistic functions that complement its theology. It is deeply significant that, within “The Church,” the very second poem turns its attention to a speaker that isn’t its usual “me.” The strangeness of the poem within *The Temple* not only primes readers to attend to the strangeness or surprise of God, it resists that desire, evident in much Herbert scholarship, to reduce his poetry to “one thing,” whether that one thing is understood as the doctrine of grace (Strier), mystical *henosis* (Fish), desire for its own sake (Netzley), or the “bare utterance” of the sign (Johnson). Stylistically, too, the particularity of “The Sacrifice” is significant. Christ’s voice in the poem is not singular in the sense that it totalizes. It does not displace or consume other voices, rather just the opposite. It sets up a difference right at the beginning of “The Church” between poet and God. Its qualities juxtapose, and thus highlight, those quite different characteristics of Herbert’s critically beloved lyric voice.

The uniqueness of “The Sacrifice” thus serves the rest of Herbert’s poetic project. Quite consciously on Herbert’s part, it relates to the rest of the lyrics in *The Temple* much as Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice relates to the celebrations of the eucharist. To borrow Jean-Luc Marion’s terms, “The Sacrifice” offers an “infinite reserve of meaning” that has been “realized in the

Word but not yet in [Herbert] or [his] words.” So, though there is a radical difference between “The Sacrifice” and the other lyrics, there is also a profound likeness. This claim may seem to fly in the face of the poem’s final assertion “Never was grief *like* mine.” It is important to remember, though, that “like” can denote either “identical” or “similar” (OED 1a). Thus, if the questioning refrain “Was ever grief like mine?” means “Was anyone else’s grief the same as mine?”, the obvious answer is “no,” as the poem itself concludes. If, however, the question is “Was anyone else’s grief ever similar to mine?” the answer, equally obviously, is yes. If it weren’t, the whole tradition of reading scripture typologically, so central to Reformation-era hermeneutics, would utterly collapse. In typological thought, Old Testament figures are “types” that prefigure Christ, often especially as their grief or suffering bears a likeness to Christ’s. Likewise, in the same tradition, it was commonplace to treat the suffering each believer experiences as an image or picture of Christ’s. Herbert, of course, treats his speaker in this loosely typological fashion throughout *The Temple*. In “The Crosse,” for example, he adopts the words of Christ in Gethsemane to express his own faithfulness in the face of suffering: “With but foure words, my words, *Thy will be done*” (36).

It should not be surprising, therefore, notwithstanding all the ways “The Sacrifice” stands alone, that it also anticipates and resembles the other poems of *The Temple*. Despite its theological insistence on singularity, “The Sacrifice” is filled with all kinds of repetition, most obviously the repetition of its refrain, but also as it repeats a number of key tropes. In one of these, Christ juxtaposes the cruelty of his torturers with his self-giving love: “they spit on me” who by “spittle gave the blind man eies” (133-4); “They gave me vinegar mingled with gall” though “With Manna... I fed them” (237, 239); “They ... by lot dispose / My coat ... which once cur’d those / Who sought for help” (241-243). In another, Christ explains the unrecognized ironic

significance of his sufferings: the “scarlet robe” placed on Jesus to mock him “shews [his] blood to be the onely way” (156-7); his “crown of thorns” identifies him as the “vine planted and watred” in “Sion” (162-3); men “pierce [his] side,” that “as sinne came, so Sacraments might flow” (246-7). But “The Sacrifice” not only repeats within itself, it echoes and fulfills “The Altar’s” desire to make an acceptable offering to God. Its words are, in reality, Herbert’s words and not Christ’s, and though Herbert creates a compelling analogy between “The Sacrifice” and Christ’s sacrifice, the former cannot be the latter. He can only speak these words on behalf of Christ, as the priest says “This is my body” in the communion liturgy. Herbert reminds us of this fact in line 215, where he leaves incomplete Christ’s cry of despair:

But, *O my God, my God!* why leav’st thou me,
The sonne, in whom thou dost delight to be?
My God, my God -----.

(213-15)

As John R. Mulder explains it, in these lines, “The poet, as actor in Christ’s role...surrenders his imitation.”⁵⁵ He leaves Christ’s expression of utter abandonment, “why hast thou forsaken me?” for Christ alone to say. In this very act of ellipsis, however, precisely *because* it asserts the ineffable intensity of Christ’s suffering, Herbert defines his God’s transcendence not as impassibility, but as a surpassing weakness and abjection. In doing so, Herbert creates in “The Sacrifice” a deity who has an infinite reserve of compassion for those feelings of isolation and abjection expressed in so many of Herbert’s own lyrics. God himself, Herbert reminds us in “The Sacrifice,” knows what it is like to be forsaken by God. Christ has also felt that despondency Herbert records in “Deniall,” where “my devotions could not pierce / Thy silent ears” (1-2); Christ, in fact, has felt it more profoundly. And it is because God’s infinity expresses itself as a boundless capacity for compassion, rather than solely as power or purity, that it creates the

⁵⁵ “*The Temple as Picture*,” in “*Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne*”: *Essays on George Herbert*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 7.

opportunity for an infinite multitude of thanksgivings. Herbert underscores this fact in the two poems that follow “The Sacrifice”: “The Thanksgiving” and “The Reprisal,” which in the Williams MS is aptly titled “The Second Thanksgiving.”

In its emphasis on Christ’s ability to comprehend suffering, “The Sacrifice” also pre-empted another way that my own eucharistic reading might slip into the very “oneness” it seeks to avoid. That is, if Herbert understands poetry in its essence as a form of thanksgiving or gratefulness, does that not risk treating the poems that express grief, loss, isolation, frustration, and ungratefulness as somehow less successful, even less real? Might it not imply that such lyrics are merely rhetorical performances of pain, present only so that they may then be overwritten, effaced or corrected? Sophie Read has wrestled with a strictly rhetorical analogue to this problem as she discusses Herbert’s penchant for the rhetorical device of *metanoia*, “the amending of a term or phrase just employed.” She points out that the rhetoricians of Herbert’s day were alive to the fact that such a trope could seem disingenuous, especially in writing, where the “usual way to remedy a mistake on the page is to erase it, not to leave it in place while presenting the reader with the possibility of a preferred alternative.”⁵⁶ Herbert nevertheless loves this trope, and gives it pride of place in “The Dedication” of *The Temple*: “*Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee; / Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came, / And must return*” (1-3). If these first fruits are really God’s, though, why does Herbert bother calling them “mine” in the first place? Read answers appositely:

...the point about *metanoia* is that it allows the poet to illustrate a process of emendation without entirely performing it: the erroneous element, for all that it has been corrected, remains, and the very mechanism that makes the lines empirically dubious rescues them from moral transgression.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 102-3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

Thus, she rightly argues, the trope is important to ‘The Dedication’ because it “describes ... the devotional impulse of a pious but fallible man and his recognition of its inadequacy.” Because “The Dedication” describes a *process* from error to truth, “to present only the final position and not the stages of reasoning that led to it would be a misrepresentation, as well as making for a very brief poem.”⁵⁸ Her argument about *metanoia* in “The Dedication” thus lends itself quite helpfully to our understanding of the moral and spiritual imperfections recorded in *The Temple*, even when they are not specifically represented through the trope of *metanoia*. The pain, isolation, or ingratitude Herbert often chronicles is part of the poetry and even part of the thankfulness that elsewhere appears. It is not discarded or effaced any more than the erroneous premise of *metanoia* is erased. Abjection is not overcome, in the sense of being abandoned or forgotten, it is re-understood as necessary for and enriching the “final position.” Grief and pain are, in fact, a necessary part of the communion liturgy Herbert would have celebrated. Before receiving the elements, each communicant had to pray the confession, which is not at all tentative in its description of human wretchedness:

...we acknowledge and bewayle oure manifold synnes and wyckednesse, whiche we from tyme to tyme moste greuously have committed, by thoughte woorde and deede, against thy divine Majestie, provokynge mooste justlye thy wrathe and indignation againste us: we do earnestly repente, and bee hartely sorye for these oure misdoinges, the remembraunce of them is grevous unto us: the burthen of theim is intolerable...⁵⁹

Grievous memories, intolerable burdens, manifold sins committed time after time, this is the substance of some of Herbert’s best poems.

And of all Herbert’s lyrics about spiritual suffering, perhaps none is better than “The Collar.” As Jeffrey Hart’s seminal essay demonstrates, “The Collar” is structured around a eucharistic understanding of frustration and grief, according to which these feelings are not

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Book of Common Prayer*, 134.

discarded or put aside, but made part of an offering to God.⁶⁰ The very acts of sinful rebellion are transfigured into eucharistic sacrifices. So, even in a text that stands out for its overtly expressed anger, the speaker's initial outburst—"I struck the board, and cry'd, No more" (1)—nevertheless primes readers to attend to sacramental themes. "Love Unknown," which comes earlier in the collection, already uses the word "board" specifically to mean a communion table (42). Because of this, one possible interpretation of the first line is that it describes a minister "striking" the eucharistic altar in frustration at God's absence. The site where God is supposed to be present thus becomes a special reminder of his absence and silence. But we may also understand the line as referring to the poet of *The Temple*, "striking" a line through the poetic "table" that begins his collection: "The Altar," the text "upon" which Herbert consecrated his whole poetic project. Thus the speaker's promise to go "abroad" (2), which subtly rearranges the letters of "board," rejects the sacrament's claim on his vocations as minister *and* as poet. He threatens to make his identity and his writing "No More." Having performed this rejection, the speaker begins to recall the pleasures of the worldly life he hopes to return to, those things provided on secular rather than sacramental boards. As he does so, however, he uses language that unconsciously, or providentially, turns him back to the very sacrament he has rejected:

Have I no harvest but a thorn
 To let me bloud, and not restore
 What I have lost with cordiall fruit?
 Sure there was wine
 Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn
 Before my tears did drown it. (7-12)

As Hart recognizes, the objects of the speaker's desire—fruit, wine, corn—are at once symbols of fleshly pleasures and eucharistic elements (in the period, "corn" was a general term including

⁶⁰ "Herbert's 'The Collar' Re-read," *Boston University Studies in English* 5 (1961), 65-73. Republished in John R. Roberts, ed., *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1979), 453-460 (page references are to this edition).

all cereals). Likewise, his plaintive rhetorical question, “Have I no harvest but a thorn / to let me bloud,” might be read against the grain of his intended meaning. “At the moment of his rebellion,” writes Hart, “the speaker understands his words in some such sense as this: my discipline is painful, in blocking the satisfaction of my desires it makes me bleed...and, to make matters worse, it brings no reward.” However, though the speaker himself does not immediately recognize it, the word “thorn” has at least two other significations. Firstly, the thorn “suggests the imperfections introduced in the world by the Fall,” as it alludes to a commonplace idea that in Eden plants grew without thorns. Secondly, though, the thorns that make the speaker bleed also “foreshadow the mode of his redemption; they are also the thorns of Christ’s crown.”⁶¹ Thus the speaker’s figurative descriptions of those goods on offer apart from Christ actually point him back to the communion cup: the blood of Christ “let” by the crown of thorns. The dramatic irony is compounded by the etymological pun on “cordiall,” which derives from the Latin *cor*, or “heart.” Thus “cordiall” refers to what comes from the heart: blood. The curative cordial fruit the speaker desires, then, is “bloody fruit.” Ironically, therefore, though the lines above overtly describe a longing for the sensual pleasures the speaker gave up when he committed himself to God, they reveal a deeper truth, that his desires would truly be satisfied only by a renewed encounter with the restorative power of God’s wine and corn, the sacrament. As Hart summarizes, “the hands that reach for the fruit of rebellion reach also ... for the chalice (‘cordiall fruit,’ ‘corn,’ ‘wine’) which, such is God’s power, restores the speaker to his proper relationship with God.”⁶² The important thing here is that the same pair of hands reaches for both things; the rebellious self, and the rebellion itself, are both redeemed in the poem. The terms of

⁶¹ Ibid., 455-6.

⁶² Ibid., 460.

the poem, its meaning, its famous emotional energy and structural innovation are not abolished by the plain-talking God who speaks in the penultimate line, they are consecrated and fulfilled:

Away! take heed;
I will abroad.
Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears.
He that forbears
To suit and serve his need,
Deserves his load.
But as I raved and grew more fierce and wilde
At every word,
Me thoughts I heard one calling, *Childe*
And I reply'd, *My Lord*. (19-36)

Though the speaker seems on the brink of abandoning his dual vocation as priest and sacred poet, we discover that the voice of God has been calling out to him “At every word” (34). God’s sacramental presence has been revealing itself even in the language of rebellion; his “board” hidden in the disobedient desire to go “abroad.” Thus, when the speaker responds to God’s cry of “*Childe*” with “*My Lord*,” the speaker re-consecrates the whole text as a reflection of the word “*childe*.” In this final line, he not only hears and responds to God, he listens to himself, recognizing what his words had been telling him all along. Thus even his expressions of frustration and disobedience add something to his identity as a son of God; they are incorporated as expressions of his “childhood.”

The appellation of “child,” by which God addresses the speaker in “The Collar,” provides yet another image of supplementation or addition in Herbert’s poetry. A child, of course, bears a remarkable likeness to a parent, but remains something distinct and particular. For a good parent, moreover, that combination of likeness and difference in the child is something experienced as a pleasing gift, even sometimes when it expresses itself as disobedience. The figure of the child, though, also necessarily points Herbert to Christ, who in Christian theology is the eternal Son of God. This identity as Son thus also points to a multiplicity within the very person of God, an idea

that Herbert explores in great depth, and with significant poetic implications, in “The Sonne.” Superficially, the poem represents the punning double meaning in its title as evidence of the aesthetic splendour of the English language. As many critics have realized, however, it has some profound things to say about Herbert’s understanding of language. Critics debate whether the poem embraces equivocation as a way of moving beyond the arbitrary significations of language to a truth that eludes them or if it does exactly the opposite, subtly revealing the “hieroglyphic” power of language to encode a “series of natural, historical, and spiritual truths.”⁶³ What exactly this truth is, however, is taken for granted. It only matters if it is found in or merely “through” the punning language of the text. In most of these readings, the poem provides no striking theological insight; it simply rehashes the commonplace association between “parents issue and the sunnes bright starre” (6) in English religious verse. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but he is also the “sun” of this world, rising again to bring light to a people darkened by sin. Herbert develops the commonplace, though, with remarkable agility:

How neatly doe we give one onely name
 To parents issue and the sunnes bright starre!
 A sonne is light and fruit; a fruitfull flame
 Chasing the fathers dimnesse, carri’d farre
 From the first man in th’ East, to fresh and new
 Western discov’ries of posteritie.
 So in one word our Lords humilitie
 We turn upon him in a sense most true:
 For what Christ once in humblenesse began,
 We him in glorie call, *The Sonne of Man*. (5-14)

Besides executing his mediation of the “sonne”-“sunne” pun in the form of *sonn*-et, Herbert draws out from his paronomasia an astonishing variety of christological revelations.⁶⁴ Sons, as

⁶³ Wilcox, *Poems of George Herbert*, 573. See here also for a brief summary of the disagreement. Mary Rickey and Asals present the former position, while R.V. Young and Martin Elsky the latter.

⁶⁴ As Matthius Bauer points out, “Sonne” becomes “sonnet” with the addition of one letter, the cruciform “T.” “‘A Title Strange, Yet True’: Toward an Explanation of Herbert’s Titles,” in *George Herbert: Sacred and Profane*, eds. Helen Wilcox and Richard Todd (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1995), 98.

offspring, are also “fruit”; thus the title “son” announces Christ as the curative antitype to the forbidden fruit eaten by “the first man in th’East” (9). Likewise, Christ’s identity as “sunne,” besides the usual associations of light and rebirth, indicates a westward movement, rendered both in the historical spread of Christianity from Palestine to the West and as the sun’s occidental motion is an image of time itself. Just as the sun’s trajectory defines the passing of a single day, Christ measures out the passage of all time, from its “eastern” dawn to its western “posteritie” (10). The pun also clarifies the paradoxical logic of the Son’s kenosis. As the Son of God and “The Sonne of Man,” Christ exhibits two kinds of filial “humilitie” (11): his “procession” from the Father within the Trinity and his more profound subordination as the child of human parents. The very same name, however, “Sonne/Sunne,” also proclaims Christ’s exaltation, the “glorie” of his rising again as the solar authority over heaven, earth, and time.⁶⁵ Throughout, “Sonne” seems to be an almost inexhaustible word, itself an image of the creative infinity of Christ the creator.

Yet the most remarkable devotional reflection in the poem is easily lost in the simplicity of its expression: the son is a “frutifull flame / Chasing the fathers dimnesse” (7-8). The phrase packs together a dense account of the Trinitarian relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Here, the Son’s brightness as “Sunne” is not opposed to the darkness of sin, but to the “dimnesse” of the Father, the shadow of his transcendence and unknowability. The Son, however, stands in dialectical relation to this holy darkness, “the visible image of the invisible God.”⁶⁶ The pun on Sonne/Sunne then, points to the startling truth that the persons of the Trinity relate to each other in a divine analogue of signification. The Father is the eternally transcendent

⁶⁵ Ephesians 10:21-22: God “raised [Christ] from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”

⁶⁶ Colossians 1:15.

signified; the Son the immanent sign, God's "fruitfull" Word and "flaming" image. Thus God, in his very being, brings together both sign and signified, such that they exist in perfect harmony, neither displacing the other. As Herbert himself expresses elsewhere, in the version of "Even-Song" not included in *The Temple*: "thou art Light and darkness both together" (11). For a poet the implications of this theological assertion are staggering. Rather than figuring linguistic expression exclusively as a "fall" from the divine realm of pure meaning into the maculate world of discourse, it opens the possibility that the "descent" of signification is an image of Christ's kenosis as God's Word. Poetry in particular, with its particularly "fleshy" linguistic materiality, thus makes signification an incarnation rather than a diminishment.

My claim, therefore, is that Herbert understands the relation between sign and signified not in the terms of displacement, but as a picture of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Figured in this way, signification becomes not a form of purchase or exchange, but an infinite, loving, and responsive pursuit, a version of the Son's "chasing" the dimness of the Father. This is actually not a very challenging model to conceive, since the text of *The Temple* actively performs it. Each of the poems in the collection is always both a unique artefact and copious gathering of intertext. "The Altar," read in dialogue with "The Sacrifice" becomes something new without ceasing to be itself. Herbert's ubiquitous auto-allusions, such as the frequent appearance of one poem's title in the text of another, never result in either poem's disappearance. We never forget that we are reading *this* poem simply because it recalls for us some other one. As in the case of the sustained pun that drives "The Sonnet," it is frequently the material features of a particular text, the "accidental" qualities that cannot dissolve into reference, that ground the reference itself. Meaning cannot escape its incarnation in the sign, nor does Herbert, ultimately, wish that it could. As Herbert expresses in "Holy Scriptures (II)," the

sign can always give something more to the signified: “for in ev’ry thing / Thy words do finde me out, and parallels bring, / And in another make me understood” (10-12).

“The Sonne” reflects on the poetic implications that Christ is the Father’s Word, himself a sign pointing to his transcendent parent. The Son and the Father are “one” but they are not the same. The Son proceeds from the Father, and his plenitude reflects a continual unfolding of and return to the one from which he proceeds. In Christian theology, though, God is not just Father and Son, but also Spirit. Within the Godhead (in western Christianity at least), Son proceeds from Father, Spirit from Son; thus God’s own being expresses an eternal version of the multiplicity so central to Herbert’s eucharistic poetics. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that Herbert concludes “The Church” with a lyric whose title again presents one of God’s names, “Love (III).” Indeed, just as “The Sonne” meditates on Christ’s identity as a being who gives something more to the Godhead, the fact that “Love (III)” is the third poem with the same title subtly reminds us that God is not only Father and Son, but also Spirit. God is “III,” not just two. When “Love (III)” treats Love as God’s proper name, therefore, it not only refers readers back to the descriptions of God in the first two “Love” poems, it also prompts readers to see each member of the Trinity as present in the poem: God the Father as the all-seeing “quick-ey’d Love” (3), God the Son as Love “who bore the blame” (15), God the Spirit as Love that “Dr[aws] near” and “sweetly question[s]” the conscience of the speaker (5). “Love (III),” though, also returns to a frequent trope within *The Temple*, where the speaker converses with a “friend” who corrects the speaker or adjusts his expectations. Unlike most of these dialogue poems, though, the speaker of “Love (III)” puts up a concerted resistance to the corrective voice, repeatedly rejecting his invitation to a shared meal. Throughout, his reason for doing so is a

concern that because he has not earned the right to that place of intimacy, accepting it would be disrespectful:

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,
 Guiltie of dust and sinne.
 But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack'd anything. (1-6)

In these lines, the speaker reads Love's question not as an implicit offer of provision, but as an enquiry into a fundamental "lack" within himself. "A guest," he answers, "worthy to be here" (7), by which he means that he has no right to accept the terms of relation that make possible the intimacy between guest and host. His concern about unworthiness sets up a back and forth in which Love slowly convinces the speaker to receive his generosity:

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here;
 Love said, you shall be he.
 I, the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.
 Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?

 Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
 And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
 My deare, then I will serve.
 You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat.
 So I did sit and eat. (7-18)

As the speaker understands things, God's holiness transcends him. It is so fully other and perfect that it ought to displace him from God's presence. The poem expresses this radical disparity in a number of ways. In the first stanza, the speaker is "slack," Love is "quick-ey'd," (3); the speaker's "soul drew back" (1), while Love "Drew nearer" (5). In the second stanza, the speaker defines himself as "unkind" and "ungrateful" (9), while Love is the picture of tenderness and grace. The speaker "cannot look" (10) at his conversation partner; Love takes hold of the

speaker's hands. Even structurally, the poem underscores the initial gulf that exists between the speaker and Love. The shift from pentameter to trimeter in the opening two lines represents the speaker's "drawing back," but it also sets up a distinction where Love is specifically named or acting in the long lines ("Love bade me welcome"/ "quick-ey'd Love"), while it is the "I" of the speaker that is named or described in the short lines ("My first entrance in"/ "If I lack'd anything"). In making these distinctions, the poem seems to confirm the speaker's awareness of the radical difference between "Love" and "me."

Thus the problem for the speaker is a simple one: Love invites the speaker into a guest-host relationship, but the speaker believes there is no "likeness" upon which such a relationship might be based. The rules of human hospitality, its duties, pleasures, and manners, all depend on a system in which there is a fundamental resemblance between guest and host. Without this analogical framework, the various kinds of communication that mark hospitality (the signs of deference, the giving of gifts, the shared meal) are not only inappropriate, they are unintelligible. Good Protestant that he is, the speaker begins the poem by rejecting just this common ground. God's transcendence, his difference from the speaker, is too great to allow any real communication between the human and the divine under the terms of hospitality. His anxiety, therefore, is not only that his acceptance would profane God's generosity, but also that such acceptance is impossible. God's "otherness" is simply too profound to allow the terms of relation Love proposes. So, when the speaker insists, "I cannot look on thee" (10), he rejects a primary mode of mutual recognition and interchange, "sight," which here is both literal and a metaphor for knowledge. This is not merely a statement about decorum ("I ought not look on thee"), it reflects what the speaker perceives to be a theological fact ("I am unable to look on thee").

In response, Love subtly changes the terms upon which the guest-host relation is established. The speaker, using sight as a metaphor for knowledge and mutuality, had looked away from Love. With a one-letter emendation of the speaker's refusal to "look," however, Love introduces another kind of sensory interaction: "Love *took* my hand" (11). "Touch," also a metaphor for knowledge, does what sight could not: it crosses the boundary of decorum and difference. Love overcomes the ontological distinction between himself and the speaker on his own initiative, reaching out with a gesture that is an image of the incarnation, grabbing hold of the speaker with his fleshly hands, and turning his gaze back to his maker. As he reminds the speaker: "Who made the eyes but I?" (12). At one level this means, "Don't you think I know how and where your eyes can look? I made them after all." But the pun here also has a deeper meaning. Love's claim is not only that he made the speaker's eyeballs, but that he made the speaker's self, his "I-ness." This homophony thus shifts the "eye/I" from being a sign of the distance and distinction between the speaker and Love to a coded indication of their similarity. Both the speaker's eye and his "I" are made by and resemble the ultimate "I Am" of Love.

The speaker seems partially moved by Love's insistence here, but ultimately even God's touch is not enough to convince him to accept a position as guest. God's original creation may have involved some measure of correspondence between the human and the divine, but that has been "marr'd" by sin (13). In the end, it is only the sense of "taste" that allows the speaker to accept God as present and intimate. Only this sense can confirm the relation of *likeness* that allows the intimacy of guest with host: "You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat. / So I did sit and eat" (17-18).

At the end of "The Church," Herbert thus returns to the eucharist. This return, though, also expresses again the key distinction I have been making between propitiatory and eucharistic

sacrifice. It appears in the difference between the speaker's initial desire to "serve" food (16) and his eventual resolve simply to "eat" it (18). Love reminds the speaker that he "bore the blame" for sin, and that therefore the speaker does not have to earn a place at God's table. The speaker piously, though mistakenly, responds: "My dear, then I will serve." Still unwilling to accept his identity as "guest," he tries to offer service instead of straightforward gratitude. Even though the speaker rightly acknowledges his unworthiness, his desire to wait table ends up looking rather like an attempt to repay God. The double-sense of the word "serve" highlights the terms of exchange and displacement to which the speaker has implicitly turned. Because Herbert uses the verb intransitively, the speaker's offer to "serve" could equally mean "take the place" of something else (OED 22a), as a big rock might "serve" for a hammer at need. "I will serve," therefore, could be read as "I will suffice." Love's whole point, however, is that the speaker does not suffice, and his patient rejoinder to "taste" also contains an embedded reminder: "No, you will not *serve*, you cannot take *my* duties on yourself, you must simply receive the food I give." Drawing on the etymological connection between "meat" (in Latin, *carne*) and the in-*carn*-ation, Love's final offer of "my meat" (17) at last breaks through the speaker's unwillingness to accept God's invitation to be his guest. "So I did sit and eat": in this concluding line the speaker finally abandons his desire to offer some propitiatory sacrifice to Love, and takes on his proper role as communicant, receiving as he does so the grace of God, the pleasure of the meal, and his own identity as "guest." In eating this eucharistic meal, and accepting the invitation to be God's guest, he also confirms the unwritten pun latent in the final stanza of "Love (III)": Christ is both the generous host of the meal and the sacramental "host" that *is* the meal.

Yet even here, in this deeply fulfilling conclusion to the final lyric of "The Church," Herbert is not performing some lapse into silence or self-dissolution. In fact, this final poetic

reception of the eucharist produces one more expression of praise and gratitude. “The Church,” as I mention above repeatedly, concludes with a truncated version of the *Gloria*, the very element of the liturgy Herbert’s mentor Lancelot Andrewes saw identifying the eucharist as a ritual of thanksgiving:

FINIS.
*Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace,
 good will toward men.*

The contrast between the speaker’s desire to “serve” and Love’s call to “taste,” therefore, should not be read as a strict opposition between activity and passivity, or between God’s presence and the speaker’s. To “eat,” in “Love (III)” is not to “cease to be” or even to stop. Tasting and eating, of course, are not things we do once and for all, but actions we perform again and again. Spiritually, in “Love (III),” tasting and eating describe a devotional disposition that gives up all claims to service understood as propitiatory sacrifice. What it does instead is take pleasure in the various forms of divine “sweetness,” savouring both the sweetness itself and the opportunity to give thanks for it. Poetically, though, Love’s call to “taste” returns us again to the sacramental imperative that began “The Church”: “approach, and taste / The churches mysticall repast” (“Superluminare,” 3-4). In doing so, it “bids us welcome” to a rereading of “The Church,” just as every celebration of the eucharist promises its innumerable iterations in the future. In “Love (III),” therefore, poetry does not come to an end, but points to its own infinite repeatability. It invites us to taste again *The Temple’s* repeated offerings of thanksgiving, to enjoy the sweet intimacy of Herbert’s poetic voice, and to savour the material pleasures of the text as a genuine

supplement to God's grace. It teaches us to read Herbert's lyrics as always pursuing and unfolding, but never exhausting, the meaning of that grace. As "Providence" concludes:

Each thing that is, although in use and name
It go for one, hath many wayes in store
To honour thee; and so each hymne thy fame
Extolleth many wayes, yet this one more. (149-152)

Donne's Communion

There are other luxations, other dislocations of Jesus, when we displace him for any worldly respect and prefer preferment before him; there are other woundings of Jesus in blasphemous oaths and execrations; there are other maimings of Jesus, in pretending to serve him entirely and yet retain one particular beloved sin still; ... there are other dissolutions of Jesus when men will melt him and pour him out and mould him up in a wafer cake or a piece of bread; there are other annihilations of Jesus when men will make him and his sacraments to be nothing but bare signs. But all these will be avoided by us if we be gained by the testimony of these six witnesses, to hold fast that entireness of Jesus which is here delivered to us by this apostle.

John Donne, *Sermons* 5.135

In his sermon on 1 John 5:7-8,¹ Donne identifies what he sees as the two opposing errors possible for eucharistic theology: on the one hand, the Roman Catholic identification of bread and wine with the literal flesh and blood of Jesus; on the other, the Zwinglian claim that the sacraments are only mnemonic signs, without any power at all to effect divine grace. Donne claims that these two misapprehensions reflect the same theological error, an error that has always plagued the Church. Both transubstantiation and memorialism, he suggests, fail to recognize the fundamental analogy between Christ's two natures—human and divine—and the sacramental elements' double-identity as physical and spiritual nutriment. The two theological extremes, therefore, violate the hypostatic unity of Christ himself, “dissolving” and “annihilating” the theological paradox at the centre of orthodox Christianity. As Donne asserts earlier in the same sermon, reflecting on the Vulgate's translation of 1 John 4:3 (*omnis spiritus qui solvit Iesum ex Deo non est*: “every spirit that *dissolves* Jesus is not of God”),

That spirit which receives not Jesus entirely, which dissolves Jesus and breaks him into pieces, that spirit is not of God. All this then is the subject of this testimony; first that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (there is Recognition of his *human nature*). And then that this Jesus is the Son of God (there is a subscription to his divine nature). He that separates these, and thereby makes him not able, or not willing to satisfie for Man, he that separates his *Nature*, or he that separates

¹ “For there are three that bear record *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, *the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” Most contemporary translations do not include the text between the asterisks, as it is not found in any early Greek manuscripts, but Donne would not have known this.

the *worke* of redemption...all these do *solver Iesum*, they slacken, they dissolve that Jesus.²

For Donne, transubstantiation and memorialism are in fact only closeted versions of earlier Christian heresies—Docetism, Marcionism, and Adoptionism—that deny the simultaneous presence of Christ’s two natures. Donne borrows this idea from Thomas Cranmer’s *Defence of the true and catholic doctrine of the sacrament*,³ but for Donne, the claim that the eucharist insists on the necessary co-presence of two distinct but mutually dependent natures takes on a much broader significance. Indeed, the theological separation Donne attributes to Catholics and Zwinglians is for him the epitome of human sin, at work in every evil from treason to procrastination to hypocrisy. Those who “separate the Prince from his subject” or who “separate [themselves] from the communion of saints”;⁴ those who utter “blasphemous oaths,” who “delay” their confession, who “retain one particular beloved sin” while publicly feigning obedience: all such persons tear apart Christ’s “entireness.”⁵

For Donne, because the elements of the eucharist represent the double-presence of the incarnation, they also provide a model for a Christian understanding of the human, since the kind of “humanity” that Christians strive to possess is precisely the divinized humanity of Christ. Like Southwell before him, and Herbert after him, Donne treats the eucharist not only as model for poetic signification but as a rubric for understanding the subjectivity of the poet. As this chapter will show, Donne finds in the paradox of Christ’s two natures, exemplified and made present to the Church in the sign-signified duality of the eucharist, a theological centre around which he

² *The Sermons of John Donne*, 10 vols., ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953-62), 5.134. All subsequent quotations of the sermons come from this edition.

³ “For as the person of Christe consisteth of two natures, that is to say, of his manhod, and of his Godhead, (And therefore bothe those natures remayne in Christ,) euen so (sayth saynt-Augustin) the sacrament consisteth of two natures, of the elementes of bread and wine, and of the body & bloud of Christ, & therefore both these natures must nedes remayne in the sacrament” (London: 1550), 27r.

⁴ *Sermons* 5.134.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

organizes a system of paradoxical dyads. Donne, I claim, makes his understanding of the eucharist as two-things-at-once a paradigm for articulating three key sacramental pairs: spiritual and physical love, soul and body, and poet and text. The first two of these pairs have received a fair amount of attention in criticism of Donne's work, and more recently in work that examines his sacramentality. Many critics have already shown that Donne's interest in the relationships between love and sex and between body and soul span his whole career, and that these interests animate both his erotic and his religious verse. This chapter aims to add to that understanding, but also to clarify some misconceptions about Donne's treatment of those pairs. It will do this by reading physical and spiritual love, as well as soul and body, as reflections of the two necessarily *co-present* natures Donne claims abide in the eucharist. I will also show, however, that these two pairs, physical/spiritual love and body/soul, closely relate to Donne's work as a writer and poet. As we will see, these sacramental dyads both parallel and reinforce Donne's presentation of author and text as *co-present* according to the same model of sacramental "doubleness."

As Donne understands them, what makes these three pairs sacramental is their essential "togetherness." Sexual intercourse is not identical with erotic spiritual love, and it *can* occur without pointing to any abstract feeling or commitment; nevertheless, sex is the "fleshy" mediation of spiritual love, so much so that only sex can "consummate" it. This is true even in Donne's religious verse. Likewise, for Donne, the soul is not the body, but the soul operates in and through the body. The body communicates and "seals" the actions of the soul. At the same time, from a Christian point of view at least, to say that the soul *is* the body devalues personhood. When Donne writes about the relationship between physical and spiritual love, or between the body and the soul, he understands these pairs according to a sacramental analogy. Overemphasizing one term in either pair is perilous. Doing so, like the theological errors of

transubstantiation or memorialism, undermines the co-presence of two distinct but mutually necessary natures. Too much emphasis on the bodily expression of eros, for example, mirrors the Catholic error of treating bread and wine as literal flesh and blood. Conversely, privileging instead some purely spiritual love repeats the error of Zwinglian memorialism, which dismisses the material elements of the eucharist as nothing but “bare signs.” For Donne, body and soul are mutually dependent in the same manner that the bread of the Lord’s Supper depends on the spiritual body of Christ. My claim, though, is that Donne appeals to this eucharistic analogy not only to understand the body and human identity, but also to understand the poet and his textual *corpus*.

These somatic sacramental pairs—physical and spiritual love; body and soul—underwrite and inform for Donne the relation between his own subjectivity and the text he produces. This is because, for Donne, writing poetry is an act of embodiment, a way of making the author present to his reader. As Regina Schwartz, Theresa DiPasquale, and Robert Whalen have all discussed, Donne’s poetry treats itself as a sacramental element, mediating the author’s self in and through its textual qualities just as the bread and wine mediate God through their material attributes. For these critics, however, Donne’s primary motivation for presenting his poetry as a sacrament is anxiety. Though they each articulate the idea in different ways, these critics all see Donne’s poetry as attempting to shore up and protect his own subjectivity, as if by creating an alternative poetic body, Donne might preserve his identity after the destruction of his literal body. For Schwartz in particular, Donne’s investment in the eucharist actually reflects a profound doubt in the ability of poetry to perform such a protective embodiment. Donne’s sacramental poetics, as she understands them, express his impossible desire to perfectly transubstantiate himself into a poetic body. And it is certainly tempting to apply this reading of literary self-representation to

Donne. For one thing, he does have an almost unseemly compulsion to pen his own name into every pun he can manage, as if writing his name down everywhere might really turn him into a poem. When Donne ends his verse letter to Henry Wotton, “I have, and you have ... DONNE” (“Sir, more than kisses,” 70), or announces his clandestine marriage to his powerful father-in-law by saying “it is irremediably done,”⁶ or tells God himself that “Thou hast not done” (“A Hymne to God the Father,” 5), it is hard to not to get the sense that Donne is anxious to guarantee his presence on the page. I contend, however, that though Donne does sometimes worry about effectual self-presentation in his poems, the presence of the eucharist in his poetry does not primarily reflect a desire to protect a threatened subjectivity. The eucharist allows Donne to think of poetry not as a way of shoring up the boundaries of the self, but rather as a medium by which the poet gives himself over to language and to his readers. In the eucharist, it is important to remember, Christ does not make himself available via the elements for his own sake, but in order to offer himself as a gift. He gives himself quite specifically so that his own identity might cease to be solely his own. As Christ mediates his presence in the elements, in fact, he becomes present in another sense, *as* the body of the Church. Christ’s act of self-representation in the sacrament, to put it another way, incorporates into his own identity a community of others. For Donne, likewise, poetry does not aim to reify and protect the ego, but rather acts as a way of recognizing the self’s entanglement with language and with others, upon whom the poet depends to read and incorporate his work.

Donne thus explores sex, the body, and poetry within the same eucharistic framework. In this framework, the sacrament acts as the fundamental figure of interdependence. It is important to clarify, therefore, that the sacramental pairs this chapter discusses—physical and spiritual

⁶ See “Letter to Sir George More (2 February 1602)” in *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 87.

love, soul and body, poet and text—overlap significantly. They are not three separate tropes or ideas; they relate to each other like expanding concentric circles, increasingly broad expressions of a Donnean insistence on eucharistic togetherness. The relationship between physical love and spiritual love in Donne's work reflects and is part of a higher order relationship between body and soul. This chapter's discussion of physical and spiritual love thus begins with the smallest concentric circle, focusing on the erotic in order to set up an expanded explication of body and soul in Donne's work. Likewise, in turn, this chapter's treatment of body and soul leads into a consideration of poetry as Donne's textual body. Treating the body-soul relationship as an analogue for the author-text relationship, the chapter's final section then examines what Donne's presentation of poet and poem as a sacramental pair means for his conception of subjectivity.

Whether it manifests specifically in Donne's unique eroticism, or as it undergirds his very understanding of the self, the eucharistic marrow of Donne's sensibility is thus a fascination with the dependence of two distinct things upon each other. In a way that resembles Herbert's emphasis on multiplicity, Donne's sacramentality posits a positive understanding of difference and distinction. Like Herbert's, Donne's work mistrusts any form of "oneness" that would dissolve difference into sameness or uniformity. Unlike Herbert, though, for whom the eucharist privileges the many over the one, Donne is fascinated by a eucharistic conception of the "two." In his oeuvre, the sacrament is the definitive model for understanding "togetherness," reciprocity, and inseparability. For Donne, therefore, it is not the Greek name, *eucharist*, i.e. thanksgiving, that reveals the sacrament's most important feature, but rather the Latinate appellation used in the *Book of Common Prayer's* table of contents, Holy Communion. The word "communion," after all, captures in its etymology exactly Donne's idea of two distinct things coming together as one. The word combines the prefix *com*, "together," and *unus*, "one." It

differs pointedly from mere “union” because it retains a sense of the plural; it designates co-presence and “mutual participation” rather than mere “oneness.” Thus, following Donne’s own sacramental understanding of interdependence, this chapter will refer to Donne’s particular concept of “togetherness” as *communion*. For the sake of clarity, I will italicize the word *communion* whenever I use it specifically to refer to this Donnean notion of sacramental co-presence.

The term *communion* is useful, however, not only because it helps us understand Donne’s poetry, but also because it helps us understand Donne himself. Since Donne’s notion of *communion* is apparent throughout his career, it gives us a helpful way of understanding the relationship between his two personae, the amorous “Jack” and the pious “Doctor.” Unlike critics who have somewhat surprisingly found in Donne’s religious work an essentially anti-sacramental turn,⁷ I will be stressing the continuities, even the *communion*, between Donne’s two modes. This continuity, I posit, is essential for understanding how Donne’s poetry resists the secularizing narratives that have dominated critical readings of literary sacramentalism in England, most of which have made Donne a starting point or an exemplary case. In one sense, I will clearly be attributing to even Donne’s early work strongly “Protestant” theological sympathies, as I claim he has a strong aversion to the identification of sign with signified. This move could be read as an implied concession to Donne’s secularity. This is only the case, however, if we take for granted the idea that Protestantism in general is dominated by impulses that presage secular modernity. It is part of the aim of this chapter to reject just that assumption, and to read Donne as a poet whose Protestant sympathies undergird a sacramentalism as integral

⁷ See Robert Whalen, *The Poetry of Immanence*, 61-2: “Donne’s sacred verse...marks his confessional identification with the doctrinally Calvinist mainstream of the English church. His capacity for perceiving the sacred in the profane [in his erotic verse] belongs to a medieval world view that had been carried into the early modern era in large part by Roman Catholic sacramentalism.”

to his poetic universe as transubstantiation was to Southwell's. My reading of Donne will demonstrate the dangers of interpreting early modern Protestant literature "after the fact," without a sense that the imaginative resources available in Donne's historical moment might have led to any number of alternative literary and religious histories.

Physical and Spiritual Love

God is Love, and the Holy Ghost is amorous in his metaphors; every where the Scriptures abound with the notion of Love, of Spouse, and Husband, and Marriage Songs, and Marriage Supper, and Marriage bed.

Sermons 7.87

While Donne's erotic poetry is often less strictly concerned with marriage than with the activities his culture nominally reserved for the marriage bed, his amorous verse shares with his preaching and devotional writing an interest in sexual intimacy as a privileged form of *communion*. In his erotic as well as his devotional poems, physical love and spiritual love are hard to separate. Indeed, one of the main ways Donne differs from his literary contemporaries is that he generally treats sex as something to be had, rather than simply to be desired. His poems are usually uninterested in reproducing that Petrarchan commonplace in which the female beloved must refuse the male writer's advances. Donne's verse also strongly rejects the Platonic counterpart to this Petrarchan trope, by which the idealized and abstracted woman becomes a paradigm of divine love. In that motif, the speaker must abandon the real woman he loves and transform her into a principle. Donne's poetry does not employ such a program of abstraction. In his work, true love always finds its fullest expression in physical, sexual intimacy.

When Donne does invoke the Petrarchan tradition of abstraction, he usually does so to critique it by taking its conventions to playful extremes. Donne's erotic poems will sometimes exuberantly address prayers to some pagan personification of Love, as "Love's Deitie" does to Cupid and "The Indifferent" to Venus. They will also ascribe to their mistresses qualities that

have no business being attributed to human beings. In “The Feaver,” for example, the mistress “canst not die” (5) because her godlike omnipresence permeates and sustains the world. “The whole world vapours with thy breath” (8), the speaker claims, insisting “Thy beauty, and all parts, which are thee, / Are unchangeable firmament” (23-4).⁸ Donne also departs from early Petrarchanism by refusing to use theological language as a way to express an unbridgeable gap between lover and beloved. The “divinity” of his mistress seldom implies her sexual unavailability. Rather, Donne balks at the idea that love’s “divinity” depends on the exclusion of sexual consummation. As the speaker of “Love’s Deitie” chafes:

I long to talke with some old lovers ghost,
 Who dyed before the god of Love was borne:
 I cannot thinke that hee, who then lov’d most,
 Sunke so low, as to love one which did scorn.
 But since this god produc’d a destinie,
 And that vice-nature, custome, lets it be;
 I must love her, that loves not me. (1-7)

Here, Donne playfully engages Petrarchan tropes by reading them according to a religious narrative. The speaker claims that his desire is unrequited not because the woman does not return his love, but because the conventions of love poetry mandate it. These conventions, the speaker implies, have been elevated to a sacred status. They are now the required forms of worship for “the god of Love,” and derive their power merely from “that vice-nature, custome” (6). The rituals of Cupid’s religion, therefore, are like the superficial and customary ceremonies of Catholic worship. So, just as the reformers saw Catholic ritual impeding divine grace and replacing it with superstitious custom, the speaker treats the Petrarchan “ritual” of withholding sex as working against the love it supposedly celebrates. As Theresa DiPasquale has demonstrated at length, this analogy runs throughout Donne’s secular poetry. In it, Donne aligns

⁸ Except where otherwise noted, all quotations of Donne’s poetry come from *Donne: Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert J.C. Grierson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

the Petrarchan tradition with the old Catholic faith, and his own poetry, more open to the possibility of mutual love and sexual intercourse, with the new dispensation of the Reformation.⁹ “Love’s Deitie” provides the most systematic development of this metaphor. Echoing Cranmer and other Protestant theologians who accused Catholic polemicists of misusing the Church fathers to defend heretical doctrines (especially transubstantiation),¹⁰ Donne’s speaker claims that the “fathers” of the Petrarchan tradition have been similarly misread and over-literalized: “Sure,” he insists, “they which made him god, meant not so much” (8). In the early days of this religion, it seems, Cupid was a more beneficent power, who did not “practise” the cruel Petrarchan denial of desire. In ancient times, “His office was indulgently to fit / Actives to passives” (11-12). Mimicking the rhetoric of the Reformers, the speaker imagines returning to a pure primordial devotion, purged of customs that only separate the faithful from grace.

At the end of the poem, though, perhaps in a nod to Donne’s own ambiguous Catholic identity in his early life, the speaker cannot follow through with his reforming logic, and backslides into a defeatist Petrarchan recusancy. He backs away from the possibility of sex and love coming together in *communion*:

Rebell and Atheist too, why murmure I,
As though I felt the worst that love could doe?
Love might make me leave loving, or might try
A deeper plague, to make her love me too,
Which, since she loves before, I am loth to see.
Falsehood is worse than hate; and that must be,
If she whom I love, should love me. (22-8)

He renounces his desire to reform the conventions of love poetry, and ironically identifies that wish to reform with two terms applied to Catholics in England: “Rebel” and “Atheist.” The

⁹ *Literature and Sacrament*, 145-72.

¹⁰ See, for example, *True and catholic doctrine* 114-5: “They therfore which gather of the doctours, that the Masse is a sacrifice for remission of syn, and that it is applied by the prieste to theim, for whom he saith or singeth: they whiche so gather of the doctours, do to them most greuous iniury and wronge, moste falsely belyng them.”

speaker recommits himself to the older tradition of unfulfillable desire and disembodied love, but his motivation for doing so is unclear. His claim that his lover will be “false” if she “should love” him may simply mean that she would have to be unfaithful to her current lover to do so, a “Falsehood” the speaker would be “loth to see.” The idea that the speaker is concerned with some other male seems unsatisfying, however, both because this concern appears nowhere else in the poem, and because Donne’s other poems almost never worry about other men. The speaker’s relapse into a Petrarchanism may thus have more cynical antifeminist motivations. A change in this woman’s affections, the speaker seems to reason, might actually be “a deeper plague,” since it would necessarily reveal a “typically” feminine inconstancy. The consummation of the speaker’s desire, in that case, would open up the possibility of his mistress’ subsequent infidelity. “Since she loves before” (26), i.e. because she currently has other romantic affections for someone else, the speaker cannot imagine her being faithful to him in the future. If this is the case, Donne’s speaker accidentally reveals the covert ideological attraction of Petrarchanism: it protects the male persona from risking any entanglement in the real “flesh” of erotic love. “Loving her that loves not me” is still preferable to having to trust the promises of a woman. All the rituals of Cupid, therefore, though they appear to be about love, actually support a deep-seated combination of misogyny, anxiety, and doubt. Though claiming to be the very substance of love, these false liturgies are nothing less than idols, habitual tropes and images preferred to the thing itself. The speaker is like a recent Protestant convert returning to the comfort of his familiar Catholic rituals: he falls back into the very habits that hold him back from satisfying a desire he can only partially will. The Petrarchan liturgies, though they promise gratification, actually prevent the speaker from partaking in what Donne treats as the sacramental element of love, sexual consummation.

Elsewhere in his oeuvre, Donne is much more willing to carry through to its end the reforming logic of “Love’s Deitie.” As Ramie Targoff aptly summarizes, “Donne’s insistence on love as a bodily as well as spiritual experience differentiates him from the vast majority of early modern practitioners in the ‘philosophy of love.’”¹¹ In no other poem is this logic so evident as “The Exstasie,” where the *communion* of bodily expression and immaterial desire is paramount. Even in the poem’s second stanza, we see Donne emphasizing the dependence of spiritual intimacy on physical expression:

Our hands were firmly cimented
 With a fast balme, which thence did spring;
 Our eye-beams twisted, and did thred
 Our eyes, upon one double string. (5-8)

The alternating end-rhymes symbolize the intertwining action of the lovers in the poem. Donne emphasizes the way the lovers communicate through both hand and eye. They need both the physical sense of touch and the more conventionally “spiritual” sense of vision, associated with the powers of human reason and the spirit. On the physical plane, the lover’s adjacent hands are “firmly cimented” together. In this image, the hands, as physical synecdoches for the lovers, join without blurring their distinct integrity. On the spiritual plane, the lovers interpenetrate each other visually. Their “eye-beams,” acting as projections of rather than windows to the soul, each thread through the other person as a string passed through pearls. Donne gives us *both* these threading images, though, to show how the lovers require both the physical and the spiritual to fully express their love.

The poem’s title, which comes from the Greek ἐκστασις, “standing outside oneself,” implicitly associates intense pleasure with an out of body experience. Yet the pleasure Donne

¹¹ *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 58.

describes in the poem cannot ultimately be had “out of body,” even though at first the lovers do experience an ecstatic reverie:

As ‘twixt two equal Armies, Fate
Suspends uncertaine victorie,
Our souls (which to advance their state,
Were gone out,) hung ‘twixt her and me. (14-16)

Their bodies lie still like “sepulchrall statues” (18) while their souls enjoy an immaterial love only visible to an idealized Petrarchan passer-by, someone “so by love refin’d / That he soules language understood” (21-2). This experience is not without its value. It reveals an important fact about love, and articulates an important distinction:

This Exstasie doth unperplex,
(We said) and tell us what we love,
We see by this, it was not sex,
We see, we saw not what did move: (29-32)

Their temporary separation from their bodies makes the two lovers recognize what they love about each other and what they do not. They do not love each other’s “sex,” that is, merely the other’s maleness or femaleness. This is an important distinction to make in a poem that differentiates itself from a tradition that often progresses from physical manifestations of gender to a more abstract sacred feminine, the “idea of woman” as Donne calls it in his “Anniversaries.” The lovers are interested in each other as individuals, not as representations of a category. They come together not because of biological prescription, but because of a mutual desire directed at the particular features of the individual. So, even as Donne describes “When love, with one another so / Interanimates two soules” (41-2), this process does not join two gendered “halves,” the unification that Plato claims motivates sexual love in the *Symposium*. “The atomies from which we grow” (47), the speaker insists, are not two gendered bodies, but two genderless souls. The out of body experience, therefore, yields an important clarification: lovers do not come

together to re-form a singular Platonic soul formerly split into two genders. They are attracted to the particularity rather than the category of the other. Yet, though the out of body experience helps the lovers realize this, Donne's use of the verb "unperplex," from the Latin verb *plectere*, "to intertwine," suggests that this "ecstasy" remains fundamentally at odds with the intertwining impulses laid out in the poem's second stanza. Ecstasy provides an important insight, but it cannot mediate the lovers' ultimate consummation. Ecstasy may "unperplex" the metaphysical distinction between the lovers' spiritual love and its bodily expression, but it does so in order that the lovers may then return to the perplexing *communion* of physical and spiritual.

Early readers not part of Donne's manuscript coterie, who first encountered this poem in print after his death, might well have anticipated the poem's famous turn, since as a preacher Donne repeatedly expressed his scepticism of religious forms of ecstasy. His sermons grant that ecstatic experiences can be useful, but Donne worries that out of body episodes threaten to dissolve the essential unity God ordained for humanity. As he puts it in a sermon delivered on Easter 1626: "man is not a soul alone, but a body too; ... God did not breath a soul towards him, but into him; ... not for ecstasies, but for an inherence."¹² Those early readers of the printed editions might therefore have anticipated Donne's choice in "The Exstasie" for the lovers to return to the body:

But O alas, so long, so farre,
Our bodies why do wee forbear?
They're ours, though they're not wee; Wee are
The intelligences, they the sphere.

We owe them thanks, because they thus
Did us, to us, at first convey,
Yielded their forces, sense, to us,
Nor are drosse to us, but allay. (49-56)

¹² *Sermons*, 7.104. See *Sermons*, 6.101, 8.46, and 8.113 for other moments when Donne expresses his reservation about the value of religious ecstasy.

Explicitly rejecting the notion that the body is merely “drosse” for the soul, the speaker decides that only bodies can mediate the ecstasies of love. Only bodies, because they yield “their forces, sense, to us,” give the soul access to anything outside itself. Without the body, the soul would be metaphysically incarcerated: “So must pure lovers’ soules descend,” as Donne puts it, “T’ affections, and to faculties, / ... Else a great Prince in prison lies” (65-6, 68). Here he inverts Plato’s claim, expressed in the *Phaedo* and elsewhere, that the body imprisons the soul, and thus that the soul needs to ascend out of the body.¹³ For Donne, the *communion* of physical and spiritual love actually requires something like Christ’s kenosis: the “lover’s soules *descend*” into the body. And just as Christ’s love is made most evident in the flesh of the incarnation, so the lover’s spiritual love for each other depends on its physical mediation. Thus, when Donne writes that bodies “did us, to us, at first convay,” he means both that the lovers’ bodies physically brought the two of them into the same space *and* that the lovers only know themselves, their “us,” through the subject-forming processes of sensing, moving, and desiring bound to the body. For Donne, then, denying the sexual, physical aspect of love is like denying the soul a body: as a soul without a body is not recognizably a “self,” so spiritual love without physical expression is merely an abstraction.

In “The Exstasie,” the *communion* between physical and spiritual love is explicitly sacramental. The lovers are not only a coming together of physical and spiritual, they are sacramental signs that edify the “weak men” who observe their love. The lovers return from their ecstasy, therefore, not only to embody their love for each other, but also to “reveal” it to others:

To’our bodies turn wee then, that so
Weake men on love reveal’d may looke;

¹³ “The lover of knowledge recognizes when philosophy takes over his soul it is a veritable prisoner fast bound within his body and cemented thereto; and that instead of investigating reality directly by itself and through itself it is compelled to peer through the bars of its prison.” *Plato’s Phaedo*, trans. R. Hackforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 92 (82d).

Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
But yet the body is his booke. (49-52)

The physical expression of love is necessary for those who, unlike the “refined” Petrarchan observer mentioned earlier in the poem, cannot understand “soules language” (22). Here Donne recalls Calvin’s *Institutes*, which repeatedly explain that the materiality of the eucharist is a graceful condescension to the weakness of humans who, because of sin, can only understand things through their physical senses:

But as our faith is slender and weak...our merciful Lord, with boundless condescension, so accommodates himself to our capacity, that seeing how from our animal nature we are always creeping on the ground, and cleaving to the flesh, ... he declines not by means of these earthly elements to lead us to himself, and even in the flesh to exhibit a mirror of spiritual blessings.¹⁴

For Donne’s audience, the allusion to Calvin would have been more readily apparent, since in the period his use of the phrase “Love’s mysteries” would equally mean “Love’s sacraments.” Sacrament, after all, is just a translation into Latin of the Greek word used for the same thing: μυστήριον (mysterion). In early modern England “mystery” was interchangeable with “sacrament,” as is apparent, for example, is in the *Book of Common Prayer*’s post-communion petition.¹⁵ And as the OED points out, “mysteries,” in the plural, referred specifically to the eucharist.¹⁶ But what is the connection between this sacramental allusion and Donne’s claim that “the body is [a] booke” (52)? Though it might seem simply another instance of Donne mixing his metaphors, the co-presence of word and sacrament in fact recalls another contention of Calvin’s, that “the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God, to offer and set forth Christ to us,

¹⁴ *Institutes*, 4.14.3.

¹⁵ “Almighty and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us who have duly received *these holy mysteries* with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.” *The Book of Common Prayer*, 138.

¹⁶ “Mystery” I.3, recorded from the 1400s: “An ordinance, rite, or sacrament, of the Christian Church... In *pl.*: the Eucharist; the consecrated elements used in the Eucharist”

and in him the treasures of heavenly grace.”¹⁷ This is something Donne’s preaching repeatedly stresses, that scripture and sacrament are interdependent signs of divine grace. As Donne explains in one sermon, God “returns to us in the dispensation and distribution of his graces, in his Word and Sacraments.”¹⁸ Likewise, in a sermon on Psalm 51:7,¹⁹ Donne talks about the power of God’s covenant, which “withdraws us ... to live within reach of our spiritual food, the Word and Sacraments.”²⁰ “The Exstasie” reflects this same insistence on the parallel functions of the sacrament and scripture, treating physical love as the erotic analogue to both. Here, we thus encounter not only an insistence that the physical and the spiritual ought to be in *communion*, we already get a hint of how the relationship between the spiritual and the physical relates to Donne’s understanding of words. Here, bodies are texts. In Donne’s work, though, as this chapter will later discuss, texts are bodies.

Returning for the moment to a focussed consideration of the *communion* of physical and spiritual love in Donne’s work, we can see how his preference for interdependence breaks strikingly from many of the conventions of his age. One of these departures is Donne’s abandonment of the period’s ubiquitous paranoia about adultery. In a striking reversal of convention, many of Donne’s poems, such as “Show me Dear Christ” even embrace a sacred cuckoldry. Sex, for Donne, is too sacramentally necessary to be tyrannically bound by monogamy. Conversely, the jealous lovers in Donne’s oeuvre tend to be presented as pathological hoarders. They display the same perversity that the reformers ascribed to self-communicating Papist priests, who consume privately what ought to be distributed to the

¹⁷ *Institutes*, 4.14.17.

¹⁸ *Sermons*, 5:327.

¹⁹ “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Interestingly, the same verse quoted in the prefatory *asperges* of the high Mass, the ritual sprinkling I discuss in chapter three, pg. 136: As is common in Donne’s preaching, the sermon reframes this verse’s Catholic associations to insist that the Christian covenant is mediated by both scripture and sacrament.

²⁰ *Sermons*, 5:310.

community. In “The Primrose,” the speaker is the opposite of this typical jealous lover. In fact, he balks at the conventional idea that the ideal woman must “more or less than woman be,” that is, she must either be the soul of a woman or simply her body. In the conceit of the poem, she must be a six petalled flower or a four-petalled one, i.e. either all spiritual or all bodily. What she cannot be is a five-petalled primrose, both bodily and spiritual at once. For readers who do not know their horticulture, the joke is that a primrose really does have five petals. For the speaker then, the Petrarchan choice between body and soul is a choice between two imagined things. He thus elects instead the real woman, the five-petalled flower:

Live, primrose, then, and thrive
 With thy true number, five;
 And, women, whom this flower doth represent,
 With this mysterious number be content.
 Ten is the farthest number: if half ten
 Belongs unto each woman, then
 Each woman may take half us men;
 Or if this will not serve their turn, since all
 Numbers are odde, or even, and they fall
 First into this, five, women may take us all. (21-30)

Rejecting the typical Petrarchan anxiety about feminine inconstancy, the speaker alludes to the numerological association of men and the number ten (as well as the number five’s position as the first integer made up of an even number and an odd number other than one) to create a quite unusual account of femininity.²¹ The woman in “Primrose” is both physical and spiritual, and she makes this dual identity apparent by being sexually open. This sexual availability appropriately corresponds to the sacramental image with which Donne begins the poem, in which sex is manna, the Old-Testament type of the eucharist:

Upon this primrose hill,

²¹ Edward W. Tayler, *Donne’s Idea of a Woman: Structure and Meaning in The Anniversaries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 169.

Where, if Heav'n would distil
 A shower of rain, each severall drop might goe
 To his owne primrose, and grow Manna so; (1-4)

There are at least three metaphors worth noticing in this complex opening. The first is of the raindrop as a man and the flower as a woman. The second, made explicit by Donne's later description of the raindrops as a "terrestriall Galaxie" (6), is a metaphor in which the rain, paralleling Christ's kenosis, manifests the heavenly realms on earth. The third treats the rain as sacramental "Manna" for the flower.

Through these initial metaphors, the male voice assumes a Christ-like pretension. Coitus becomes an act of eucharistic feeding, each male raindrop becoming nutritious manna "To his owne primrose." By the end of the poem, however, the metaphors have shifted. The primrose-woman "thrives" (21) not because she is nourished by one man, but because she "may take us all" (30). She is now the active sexual "taker," and her promiscuity fully expresses the *communion* of bodily intimacy and immaterial desire. Here, it is the woman rather than the man who becomes more like Christ. Her "incarnation" as a real woman, a five-petalled flower, now takes "us all," just as Christ's incarnation "takes" all men into its grace. Like the sacramental elements, and the two natures of Christ they represent, the woman herself has a double-nature. Unlike the Petrarchan woman who must "more or less than woman be," she has a physical *and* a spiritual identity. These remain distinct but inseparable, just like the spiritual and the physical natures of the sacrament.

What is both surprising and playful about Donne's comparison here, though, is how he presents it as sanctioning the woman's polyamorous availability. As a figure of the sacramental elements, it is appropriate that she may "take ... all" believers. "The Primrose" is thus unusual for the period for being unthreatened by female promiscuity. The poem could, of course, be read

as somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as many of Donne's poems obviously are. Yet however jocund "The Primrose" may be, Donne clearly has some sincere attraction to the sacramental sexuality of the poem, since he reworks the same "perversions" in his *Holy Sonnet*, "Show me, dear Christ."²² In that *Holy Sonnet*, the Church is now the holy whore: "Betray, kind husband", the speaker implores God, 'thy spouse to our sights, / And let mine amorous soul court thy mild dove, / Who is most true and pleasing to thee then / When she's embrac'd and open to most men" (11-14). Here, as Donne tries to locate the elusive true Church, the feminized body of true believers is constituted, like the woman in "The Primrose," by its sexual openness. In fact, "Show me Dear Christ" hearkens back to Donne's erotic verse in a number of ways. It contrasts the ugly features of different women, as do so many of Donne's *Elegies*. The speaker is sarcastically unsure whether the Church is the woman who "goes richly painted" (3, the Roman Church) or another who, "robbed and tore, / Laments and mourns in Germany" (3-4, the Lutheran Church). We also have a speaker, in a sacred parody of the young "Jack" Donne, who desires to cuckold a normally very jealous husband, God himself. Donne also posits a revolution in sexual ethics, as he did in "Love's Deity" and "The Exstasie," that requires the rejection of a particular genre. The speaker coyly asks: "Dwells she [the true Church] with us, or like adventuring knights / First travel we to seek, and then make love?" (9-10). Donne amusingly mocks those who are always seeking the Church outside of England, in some continental elsewhere, by accusing them of pursuing their desire according to the outmoded literary conventions of chivalric romance. Like the Petrarchan devotees in "Love's Deitie," who inherit many of their idealizing tendencies from the chivalric tradition, these adventurers can only imagine the true Church according to the anticorporeal terms of chastity: she must be

²² Throughout this chapter, for the sake of clarity, I will be referring to the *Holy Sonnets* by their first lines rather than by any one of several numbering conventions. All quotations of the *Holy Sonnets* come from *John Donne: The Divine Poems*, 2nd ed., ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

geographically distant, spiritually withdrawn, and available, if at all, only to the male who has proved, like Galahad, his own untarnishable sexual purity. It is thus a literary misapprehension that prevents Christians from recognizing the true Church's holy cupidity, her proximity and presence, and her willingness to receive any man (or woman even) that will take her and her sacraments. Dramatically, then, "Show me Dear Christ" presents a Church that sanctifies even the most carnal forms of human craving. She calls the libidinous "Jack," not in spite of, but through the desires of his flesh. To redirect Calvin's phrasing, she "declines not by means of these earthly elements to lead us to herself, and even in the flesh to exhibit a mirror of spiritual blessings." Donne's Church, like the woman in "The Primrose," loves both physically and spiritually, mediating her immaterial nature through a material eucharistic body that is open to all. She affirms, therefore, that the eucharist and sexuality are parallel expressions of human "entireness," both ultimately pointing to the sacred paradox that informs all Christian understandings of humanity: that God became flesh.

Body and Soul

This sacrament of the body and blood of our Saviour, Luther calls safely, *venerabile et adorabile* for certainly, whatsoever that is which we see, that which we receive is to be adored; for we receive Christ. He is *Res sacramenti*, the form, the essence, the substance, the soul of the sacrament.

Sermons 7.320

In Donne's erotic poems, sexuality has the same double-nature as the eucharist: physical love is the material element, and spiritual love its divine substance. Sex itself is the eating. Sexuality, understood in Donnean terms, reveals that human beings are themselves a kind of sacrament, always physical and spiritual at once. Every individual is, in other words, an image of the eucharistic elements, just as they are images of Christ, the ultimate and best human. Indeed, in Donne's writing, he often makes quite explicit the analogy he sees between soul and body and

the material-spiritual *communion* of the eucharist. In Donne's Prebend sermon quoted above, for example, we see that Christ is the "soul of the sacrament." The bread and wine are, implicitly, its body. Donne is thus quite comfortable "adoring" the eucharist, not because the bread and wine *are* Christ, but because they are the means by which the Christian may "receive" Christ. The adoration of the sacrament is appropriate because the sacrament not only communicates divine grace, but communicates it in a way that pictures the *communion* of Christ's human and divine natures. Those unwilling to venerate the elements for fear of idolatry actually risk spiritualizing Christ, removing him from the material bodies through which he makes himself known. This is for Donne essentially the same error the Petrarchan and Neoplatonic traditions make, which reject the body in favour of some transcendent ideal. This rejection, though, denies both the essential goodness of the body and the material world more broadly. For Donne, this goodness is grounded in the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and the resurrection, the two most important theological claims remembered and celebrated in the eucharist. These doctrines resist any Christian desire to escape the body. The incarnation asserts that God himself has a body, and belief in the resurrection that all Christians will ultimately be reunited with theirs. Both doctrines insist that the human being is defined by the *communion* of body *and* soul. Donne's erotic poems thus return again and again to images of or allusions to these two central doctrines. "Aire and Angels," for example, transforms the commonplace sentiment of a lover feeling that he knew his beloved before actually meeting her into a version of the incarnation. The beloved's appearance in the flesh is a divine kenosis:

But since my soule, whose child love is,
Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
More subtile than the parent is
Love must not be, but take a body too;
And therefore what thou wert, and who,
I bid Love aske, and now

That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow. (7-14)

The abstracted idea of beloved, the “lovely glorious nothing” (6) that the speaker had in his head, now “assumes” a body, becoming incarnate in the particularity of “lip, eye, and brow.” The word “assume” here is the same verb that Donne and his contemporaries used of the incarnation: Christ “did assume man’s nature.”²³ Like Christ in the incarnation, and like the grace conferred in the eucharist, the beloved in “Aire and Angels” must “take limbs of flesh” (8).

In “Aire and Angels,” love cannot exist as an abstraction; it has to animate some real body. The necessity of the body, as I have been arguing, and as Donne criticism has now long recognized, is an idea that pervades the poet’s work. It even makes a strong appearance in *paradoxes and problems*, a collection of pithy prose juvenilia Donne likely wrote during his time as a law student at Lincoln’s Inn. These rhetorical exercises are light-hearted, designed to show an elastic wit by comically inverting clichéd proverbs. Still, when one reads Donne’s eleventh paradox, “That the gifts of the body are better than those of the mind,” it is hard not to see the beginnings of that genuine concern for the body that so animates his later writing. “My *Body*,” Donne writes, “licenseth my *soule* to see the Worlds *beauties* through mine *eyes*; to heare pleasant things thorough mine *eares*; and affords it apt *Organs* for the conueiance of all perceiuable *delight*.”²⁴ As in “Aire and Angels,” Donne here sees the soul, without the body, as “a lovely glorious nothing,” or as a “great Prince in prison.” Any impulse to “ecstasy,” therefore, whether religious or erotic, forgets the soul’s need for the body.

²³ *Sermons*, 3.106. It is also this verb’s theological associations that have made the error that appears in the final line of the printed edition of the “What if this present were the worlds last night?” (“This beauteous form assumes a piteous mind”) so fascinating to critics, even though, as the manuscripts attest, Donne almost assuredly meant it to read “assures.”

²⁴ *Juvenilia or Certaine paradoxes and problemes, Written by I. Donne. The second edition, corrected* (London: printed by Henry Seyle, 1633), 25.

Perhaps precisely because of his repeated affirmations that the body and the soul are an interdependent pair, Donne is frequently haunted by a desire to anatomize these two parts of the human person. A great many of his poems are thought experiments imagining what might happen when the *communion* of body and soul is severed. This anxiety reflects concerns that permeate the polemic debates about the eucharist in the period. Both Catholics and Protestants wanted to preserve the eucharist as a sacrament of unification. They both saw it as bringing God's presence into the world and cementing the communion of believers. In their very effort to define and defend the reliability of this unification, however, polemic definitions of the eucharist very often ended up performing a whole series of divisions: they separated Christian communities, they broke down the modes of presence and absence within the eucharist, they distinguished the particular questions of material mediation from the context of Christ's manifestation in the body of the Church. It is not terribly surprising, therefore, that, even as Donne turns to the eucharist as the paradigm of body-soul *communion*, he also draws his vocabulary for talking about their division from the same place.

As Ramie Targoff discusses, one particularly visceral realization of Donne's anxiety about the division of body and soul occurs in a sermon he preached as Reader of Divinity at Lincoln's Inn, for the same learned legal audience as his earlier *paradoxes*.²⁵ Donne spends two paragraphs stressing what he considers the ultimate "mortification" and "humiliation" of the human body: its decomposition. He is especially horrified by its slow consumption by worms: "skinne and body, beauty and substance must be destroyd; and, *destroyed by wormes*, which is another descent in this humiliation and exinanition of man in death."²⁶ This eating that the worms perform is utterly unsacramental; it leads to no mystical re-incorporation. The human

²⁵ *Body and Soul*, 19-21.

²⁶ *Sermons*, 3.106.

merely returns to the *humus*. This dislocation, this utter break of body and soul, clearly fascinates Donne. In the same sermon, for example, Donne suggests that it is not the incarnation that is the most perplexing Christological doctrine, but rather Christ's death and descent to hell. This is *the* great mystery of the Christian faith, how Christ remained both God *and* man even in death, after the disjunction of soul and body: "If we might compare things infinite in themselves," he muses, "it was nothing so much that god did assume mans nature as that god did still cleave to that man then when he was no man, in the separation of body and soul in the grave."²⁷ This fascination with, and anxiety about, the separation of body and soul clearly stayed with Donne until the end of his life. In his final sermon, "Death's Duel," he returns again to his horror at the severance not only of body from soul, but of the pieces of the body from each other: "for us that die now and sleep in the state of the dead, we must all pass this posthume death, this death after death, nay, this death after burial, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrefaction, of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave."²⁸ Donne knew his death was near when he delivered these lines, and his personal concern that death might be irrevocable is evident. "This death of incineration and dispersion is," Donne says, "to natural reason, the most irrecoverable death of all." Yet the ultimate power of the resurrection for Donne is that it asserts God's ability to gather all things together, even the dead. "[B]y recompacting this dust into the same body, and remaining the same body with the same soul," God, Donne claims, "shall in a blessed and glorious resurrection give ... a life that shall last as long as the Lord of Life himself."²⁹ The absurd solution to death appears only in this re-gathering of body and soul into a resurrected *communion*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Sermons*, 10. 235-6.

²⁹ Ibid., 10. 238.

“Death’s Duel,” though, can seem to revel in the very horrors the resurrection would overcome. Many of Donne’s erotic poems similarly revel. Donne frequently fixates on decomposing flesh, for him the most troubling manifestation of the soul’s separation from the body. “Love’s Alchymie” provides an especially unsettling example of this trope, one that can be read as an antithesis to the incarnation in “Aire and Angles.” The woman in the poem, rather than becoming the embodiment of Love, instead becomes a zombie-like corpse. She is “mummy,” that is, a chunk of flesh that retains a trace of vital energy, but is not animated by a soul. The poem’s speaker begins by decrying lovers as nothing but tinkering alchemists. Though they strive after the “Elixir” (7) of true love, the best their experiments can produce is “some odoriferous thing, or medicinall” (10). They think they can find the “hidden mysterie” (5) of love, but in fact only fool themselves: “So, lovers dreame a rich and long delight, / But get a winter-seeming summers night” (11-12). Women, the speaker thinks, are decidedly not “mysteries” in the sacramental sense; they do not have a physical and a spiritual nature. The reason, in fact, that women cannot satisfy male desire is because they are really just mindless flesh: “Hope not for mind in women; at their best / Sweetnesse and wit, they’re but *Mummy*, possess’d” (23-4). Women are nothing but “mummy,” dead flesh that, according to Paracelsian physiology, retains a trace of its former life, but lacks a “mind” (i.e. soul) behind it.³⁰ Women are thus even less than zombies, they are severed bits of zombie-flesh repackaged as pharmaceuticals.

This rather grisly reference to “mummy” recalls a whole network of eucharistic anxieties. Mummy is an alchemical term, but Donne uses it, especially in contrast with the “mysterie” of line five, to play on the resemblance between consuming alchemically prepared flesh and eating

³⁰ There is also a punning reference to motherhood here (see OED “mammy,” from 1523), possibly suggesting pregnancy as a kind of “possession” of female flesh.

Christ's body in the sacrament. According to Paracelsian theory, mummy, and particularly human mummy, could be used as the base for a variety of medicinal cures. As Louise Noble points out, "mummy" was especially popular in Protestant countries, where new medical theories and treatments were sometimes seen as paralleling the broader reforming goals of Protestantism itself.³¹ In the words of one Paracelsian apologist, the new theories harkened back to the "former puritie" of a "true and auncient phisicke," purging the discipline of the "corporall and gross medicines" of Galenism, which were themselves images of Catholicism's "outward ceremonies and ... corporal exercises."³² Ironically, then, the new medical uses of mummy veered eerily close to the threat Protestants saw looming in the doctrine of transubstantiation: cannibalism. So, even as Protestant polemicists railed with disgust at the cannibalism of Roman Catholics,³³ their countrymen seemed at least to tolerate a quite literal consumption of human flesh.

"Love's Alchymie," recalls the ironic relation between mummy and sacrament to implicitly contrast a sacramental notion of personhood (displayed in poems like "Aire and Angels") with the mummy-woman of the text. The speaker is a kind of anti-Petrarchan who, rather than abstracting any feminine ideal from female bodies, seems *only* to register the body, and to respond to it with abject disgust. This disgust, though, could be read as mimicking either a reactionary Protestant's rhetoric or a conservative Catholic's, or indeed both at the same time. On the one hand, the speaker seems to see all women as Calvin saw the transubstantiated sacrament: revolting flesh devoid of spiritual substance. On the other hand, he ultimately refuses

³¹ *Medical Cannibalism in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 96. In Noble's broad-ranging study of "mummy" in England, one odd omission is a consideration of "Love's Alchymie," despite the fact that she deals at length with Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*.

³² R. Bostocke, *The difference between the auncient Phisicke . . . and the latter Phisicke* (London, 1585). Qtd. in Noble, 96.

³³ Calvin, for example, repeatedly expresses his utter revulsion at the apocryphal confession of Berenger of Tours, which graphically insists the body of Christ is "broken in the hands of the priest and crushed by the teeth of the faithful." Qtd. in Noble, 102. As I discuss in chapter one, ever since Wyclif, it was also a standard trope of anti-transubstantiation polemic to dwell on the gross implications of digesting Christ.

his Paracelsian medicinal “flesh” (i.e. sexual intercourse) because of a superstitious adherence to Papist and Galenist taboos that treat the body as off-limits. In either case, the speaker’s mistrust of women stems from a paranoid and covertly dualistic ideology: he reifies women as meat and then despises them for being “fleshy.” The dualism of this poem flatly contradicts Donne’s idea of *communion*. Its speaker is a foil, whose rhetorical strategies are self-protecting, aimed at masking his own hurt and alienation. This self-protection is quite apparent in the affected way the speaker dismisses true love because people from lower classes seem to have it: “Ends love in this, that my man / Can be as happy as I can, if he can / Endure the short scorn of a bridegroom’s play?” (15-17). It’s clearly absurd, in other words, that a servant (“my man”) might experience something that the speaker cannot. Love must be a fairy tale. In the first stanza, the speaker tells us, “I have lov’d, and got, and told, / But should I love, get, tell, till I were old, / I should not find that hidden mystery” (3-5). He has desired to find the sacrament of love, but has not found it. It simply infuriates him that commoners quite commonly have happy marriages. To protect himself from the idea that he might be missing something, the speaker has to dismiss his “man” as a naïve idiot.

For the same reason, he downgrades all women to the status of mere flesh. He disguises this self-protection as a “natural” abhorrence towards the abject. The speaker’s rhetorically excessive repulsion, though, calls to mind the rhetorical “othering” both Protestants and Catholics employed when they recoiled at each other’s sacramental theology. Like a paranoid Protestant horrified by the host, he can only see flesh when he should see sacrament; like a Papist-Galenist, he is revolted by the very flesh that might cure him. Through this speaker, Donne coyly critiques two related and erroneous forms of anti-materialist sacramental theology: a Protestant hysteria that any fleshy substance implies cannibalism, and a more covert Catholic

one, that must abandon the real-world materiality of the elements in favour of a literally divine substance. Invoking both sacramental pathologies at once, the speaker of “Love’s Alchymie” can only see women as flesh, and flesh only as a sign of horror and death. This doubly-perverse anti-sacramental attitude, which grounds the speaker’s chauvinist spite, is deeply at odds with Donne’s understanding of the human being as a *communion* of body and soul.

“Love’s Alchymie” is the poetic opposite of “Aire and Angels.” In the one poem, the beloved is a physical incarnation of divine love, at once a real body and a transcendent spirit; in the other, *all* women become perversely untranscendent, bodies that move but have no soul. The speaker of “Aire and Angels” thus expresses an idea of *communion* that reflects Donne’s sacramental ideal, while the speaker of “Love’s Alchymie” acts as a foil, voicing the pathologies of one who cannot recognize the dual-nature of human beings. In both of those poems, as we have seen, Donne draws on eucharistic theology, which, when rightly understood, expresses exactly that material/spiritual double-ness of persons. “The Funerall” and “The Relique,” to which I turn now, function similarly as ideological opposites. “The Funerall” echoes the anti-sacramental perspective of “Love’s Alchymie,” though in much more subtle and attractive ways. “The Relique” more closely parallels “Aire and Angels,” concluding with a strong assertion of the *communion* of body and soul. Both of these poems operate around the same conceit, which they use to imagine a metaphysical limbo between life and death. Both begin with a male speaker tying a “subtle wreath” (“Funerall,” 6) of his beloved’s “bright hair” (“Relique,” 6) around his arm. The speaker’s intention in both cases is to be buried with this hair, and for the hair to preserve a connection with his lover after his death. The two poems, however, have radically different tones, and develop the conceit in radically different ways.

“The Funerall,” though it begins by treating the hair in explicitly sacramental terms, ultimately backs away from those features of sacramental theology that are most appealing to Donne: the co-presence of body and soul and the simultaneous cooperative action of multiple agencies. At first, when he address the man who “comes to shroud me” (1), the speaker wants the hair to be treated as a consecrated sign:

The mystery, the signe you must not touch,
 For ‘tis my outward Soule,
 Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,
 Will leave this to controule
 And keep these limbes, her Provinces, from dissolution. (4-8)

The hair is an “outward” embodiment of the “Soule,” a “mystery” (read sacrament) that represents the divine on earth. Like the eucharist, which keeps the “limbs” of Christ’s Church “from dissolution” for the period of his absence, the hair sustains the speaker’s body after his beloved’s ascension to heaven. Like the “mystery” of the eucharist, the hair promises a presence that dwells in and even animates the body of the one who receives it. The hair even seems able to perpetually preserve the body from decay. As Donne reminds us in “Death’s Duel,” though, it is Christ alone who is saved from bodily decay.³⁴ Thus, this bit of theological overreach in “The Funerall” might already hint that the speaker is not going to follow through on the logic he at first invokes. The focus of the speaker, after all, has subtly shifted from spiritual intimacy with another to the preservation of *his* body. It is not entirely surprising, therefore, that the following stanza entirely changes the function of the hair. Now it is not a sacrament, but a tool to chain him and control him. His lover’s hair extends itself into his body like a nervous system (“the sinewy thread my brain lets fall,” 9). Yet this is not the welcomed mode of indwelling mediated by the sacraments, it is an imprisonment:

³⁴“It was a prerogative peculiar to Christ, not to die this death, not to see corruption,” *Sermons*, 10.236.

... she meant that I
 By this should know my pain,
 As prisoners then are manacled, when they're condemn'd to die. (14-16)

The hair, which wraps around his arm like a shackle, no longer promises his preservation, it signifies his condemnation and imminent death. Like the mummy-flesh of "Love's Alchymie," the hair draws on a set of eucharistic associations, but ultimately has the opposite effect of the sacrament. The beloved's locks possess and imprison the speaker rather than mediating his co-presence with her. The hair also ultimately fails to achieve a reunion of body and soul. There is no resurrection in the poem. The woman does not return to her body, and though she controls the speaker, he does not return to life. His body is simply, eerily, preserved. This is not *communion* of body and soul, but the *possession* of one by the other.

Having so radically distorted the function of "sacrament" within the poem, the speaker presents himself as suddenly struck by a Reformed iconoclastic impulse. He claims to be worried that the hair, if exhumed, might encourage heretical Catholic devotion to a relic:

...bury it with me,
 For since I am
 Love's martyr, it might breed idolatrie,
 If into other hands these reliques came. (17-20)

Superficially here, he appeals to the Reformation anxiety that Catholic sacraments took advantage of lay superstition and encouraged idolatry. The appeal, though, is entirely rhetorical. He clearly has no interest in correcting the superstition. In fact, he clings to it himself as a way of exerting his own control over the woman who binds him, but will not give herself over to him. In the poem's final lines, the speaker of "The Funerall" thus falls into the same possessiveness that he attributes to his beloved: "since you would save none of mee," he jealously resolves, "I bury some of you" (24). What began as a desire for sacramental intimacy thus ends with a desire to possess and control. The speaker retaliates, we might say, against the control he feels the woman

exerting on him. There is something pseudo-eucharistic about this retribution, since it entails a version of mutual interpenetration by the lovers. The woman's hair takes over the man's body, possessing him as his "Soule" (5); the man "buries" a piece of the woman in his grave. This interpenetration, though, is deeply antagonistic. It figures a perpetual competition between body and soul, and between man and woman. Each opposite tries to command and possess the other. There is no *communion* between natures or persons.

"The Relique," takes the same sacramental conceit in another direction. It begins with the most compellingly erotic image of an exhumed body in English poetry:

When my grave is broke up againe
 Some second ghest to entertain,
 (For graves have learn'd that woman-head,
 To be to more than one a Bed)
 And he that digs it, spies
 A bracelet of bright haire about the bone,
 Will he not let'us alone,
 And think that there a loving couple lies,
 Who thought that this device might be some way
 To make their soules, at the last busie day,
 Meet at this grave, and make a little stay? (1-11)

The sacralization of the hair is much more subtle than in "The Funerall." It is the gravedigger rather than the speaker himself who interprets the hair as sacred. Even so, the hair is more properly sacramental than it is in "The Funerall." It is not a metonymy of the beloved, a piece of her body used to control or "bury" her, but a "device" that will recall her in her entirety. In Donne's deeply moving conceit, the hair will enable one last fleeting encounter after the resurrection, after which, according to the standard reading of Mark 12:25,³⁵ sexual intercourse will no longer be a feature of human existence. The hair in "The Relique" is thus eucharistic precisely in the way that it is not in "The Funerall": the hair is a seal, a special mediator of

³⁵ "For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven." See also Matthew 22:30. Donne, though, in his own preaching, suggests that sex might be a feature of the resurrected life.

presence in the present moment, but also a guarantee of a perfect consummation that will occur at the resurrection, when at last the body and soul are perfectly integrated. This speaker wants something different from the speaker in “The Funerall.” He desires to reunite with his beloved, body and soul, and “make a little stay,” even if that stay is only momentary. He has no aspiration to possess or control her. His desire for the gravedigger to rebury his corpse and the hair-bracelet is unlike the other speaker’s desire to “bury” his beloved. In “The Relique,” the speaker fantasizes that the hair will make it seem to the gravedigger as if the two lovers are buried together: “Will he not let us alone, / And think that there a loving couple lies” (7-8). He suggests, moreover, that the hair somehow really makes the gravedigger’s misapprehension true, since he slips into the plural “us.” “Will he not let us alone,” the speaker says, as if the two lovers’ bodies were actually side-by-side. He wants to stay buried, in other words, because it will prolong the time he gets to “lie” with his beloved. There are thus two kinds of “being together” hoped for in this first stanza. The first is a kind of spiritual proximity, a “nearness” mediated by the sacramental sign of the hair. Like the consecrated elements of the eucharist, this hair bracelet effects what it signifies: co-presence, the “us” the lovers share in the grave. But also like the elements of the eucharist, this sign effects a presence that, though real, remains not yet fully realized. The hair promises a second and fuller kind of “being together,” only attainable at the resurrection, which Donne figures not as a perfect union with God, but as the perfect *communion* of lovers.

In the second stanza of “The Relique,” Donne develops this conceit in some strikingly playful ways. Donne’s playfulness, though, should not be confused with desacralization. For Donne, a “heretical” joke can be a sincere expression of devotion to God, or a compelling illustration of love for a woman. In “The Relique,” in fact, we see just this kind of profane play

revealing a much more sincere sanctification of erotic desire than the speaker of “The Funerall” was capable of expressing. The gravedigger, Donne fancies, lives in a land “where mis-devotion doth command” (13) and the inhabitants have backslidden into Catholic idolatry. The workman therefore brings the two bodies “to the bishop or the king, / To make us relics” (15-16). Unlike the speaker of “The Funerall,” the speaker here does not pretend to have any Protestant concern about this superstitious behaviour. In fact, he runs with the heresy, enjoying his veneration: “Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalene, and I / A something else thereby.” It’s a stunning, if coy, comparison: in the same breath he declares himself an erotic Christ and hints at a sexual relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. Yet even in this playful blasphemy, the poem does not fall into mockery. The punch-line, in part by being so oblique (“a something else thereby”), invites both the addressed beloved and the reader to take the joke in stride. Its goal is not to offend, but to reveal the speaker’s exuberant and attractive rhetorical abandon. Yet beneath this metaphor’s almost adolescent charm, there appears a thematically appropriate allusion to the eucharist. The host, after all, especially in late medieval and early modern Catholicism, was treated as the one bodily relic Christ “left behind.”³⁶ Insofar as the speaker presents himself as a relic and as a “Christ,” he also invites us to think of him as an erotic eucharist. When women and men come from all around to adore him (19), he is as much like a wafer displayed in a monstrance as he is like some saintly bone in a reliquary. At one level this metaphor is remarkably self-aggrandizing, of course, but at another it expresses the same desire for intimacy that animates Christian devotion, most especially in the eucharist. In the sacrament, there is indeed a sense in which communicants do become Christ. Though they take bread into their bodies, it is actually Christ who takes them into his. In “The Relique,” Donne redeploys

³⁶ See G.J.C. Snoek’s exhaustive comparison of the similarity between medieval relics and the eucharist in *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist*.

something of this logic in an erotic context. The speaker offers himself as a Christ to his lover, and wants her to be his dearly beloved saint. There is an assertion of male authority in this wish that might sit uneasily with some modern readers, but it also reflects a desire for the kind of mutual incorporation that goes on in the eucharist, where the interpenetration of persons does not require either to be erased. The two can exist in *communion*, as body and soul, or as the two natures of the sacrament.

“The Relique,” in contrast with “The Funerall,” draws on the eucharist to resist the idea that erotic desire essentially aims to erase or possess the other. As part of this resistance, it moves towards its conclusion with a careful consideration of the word “miracle.” Playing on the common Protestant objection that transubstantiation made “miracles” so commonplace that they were emptied of meaning, Donne juggles the different senses of the word: “...since at such time miracles are sought, / I would have that age by this paper taught / What miracles wee harmlesse lovers wrought” (20-21). The speaker is concerned that these fictional future people might need some help identifying the real miracle of love. It is ironic, of course, that as Donne invokes an anxiety about multiplying miracles, he himself multiplies the word “miracle” four times in the very lines that do so (20, 21, 31, 33). Yet this multiplication still leads to a rather Protestant move, in which the speaker directs his audience to turn away from relic and host and towards the written word. Likewise, just as Protestants wanted Catholics to redirect their devotion from the “miraculous” host to the miraculous human being scripture is about, the last stanza of “The Relique” redirects its readers to the particular human being about which it testifies. There are, the speaker says, signs and wonders that reveal the divine nature of lover’s romance—their virginity for one thing (29, “Our hands ne’er toucht the seals”)—but these are not the true miracles of the poem. As Christ himself is the ultimate miracle recorded in the gospels, so the beloved is the one

true miracle in “The Relique.” All the “miracles we did” (32), the speaker claims, are subordinate to the “miracle she was” (33). The simple fact of her—the reality of this other person, at once a body and a soul—is what leaves him speechless: “now alas, / All measure, and all language, I should pass, / Should I tell what a miracle she was” (31-3).

Donne beautifully adapts this Protestant concern that all the “miracles” of Catholic tradition—images, relics, ritual, and most especially the host—distracted believers from intimacy with God and with Christ. The sign, Protestants feared, could take the place of what it signified. “The Relique” borrows this concern, but it does not respond to it by rejecting the idea of sacramental signs altogether. “The bracelet of bright hair” that begins the poem, instead of replacing the beloved, brings both speaker and reader to the person herself. The poem narrates a passage from material sign to a genuine encounter with the other. Unlike “The Funerall,” it avoids seeing all signs, or all persons, as agents in competition with each other. With the same kind of complexity that operates in the eucharistic celebration, “The Relique” carefully navigates the interaction of sign and signified, self and other, desiring and being desired. It does so with what we might call an attitude of welcome, which never sees the presence of one thing as a threat to another. It eschews both Platonic disembodiment and the antagonisms of “The Funerall.” It achieves this via Donne’s careful appropriation of the doctrine of the resurrection, which Donne sees as promising the eventual perfect *communion* of body with soul, and of persons with each other. “The Relique” thus answers “The Funerall” much as the promise of the resurrection answers the fear of decomposition in “Death’s Duel.” It is driven by the same hope in a final re-gathering of body and soul that Donne expresses in his sermons.

In a sermon on John 19:26, preached at Lincoln’s Inn, Donne provides an explanation of the resurrection that helps explain the doctrine’s significance in “The Relique” and in Donne’s

work more broadly. For Donne, only the risen body is able to achieve a perfect communion with the soul. According to this sermon, people always experience this world in a self-divided way.

The soul wanders from the body because its desires carry it away from the body's present location. "You are not all here," Donne tells his congregants:

You are here now, hearing me, and yet you are thinking that you have heard a better Sermon somewhere else, of this text before;...you are here, and you remember your selves that now yee think of it, this had been the fittest time, now, when every body else is at Church, to have made such and such a private visit; and because you would bee there, you are there."³⁷

When the trump sounds, Donne says, this internal discord will end. Then the desires of the soul will accord with the goods and even location of the body. Donne declares to his congregants, "you cannot say so perfectly, so entirely now, as at the Resurrection, *Ego*, I am here; I, body and soul."³⁸ What the bracelet of hair does in "The Relique," then, is to promise this eschatological realization of a perfectly integrated personhood. Like the eucharist, the hair mediates a certain kind of presence in the "now," but it also betokens a version of embodied subjectivity that resembles the resurrected *communion* of body and soul. The poem thus expresses the speaker's aspiration to love his beloved with a simultaneously bodily and spiritual wholeness that goes beyond the normal capacities of human beings in this life.

For Ramie Targoff, both Donne's sermon and poems like "The Relique" express a "fantasy of being fully present." They draw on Donne's "desire to seize this moment and not the next, to isolate and then luxuriate in a particular instance in time, to be all there in body and soul."³⁹ Targoff essentially shares my perspective that Donne sees the soul and body as a mutually dependent pair. Since she develops her reading from the moments in Donne's oeuvre like the sermon quoted above, however, Targoff tends to see any diversion of attention away

³⁷ *Sermons*, 3.110.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *John Donne: Body and Soul*, 23.

from the present moment as a threat to Donne's ideal of bodily and spiritual presence. For her, Donne "luxuriates" in "this moment" and—significantly—"not the next." The appeal of her interpretation is apparent. Who has not experienced the kind of self-division Donne describes in his sermon, being physically in one place and spiritually somewhere else? Teachers of literature, no less than homilists, regularly encounter this kind of division in their audience. If only we could have our souls solely in the "now," not led away from our bodies by the oppressive division of memory or fantasy, would this not achieve the kind of body-soul communion Donne's work longs for? It might, in a sense. This presentism, though, is not actually the solution Donne proposes, even in a poem like "The Relique." Indeed, if Targoff is right about Donne's desire to write within a single moment (and not some other), we might reasonably expect his poems to present or meditate on such a singular moment, or at least one continuous block of time. We might expect poems like "Ode to a Grecian Urn" or one of Herrick's poems to Julia. In the case of "The Relique," however, we see a speaker who moves between at least four different temporal settings: his own present, when he ties the bracelet of hair around his arm; the past he remembers sharing with his lover (mostly in stanza three); the resurrection, when he and his lover will "make a little stay"; and that putative future that takes up most of the poem, when his skeleton is accidentally exhumed. Of these temporal settings, the speaker spends by far the fewest words addressing his own present, which only *directly* appears in the final three lines ("...but *now* alas, / All measure, and all language, I should pass, / Should I tell...", my italics). The poem is almost all temporally deferred: the speaker imagines the perfection of love at the end of time, he fantasizes about himself and his beloved being "adored" in one possible future, and he remembers the miracle that his lover "was." The speaker is radically extended, though not "dispersed" in a way that undermines the *communion* he both hopes for and represents. The

poem rather knits these different moments together as an organic whole. It does not desire to be “here, and here only,” but rather for the various “heres,” “nows,” “thens,” and “theres” of the text to be incorporated in such a way that the presence of one does not require the absence of another.

This desire in “The Relique,” that the intellectual faculties of the soul integrate different moments in time into the self, is not singular in Donne’s work. Donne’s preaching, in fact, is unusual in the period for the emphasis it places on memory as the primary means of achieving salvation. Donne, like many theologians of his day, draws on the Augustinian notion that the three faculties of the soul—understanding, will, and memory—correspond to the tripartite being of the Trinity. This correspondence was for Augustine and those who took up his idea tangible evidence that man is made in God’s image. Donne stands out, though, for claiming that of these three faculties, memory, and not understanding, confers salvation:⁴⁰

Of our perverseness in both faculties, understanding, and will, God may complain, but as much of our memory, for, for the rectifying of the will, the understanding must be rectified, and that implies great difficulty; But the memory is so familiar, and so present, and so ready a faculty, as will always answer, if we will but speake to it, and aske it, *what hath God done for us, or for others*. The art of *salvation* is but the art of *memory*.⁴¹

These assertions complicate any idea of Donne as being “in the moment,” since memory, much more than understanding or will, seems necessarily to threaten some division of the body that is “here” from a mind that is “there,” at least if we use the spatial metaphors that Targoff does. In fact, the problem Donne identifies in his sermon at Lincoln’s Inn, that he and his audience are “not all here,” does not stem from their failing to “live in the moment.” It stems from the fact that the memory is *directed away* from the present situation of the body instead of towards it. Donne’s putative congregant “remembers [that] this had been the fittest time, now, when every

⁴⁰ See Jeffrey Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 12.

⁴¹ *Sermons*, 2.73

body else is at Church, to have made such and such a private visit.” So, Donne says, “because you would bee there, you are there.” Donne’s privileging of memory, though, means that the antidote to mental distraction is not banishing all thoughts of the past from our minds. Rather, we ought to bring our memories to bear on the present moment. It is the memory, of course, rather than the will, that Donne treats as the “ready faculty” of salvation.

Achsah Guibbory provides an especially helpful articulation of the significance of memory in Donne’s work. She points out how memory, for Donne, does not draw the soul away from the body or the present, but actually unites the past and present self together as a single entity. “Most importantly,” she writes, “the ‘recollection’ of memory is an image, an anticipation, of the resurrection man will have at the Apocalypse, when God will ‘re-collect’ all the ‘scattered’ grains of dust, ‘re-compact’ the body, and finally ‘re-unite’ body and soul.”⁴² If we apply this observation to our reading of “The Relique,” it simply becomes impossible to see the poem as aiming primarily to “luxuriate” in a single moment. Rather, the text longs to understand how different moments in time might come together in the unity of a person, whose body is tied to the present moment, but whose soul extends across time by means of his memory. In “The Relique,” after all, the true miracle is “the miracle she *was*”: not the immediacy of the beloved in some particular moment of special intimacy, but the completeness of her *whole* self, in body and soul, but also across time. “The Relique” does not merely imagine the perfect knowledge and mutuality of a blessed moment; its vision is grander even than that. The fantasy of “The Relique” is that any “moment” of intimacy between the lovers will somehow remain present in all the others, even to the end of the age, when their souls will “make a little stay.”

⁴² “John Donne and Memory as the ‘Art of Salvation’,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 43.4 (1980): 274. Guibbory’s quotes here are from *Sermons*, 7.103.

It is now easy to see how closely “The Relique” mirrors the theological impulses of the eucharist. Any one iteration of the eucharist draws into itself with both the historical life of Christ and every past and future celebration of the sacrament. As Guibbory also points out, Donne himself is quite clear that memory is not only the “art of salvation,” but also the most significant mental faculty employed in the Christian sacraments. Donne sees Christian ceremonies as better than the Jewish ones, she explains, because “they place more emphasis on memory.” As Donne understood it, Old Testament ritual “had reference mainly to future occurrences,” while the sacraments of the new covenant, in Donne’s words, “do most respect things formerly done, and so they awaken, and work upon our memory.”⁴³ As I have stressed throughout this dissertation, the eucharist is never solely focused on experiencing intimacy with God in the present moment; it is also about connecting that particular experience of presence with a narrative that progresses throughout Christian history. It looks back to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it knits the body of the Church together across time, and it looks forward to the final consummation of history in the resurrection. Donne clearly and deeply values this layered temporality. Donne’s poetry can usefully be considered sacramental as it endeavours to integrate different moments in time, via the remembering faculties of the soul, with and within the immanent “now” of the fleshly body. For Donne, enigmatically, even the anticipation that goes on in the sacrament is something performed by the memory, since, as Guibbory puts it, “the mind is able to remember events which have not yet happened.” “The wiseman,” Donne claims in one sermon, “places all goodnesse in this faculty, the memory; properly nothing can fall into the memory, but that which is past, and yet [the author of *Sirach*] says, ‘Whatso ever thou takest in hand, remember the end, and thou shalt never doe amisse.’”

⁴³ “Memory as the ‘Art of Salvation’,” 262-3. Quote from *Sermons*, 2.259.

For Donne, “[t]he end cannot be yet come, and yet we are bid to remember that.”⁴⁴ Memory, as Donne acknowledges, can indeed create profound divisions within the self, since it has the power to separate the mental faculties of the soul from their bodily “here.” Yet this does not imply that Donne sees the memory, or an attentiveness to past or future, as necessarily self-divisive. Indeed, the memory, for Donne is “so present” and “so familiar” because it has the power to re-collect the self’s extension across time, even its projection into the future.⁴⁵ Memory, that fundamentally sacramental capacity, brings the present materiality of the self together with its immaterial continuity over time, gathering human identity together in a way that anticipates the resurrection.

As different as the *Holy Sonnets* are in subject matter from Donne’s erotic poetry, they share his “secular” poetry’s fascination with memory and resurrection. Almost all of the *Holy Sonnets*, in fact, quite carefully perform that paradoxical process of “remembering the end”—“end” here meaning both Donne’s death and the final resurrection of all. The point of this remembrance, in all the *Holy Sonnets*, is to spur the speaker towards authentic repentance. Repentance, of course, is the first step by which the fallen self “turns” from his separation from God, and also from his own divided nature, and begins to take on the kind of Christ-like *communion* figured in the elements of the eucharist. In many passages of scripture, repentance leads to God forgetting the sinful past of a believer.⁴⁶ Understood according to this paradigm, the atonement that follows repentance would nicely fit Targoff’s assessment of Donne’s presentism. The resurrected Christian person would experience a perfect divorce from the past of his fallen self. He would indeed, at the end of history, be “all here” and *only* here in the presence of God. In “If pois’nous minerals,” Donne does briefly entertain this model of atonement as forgetting.

⁴⁴ *Sermons*, 9.84-85 (Qtd. in Guibbory, 268). Donne’s reference is from *Sirach* 7:36.

⁴⁵ *Sermons*, 2.73.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Isaiah 43:25 (also quoted in Hebrews 8:12): “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

There, the sacramental blood of Christ flows together with the speaker's tears to "make a heavenly Lethean flood" that will "drown in it my sinnes blacke memory" (11-12). His final petition to God, moreover, is a request that "Thou wilt forget" (14). Ultimately, though, this sonnet is an outlier in the collection. All the other *Holy Sonnets* actively stress the power of remembrance, both on the part of the speaker and on the part of God.

In those *Holy Sonnets*, repentance does not destroy the past, but redeems it and redirects it (as the New Testament word *μετάνοια*, "a *change* of mind," suggests). Repentance, in fact, *is* a kind of memory. We see this emphasis in "What if this present were the world's last night," which is really just a series of remembrances: the speaker "remembers" the ultimate judgement of the world on its "last night" (1), he reflects on his former life of sinful "idolatry" (9), and he recalls the "beauteous form" of Christ on the cross, which "assures a piteous mind" (14). This final line, importantly, reminds that speaker that this remembering is reciprocal. He remembers Christ's sacrifice, but Christ also has the speaker in "mind." The consolation is not that Christ will forget the speaker's sin, but that Christ's remembrance of the speaker, sins and all, will be "piteous." In "Since she whom I loved," similarly, remembrance remains paramount. The speaker, understandably, has no desire to forget his former earthly spouse, even though this remembrance threatens to "put [God] out" of first position in his heart (14). Memory is clearly capable of "dividing" the speaker, since it threatens to distract him from his present attention to God, and even to his turn his devotion away from its appropriate end. Yet memory itself is not the problem. Rather, memory must be directed so that the devotee can retain it in a spiritually healthy way. Thus it is actually the speaker's recollection of his spouse that directs him to a more intimate experience of God: "Here the admiring her my mind did whet / To seek thee, God; so streams do show the head" (6-7). He remembers his love for his wife, and that helps him

understand how to love God. Even more importantly, the memory of his wife helps him understand how God loves and remembers him. It is no accident that, following the speaker's opening remembrance of his wife, the poem increasingly uses metaphors of courtship to understand God's actions. God "dost woo" his soul (10), and "fears" any inconstancy with a "tender jealousy" (13). Thus, as in "What if this present," the speaker quite consciously moves from a recollection of the past to a deeper experience of divine intimacy "in the moment" of the poem. In both texts, there is a potential friction between past and present, a danger that memory might run counter to the appropriate goods of the moment, but the solution on offer in both is not some attempt to be all and only "here." It is rather for the "thens" and the "theres" of the past to co-exist in *communion* with the "here" of the body and the "now" of the present thought.

I have been arguing that Donne sees the relationship between the body and the soul as a *communion* analogous to the double-identity of the eucharistic elements. My point has also been to clarify that this analogy should not lead us to confuse Donne's desire for the body and soul to be fully present *to* each other with the idea that he desires them to exist *only* in the present moment. This is an important distinction to make as it helps specify what exactly Donne means by "presence." In one sense, Donne's ideal of *communion* between body and soul is a desire for a certain kind of presence, a mode of subjectivity in which the physical and spiritual come together and are present to each other. Because Donne makes memory the principal faculty of the soul, however, the presence at work in the *communion* of body and soul cannot exclusively be registered in terms of temporal or spatial proximity. For Donne, insofar as the soul is governed by memory, the soul can never simply be "here" and "here only." We get a sense of this in "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward," where though Christ's sufferings on the cross "be from mine eye, / They're present yet unto my memory" (33-34). In that poem, it is only because his

memory “bends toward the East,” that is, towards Christ’s historical death in Jerusalem, that his body’s physical orientation “towards the West” (9) can be understood as sign of presence before God rather than an indication of his absence:

Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
 They’re present yet unto my memory,
 For that looks towards them; and thou look’st towards mee,
 O Saviour, as thou hang’st upon the tree;
 I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
 Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave. (33-38)

Only as the speaker’s memory looks toward Christ (and away from his bodily orientation) does he recognize his own position as the object of Christ’s gaze. In the light of that gaze, the speaker’s turned back becomes a sign of submission, a willingness to “receive / Corrections,” rather than a sign of distance or disobedience. What Donne presents here, then, is not a devotional opposition between the body and the soul, between physical westward motion and a spiritual turn east, but a more complex devotional movement. Memory directs the self towards the past in order that the present moment may be re-understood as more present to God than it at first appeared to be. The speaker can only become present to God by projecting his presence into more than one physical and temporal location. In “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward,” we could say, being fully “here” in the presence of God depends on being not *only* “here.”

In Donne criticism more generally, and especially in more recent considerations of Donne’s sacramentality, “presence” has not been treated with this kind of complexity. If critics have often mistakenly read Herbert as always meaning one thing, they have similarly misread Donne as being all in one place. Donne’s desire for presence, in other words, has been confused with a desire to be “here” in one manner only, and not in any others. For Ramie Targoff, as we have already seen, Donne is all about the “here” and “now.” Ryan Netzley and Kimberly Johnson, similarly, read Donne as trying to be “present” solely in the text. For Netzley, the

“here” of Donne’s text is experiential. In the *Holy Sonnets* particularly, as he reads them, Donne is interested in discovering an affective encounter with God that occurs for its own sake, not as a means to salvation or pleasure. For Netzley, even expressions of fear in Donne’s religious poetry have an unqualified immanence, and do not gesture at any spiritual lack “elsewhere” than the experience itself.⁴⁷ For Kimberly Johnson, the “here” of the text is rhetorical. As she reads Donne, the goal of his extended conceits is actually to draw the reader’s attention away from their meaning, such that we come to appreciate its poetic wit as simply “here” for its own sake and not what it signifies. To make these arguments, though, Netzley and Johnson both depend on an understanding of “presence” as unadulterated immanence. Like Targoff, they both treat Donne’s desire to be “here” as if it were also a desire to be nowhere else. Donne’s atypical exhalation of memory, however, reveals that he does not understand presence in such either-or terms. Like Herbert, Donne does not think one thing must always take the place of another. For him, in fact, being physically or temporally here does not exclude the possibility of being somewhere else as well.

In fact, precisely because Donne comprehends the relationship between body and soul as a sacramental relationship, it follows quite naturally that he would conceive its presence as involving tangible immediacy *as well as* temporal and spatial deferral. None of the presences in the eucharist, as Donne himself stresses, are ever simply “here” for the communicant. The material qualities of the elements are perhaps the most straightforwardly present entities in the Protestant eucharist, but even their presence is not simply there for its own sake, but to refer to the spiritually nourishing qualities of Christ. An exclusive focus on their here-ness undermines what they are here for (this is the basic error that Netzley and Johnson make in their critical

⁴⁷ “Donne’s model of anxious reading enacts a devotion without hope, and instead displays a fear converted from a reactive phenomenon into an affective act that one can love as such and does not seek its own transcendence.” *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist*, 148.

appropriations of the eucharist). In the eucharist Christ himself, likewise, is present “here” in a manner and present “there” in another. Spatially, Christ can only be “here” personally and intimately to each believer because he has ascended to “there,” heaven. Indeed, as long as Christ remained physically present on earth in his human body, he could not have been really present to each communicant in the sacrament, since his physical presence can only be in one place at a time. Instead, it is only because he has ascended to the seat of authority at the right of the Father that Christ can make himself present in the sacraments and, thereby, in his body the Church. He must be there to be here. Likewise, temporally, Christ’s presence at the moment of reception depends upon and refers to both his bodily sacrifice in the past (which for Donne is remembered but not strictly repeated) and his bodily return at the end of time. Thus Christ’s presence in the sacrament is not “all now” any more than it is “all here.” Insofar as Christ is temporally present in the eucharist, that presence cannot exist except in relation to its past and its future, a relation, moreover, that Donne sees as realized by the memory, the soul’s principal and sacramental faculty.

What is at stake in this argument? If Donne sees the *communion* of material bread and spiritual body in the eucharist as an analogy for the ideal relation between body and soul, the *communion* of the self cannot be wholly buffered either spatially or temporally. Indeed, the temporal presence of Donne’s “sacramental” self is grounded in the memory of past and future. For the Christian subject, moreover, these pasts and futures are not even personally remembered, they are narrated to the communicant by a historical community and its scriptures. For Donne, therefore, the self in *communion* cannot exist apart from either its dependence on others or from its need to situate any present moment within the long story of time. To read Donne’s work as striving to live “in the moment,” then, or to treat his poetry as having an exclusively textual

presence is utterly unsacramental. Doing so projects back on Donne the desires of the buffered self. We can only read Donne as “in the moment,” or in the text alone, if we transpose our own modern inclinations to see fissures in the boundaries of the self exclusively as threats. It is only possible to read Donne this way, in other words, if we confuse our understanding of presence with his. In Donne’s work, though, the ideal of *communion* is not a self-protective fantasy, but a vision of selfhood as constituted through a peaceable duality. Understood as a *communion*, the human is present in *both* soul and body, in the then *and* the now, as an individual and as a member of a community.

Poet and Text

As there is a communion of saints so there is a communication of saints. Think not heaven a charterhouse where men, who onely of all creatures are enabled by god to speak, must not speak to one another. The lord of heaven is *verbum*, the word, and his servants there talk of us here and pray to him for us.

Sermons 3.122

The eucharist, as Donne understands it, expresses the essential double-ness of Christ’s simultaneously human and divine nature. The sacramental meal has at once a material and a spiritual reality, and because it has *both* these natures it makes present the two-natured Christ. The eucharist, therefore, because it manifests that vital *communion* of Christ’s two natures, becomes for Donne the preeminent paradigm for understanding the modes of double-ness that make up every human person as an image of Christ. The two sacramental pairs I have been discussing—physical and spiritual; body and soul—accordingly correspond to the mutuality of Christ’s two natures revealed in the eucharist. Donne’s poetry, we have seen, expresses this mutual dependence through a network of explicitly eucharistic metaphors, allusions to sacramental liturgy, and gestures to the complex problems taken up by sacramental theology. In Donne’s work, when physical and spiritual expressions of love coexist interdependently, they are, like the eucharist itself, an image of Christ’s two natures. Likewise, in Donne’s erotic and devotional writing, personhood becomes Christological; body and soul act together as the material and spiritual substances that

make up the self. Sexuality and selfhood are sacramental because, like the sacrament of the altar, they mirror the reciprocal and peaceful coexistence of the natures that make up Christ's own person.

Yet if Christ is man and God at once, he is also the "word." Christ is the *verbum* of God, as Donne puts it in another sermon preached at Lincoln's Inn, quoted above. And because Christ is also "word," the two-natured eucharistic presence of Christ also becomes for Donne a paradigm for understanding how the poet presents himself in words. Donne, I claim, sees the relation of author and text as a poetic analogue to, an extension of, the sacramental relation of body and soul. Author and text are an interdependent and mutually constitutive pair. As we have seen already, the speakers in Donne's poems often desire to make themselves present in a material object, or to mediate their lover's presence using one. This desire, though, reflects a desire inherent in Donne's poetry, to make the poem a special mediation of the author's presence. It is important to clarify, however, that in Donne's work, this sacramental treatment of the text does not reflect a desire for self-protective instantiation, as if the poet's only goal in writing was to transfer himself into some supposedly more stable literary form. For Donne, rather, the act of writing makes the self porous. The poet "presents" himself in his texts, but he is simultaneously shaped, defined, and constructed by the properties of language, which always escape his full control. Poetry, much as it does for Southwell and Herbert, acts for Donne as a means by which the author gives his presence to be read, by a lover, by a reader, by God, or all three. Like Herbert, Donne conceives the "material" properties of poetry as the bread of literary signification; they are the material signs that convey the author's "spiritual" presence. But just as Christ presents himself as bread in order to entangle his presence with the physical world and with a body of others, Donne treats the ideal poem as an exercise in self-giving. The poet exists in *communion* with a linguistic body that cannot be bounded within the self, and by doing so opens up his own subjectivity both to discourse, which necessarily exceeds his autonomy, and to others, who receive, faithfully or otherwise, Donne's literary sacrament of words. The self thus becomes "present" in a more homely sense, as a gift.

As we might expect from a poet who so regularly ventriloquizes voices other than his, Donne often articulates the sacramental relation between author and text rather obliquely, especially in his erotic poems. A number of those poems invoke the same sacramental debate Donne draws on to critique the conventions of Petrarchanism. As I discuss above, where I develop an argument made by Theresa DiPasquale, many of Donne's poems, including "Love's Deitie," present a speaker with a pathologically Petrarchan preference for purely spiritual rather than physical love. In that poem, in fact, non-reciprocation and the rejection of sexual consummation become *the* defining features of "true" poetic love. For this reason, at the end of the poem, the speaker cannot really bring himself to believe that "she whom I love, should love me" (28). Following Pasquale, I showed above how Donne connects this preference for absence with Roman Catholicism. From a Protestant perspective, the speaker of "Love's Deitie" looks a lot like a Papist clinging to idolatrous conventions, even though those conventions stand in the way of the relationship he apparently desires. The speaker ends up falling into an absurd position because he is too concerned with only one term in the body-soul pair. He loves the idea of love, but cannot love a woman. As Donne's poems reflect on the nature of signs, we frequently encounter similar negative examples. Much as the speaker of "Love's Deitie" becomes enamored with a set of conventions that take the place of a real person, many of Donne's other speakers get confused about the relationship between themselves and the signs that they intend to signify themselves. These speakers frequently fall into one semiotic extreme or the other, either treating the material or poetic sign as if it were identical to the "I" it signifies, or regarding it as totally unmoored from any real relation to that signified. In fact, Donne regularly invokes Thomist and Zwinglian thinking as opposite forms of a single semiotic pathology, and will sometimes even have the same voice occupy both of these extremes within the same poem. In either case, the error is to privilege one term in the sign-signified pair at the expense of the other.

In “Twicknam Garden,” for example, the speaker shifts from a Protestant to a radically Catholic treatment of signs. He begins by expressing a typically Petrarchan erotic abjection. His love unrequited, he comes, “blasted with sighs, and surrounded with teares” (1), to the erotic space of a garden. The speaker admits, however, that he cannot “Receive such balmes” (4) as this garden is meant to provide because he brings a “spider love” that “transubstantiates ... Manna to gall” (6-7). The verb “transubstantiate” here clearly primes us to think about the poem in relation to the eucharist. Ironically, however, the speaker uses a Catholic verb—“transubstantiate”—to suggest a surprisingly Protestant conception of the relationship between signs and the receiver of those signs. In a Roman Catholic understanding of the Mass, after all, it is God who does the transubstantiating, while the one who receives the elements has no influence on the reality of that change, only whether it edifies or harms. In “Twicknam Garden,” in contrast, the agent of transubstantiation is the speaker. His disposition determines whether the sacramental “balmes” of the garden are “Manna”—that is, sacred bread—or “gall.” At this point, then, the speaker seems to have in mind Hooker’s insistence that the substance of the sacrament is to be sought in its “worthy receiver.”⁴⁸ The speaker, though, represents the implied opposite of the worthy receiver in Hooker’s dictum: the unworthy receiver who transforms presence into absence.

Quite quickly, however, the speaker backs away from the poetic implications of his theological metaphor. As the poem progresses, he stops seeing himself as the agent that determines the substance and meaning of poetic signs. Instead, he treats another set of conventionally erotic signs—this time, tears—as having the same kind of innate sacramental power as the host:

⁴⁸ *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 225 (5.67.4).

Hither with crystal vials, lovers, come,
 And take my teares, which are loves wine,
 And try your mistress' tears at home,
 For all are false, that taste not just like mine.
 Alas, hearts do not in eyes shine,
 Nor can you more judge women's thoughts by teares,
 Than by her shadow what she wears. (19-25)

The speaker does not treat tears in the same way that he treats the “balmes” of the garden; they cannot be transubstantiated by his disposition or his will. Tears are either reliable pledges of fidelity, if they are the speaker's, or they are bare signs, if they belong to a woman. Women's bodily fluids, in fact, become for the speaker a kind of anti-sacrament. Female tears are lies, promises of absence rather than of presence, just as Protestant celebrations of the eucharist would seem to early modern Catholics. The speaker's tears, in contrast, are the true sacrament: “loves wine.” And indeed, they appear physically identifiable with the fidelity they represent, since that fidelity can be tasted by the tongue (22). The male readers of the poem can take a vial of the speaker's tears for an at-home flavour test. If they compare his tears with their mistresses', they will realize those tears were faked. The male tears, like the host in popular medieval legends, distinguish truth from falsehood and reveal secret sins. The speaker's tears can even discover the clandestine adulteries of cheating girlfriends.

As he attempts to instantiate his own presence in this enchanted bodily fluid, however, the speaker slips into exactly those pathologies that Protestants claimed were operating behind the doctrine of transubstantiation. The big concern Protestants had about the Catholic Mass was that it was idolatrous, because it replaced the real God, who could not be contained in some material element, with something that merely represented him. For Calvin and Luther, as for Donne, transubstantiation deluded people into thinking they were receiving Christ, while the ritual actually confirmed his absence. The “magic” of transubstantiation directed recipients'

attention away from the internal act of faith by which Christ might really become present. Even though Catholic doctrine promised the literal body of Christ, therefore, it only confirmed the absence of that body, which was to be sought in the interaction of heart and bread, rather than in the bread alone. The promise of presence thus became the seal of absence. In “Twicknam Garden,” we see a version of this same logic guiding the speaker. Because he believes a man cannot “judge a woman’s thoughts by teares” (4), he rather vindictively offers his own tears as a more authentic alternative. His tears, at least, will be real. The irony is that his tears are authentic only in that they represent his separation from and rejection by his lover. They are, in one sense, guarantees of his presence. In another sense, however, they are signs of absence, the seal that perpetually reminds men not to trust the bodily signs of their mistresses. His tears, if they are drunk, might create a kind of community, but one bound together only by its shared inability to trust the outward actions or statements of women. Like the “false” elements of the Roman Church, then, his tears seem to confer a form of presence, but actually only impede the presence that was desired in the first place. We get the “authentic” tears of a bitter speaker instead of the pitying woman’s tears desired by the conventional Petrarchan lover. I claim that Donne intends this exchange to raise our suspicions, and to indicate that the speaker is not someone we should imitate. He has rather fallen into a heretically “Catholic” understanding of the sign. He has confused the sign for the thing it ought to have represented and which he ought to have sought.

In a poem like “The Flea,” however, we get the opposite movement, from a Thomist identification of sign with signified to a radically memorialist insistence on their disjunction. Famously, the speaker begins by trying to seduce his mistress with a conceit that depends on a rather extreme conflation of sign and signified. “[I]n this flea our two bloods mingled be,” the speaker coquettishly points out, yet “this cannot be said / A sin, nor shame, nor loss of

maidenhead” (4-6). Since our blood is already mingled in the flea, so the appeal goes, and that couldn’t be considered wrong, it also can’t be wrong for our blood to be mingled by sexual intercourse. There are two senses here in which the speaker treats sign as identical with signifier. Firstly, he treats blood, which is really just a synecdoche for the two individuals, as if it were identical to the individuals themselves. This identification, of course, brings to mind a host of eucharistic associations, mostly importantly the way that blood, in the Catholic sacrament, is understood as identical to the whole person of Christ. The Catholic blood, it bears mentioning, is not “literal” in the literal sense; “drinking Christ” in the Mass does not mean the same thing it would mean if we described drinking a normal human’s blood as “drinking them.” The blood is not an effluence from or even a part of Christ, it is Christ himself in his entirety. The blood in “The Flea” functions in the same way. It *is* the persons from whom it flowed. This is why, in the second stanza, the speaker says, “This flea *is* you and I” (12). And this brings us to the second sense in which the speaker identifies sign with signified: he treats the flea, which is really just a sign of the hoped-for consummation, as if it were the consummation itself. Because the two lovers are “more than married” in “these living walls of jet” (11, 15), “enjoying” each other sexually in the usual manner would merely fulfill their pre-existing marital contract. In this secondary conflation, there is another pointed allusion to the eucharist, as Protestant critiques of Roman Catholic sacramental theology often pointed to the troubling prospect of the host being consumed by animals as evidence of the absurdity of transubstantiation. Fleas and other insects were favourite exemplars of this problem, as Catholic priests had been traditionally instructed to consume any insects that landed in the wine.⁴⁹ The speaker, therefore, can be read as hyperbolically out-Catholicizing the Catholics, treating the unfortunate bug as if, because it has

⁴⁹ See Katherine Breen’s discussion of John Mirk’s *Instructions to Parish Priests* in *Imagining the English Reading Public, 1150-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 36.

drunk the blood, it was itself transubstantiated into a hematic sacrament. Thus the flea becomes at once a communicant, since it drinks the sacred blood, and an erotic host, since it *is* the “one flesh” of the lovers’ marriage. When the woman finally squishes the flea, therefore, the speaker parodically interprets its death as a propitiatory offering like the sacrifice of the Mass. The broken flea acts as a guiltless stand-in for the speaker:

Cruell and sodaine, Hast thou since
 Purpled thy naile, in blood of innocence?
 In what could this flea guilty bee,
 Except in that drop which it suckt from thee? (19-22)

The pun on ‘nail’, here, alluding to the nails of crucifixion, reinforces this eucharistic analogy of the flea as a Christ-host. As the host is sacrificed to God, the flea is offered up to appease the woman.

The woman’s choice to destroy the flea, though, lets us know that she has rejected the speaker’s Catholic logic. As he reports it: “thou triumph’st, and saist that thou / Find’st not thyself nor me the weaker now” (23-4). She squishes the flea, and by killing the speaker’s insect-sacrament comically rejects his sacramental premise. Like the Swiss-Protestant iconoclasts, who publicly derided and desecrated hosts, the woman rebuffs the speaker’s dubious theology by destroying its physical manifestation.⁵⁰ But the speaker is not really scandalized or offended. Instead, he simply changes his rhetorical tack, abandoning his own “Catholic” approach for a Zwinglian retort. The woman “Find’st not [her] self, nor me the weaker now” that the flea has been destroyed. “Tis true,” he admits, “then learne how false feares be: / Just so much honour, when thou yield’st to me, / Will wast, as this flea’s death took life from thee” (25-27). Theresa Di Pasquale has suggested that this second argument is one Donne hints will likely work, since it appeals to a Protestant logic in which, “physical violence to the outward signs does *not* ...

⁵⁰ Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 215.

destroy what they represent.”⁵¹ In other words, if we assume that the mistress is a Protestant, she is more likely to be persuaded by Protestant theological logic than Catholic. I am not convinced of this argument, for two main reasons. First of all, even if the speaker’s argument is structurally “Protestant,” the proposition that the woman should have sex with him because sex doesn’t really matter is not very persuasive. That is just adolescent badgering disguised by a little rhetorical flair. And we know already that the woman in the poem is quite capable of seeing through the speaker’s poetic subtleties. Secondly, as I have shown, Donne’s sermons do not suggest that his understanding of the relationship between sign and signified is “Protestant” in the sense that it sees their relation as arbitrary. He is just as horrified by Zwinglian disconnection as he is by Catholic identification. Because of this, we should not expect Donne to endorse his speaker’s exchange of Thomist semiotics for Zwinglian ones. We should instead be primed to see both approaches as problematic. This becomes quite obvious when we consider why an early modern woman might still value her virginity even if she concedes that it is not identical with her honour. The difference between herself and her blood, or herself and her virginity, does not make either blood or virginity “bare signes.” In fact, if read as without irony, the speaker’s appeal proves that he does not understand the work of signification, since to him the sign is either everything or nothing. Either the blood in the flea is identical with the woman (à la transubstantiation), or her chastity is nothing more than an empty and arbitrary sign (à la Zwinglian memorialism).

“Twicknam Garden” and “The Flea,” then, represent opposite theological errors. In “Twicknam Garden,” the sacramental token, the speaker’s vial of tears, becomes everything. The fluid materially represents a certain authenticity, but only by treating a male lover’s unrequited desire as the only “authentic” erotic experience. The tears are “sacramental” insofar as they

⁵¹ *Literature and Sacrament*, 181.

instantiate the speaker's presence, but they cannot create any *communion* between persons. Rather, the tears reify isolation and disconnection and actually preclude the reciprocity the eucharist is supposed to perform. Instead of mediating access *to* the beloved, the tears take the place *of* the beloved. They become an idol that ironically guarantees the very exclusion the speaker laments. Just as, to Protestant eyes, the Catholic host becomes an idol that takes the place of Christ, so the tears replace the desired mistress. In "The Flea," the speaker has the opposite misreading of the sacramental element. He treats his token as nothing but a bare sign, consecrated only so that it may be profaned.

Yet if "The Flea" retains a persuasive charm, and I think it certainly does, its rhetorical force does not come strictly from the logic of the speaker's argument. Rather, it is in the way the poem constructs a female persona willing to "play along" with and probe its conceit. If we did want to read the mistress as willing to "yield" to the speaker, it would certainly not be because she is unable to resist the vice-grip of his metaphysical reasoning. It might be because the poem itself offers to the mistress an account of herself as the authoritative "chooser." She is clearly an active participant in this dialogue of seduction, and her reception of Donne's sacramental manoeuvres renders them effective or not. Perhaps, in acknowledging that she has this agency, the speaker may convince his mistress that he really does "honour" her, and is, therefore, a worthy receiver of her sexual sacrament. The woman's ultimate decision, of course, is left up to the interpretation of each individual reader, but the very fact that *her* choice hangs open at the end of the poem says something about how the presence instantiated in "The Flea" is quite different from the presence instantiated in "Twickenham Garden." "Twickenham Garden" essentially removes women from the text, concluding with an address to its imagined coterie of cuckolded men. "The Flea" narrates a dialogic co-presence of both lover and beloved. "The Flea," in fact,

ironically affirms the speaker's identification of both humans with the flea, since within the world of the poem, the insect really does make speaker and mistress present to each other. On the one hand, of course, the flea manifests the speaker's rhetorical presence, his wit "cloistered in these living walls of jet" (15). On the other hand, insofar as the flea is literally and symbolically "broken" by the mistress, the creature also mediates the woman's active presence within the poem and confers to her an amusing priestly authority to break the consecrated element.

Thus "The Flea," even as its speaker appeals to a memorialism Donne mistrusts, ultimately acknowledges a *communion* between the poet and his text. It does this with a remarkable creativity, by constructing a female presence that surprises the male speaker and undermines his imagined rhetorical mastery. In reality, of course, the woman in the poem is Donne's construction, and does not actually exist outside the poem such that she could intervene within it. However, the speaker's opening up of himself to the woman's interpretative power does figure for Donne an opening up of the poet to an other who really is outside the poem, his readers. Within the fiction of the poem, the woman's presence, like Christ's presence in the bread and wine, is hidden within or "under" the speaker's text. She herself never speaks; we never get direct access to her except through the mediating account of the poem. Yet despite the fact of that mediation, it is her agency that drives the poem and gives it its special charm. But this is not merely a rhetorical sleight of hand, an effort on Donne's part to create a persona that appears to be vulnerable while, as poet, he remains in total control of the text and the woman within it. By leaving the woman's ultimate decision open, Donne quite consciously allows us to determine the effectiveness of his poetic signs, and in doing so acknowledges his dependence on us as readers to receive his poetic presence. In this enigmatic reversal, the poem structurally models the paradoxes of agency I have repeatedly stressed occupy the eucharist. There, the

communicant appears to be eating, but in reality he is eaten. In “The Flea,” the blood-sucking insect appears to consume the woman, and so in turn provides the speaker a way to sexually “consume” her. At the end of the poem, though, it is the woman who acts on the flea, and we who decide whether she will confer the “grace” the speaker desires. Neither her choice nor ours can be coerced or manipulated any more than divine grace can be coerced by the sacrament.

It is my claim that because the insect in “The Flea” mediates the relation between the speaker and the woman in the text, it can also usefully be thought of as a metonym for the poem itself, which mediates the relation between Donne and his readers. Donne invites this comparison in the first line of the poem, which uses pronouns ambiguously to imply an analogy between “this” – the poetic text – and “this flea”: “Mark but this flea, and mark in *this*, / How little that which thou deniest me is” (1-2). The title of the poem, of course, confirms this implicit comparison, and makes it hard to distinguish “The Flea” from the flea.⁵² For Donne, the point of this parallel is twofold. From one point of view, it encourages readers to think of the poem as a way of making the poet present: just as “This flea is ... I,” so the poem aspires to figure Donne himself. Most critics who have considered Donne’s sacramental poetics, especially in relation to “The Flea,” have exclusively focussed on sacramentality in this sense. They have focussed, that is, on the way Donne makes use of eucharistic allusions, associations, and structures to imply his own presence within the text. This is certainly an aspect of what Donne is up to in a poem like “The Flea,” but critics have usually read this to mean that Donne’s poetic sacramentality is primarily the product of an anxiety. According to this logic, Donne, as part of a larger progress towards disenchantment, has begun to lose faith in the guarantees of identity, personhood, and salvation that used to come with transubstantiation. In the face of that loss, and in response to the

⁵² We do not actually know if Donne himself would have given the poem this title, but the fact that his earliest editors did confirms my point, that the poem presents its own signifying activity as analogous to the signifying work of the insect in the poem.

anxiety it provokes, he puts poetry in the place of sacrament, hoping to transfer to it some of the fading power of the elements. “Sacramental poetics,” therefore, become primarily a way for the poet to reify his own presence in the very moment that subjectivity first (supposedly) felt itself to be isolated and under threat rather than integrated within a porous and enchanted universe. The presence-making power of the eucharist, in other words, is redeployed to protect the newly autonomous self from the disenchantment of the eucharist. Poetry becomes the new liturgy, but instead of receiving a presence that comes from outside the self, the poet fantasizes that he can make himself “eucharistically” immanent within his own texts. Though it cannot save his soul, the poem at least makes the poet textually “present,” potentially forever.

The problem with this paradigm is that it entirely misconstrues the more accurately eucharistic function of Donne’s work, which because it sees the poet as eucharistically present in the “elements” of his text, also understands poetry as opening the self up to the influence of presences that come from outside it. In “The Flea,” this insistently *other* presence is the mistress, who acts as a foil to the apparent though affected rhetorical confidence of the speaker. The pleasure of that poem, I have argued, does not come from some sacred instantiation of the speaker, but rather the opposite. The pleasure comes from the fact that throughout the poem the speaker writes in response to another presence who, like the reader whom she figures, is outside the text, yet who nevertheless impinges on the speaker’s words and self-presentation. It is in this opening up of the self to the other, through the text, that Donne’s poetry models itself on the eucharist. His poetry is not trying to replace the eucharist, but rather to learn from the sacrament how systems of signification belie any absolute notion of buffered subjectivity. As much as we construct ourselves in text, Donne’s poetry suggests, we also open ourselves to a construction that comes from that text, as that text is never strictly ours. Insofar as poetry uniquely provides

for the expression of self, even offering an almost sacred power of *self*-representation, it also opens up the self to a variety of presences that can surprise, reshape, or frustrate that self-fashioning impulse. Poetry, as Donne composes it, may thus be something other than an anxious response to disenchantment. It may, like the sacrament itself, be a kind of gift. Even in comic lines of “The Flea,” both the titular insect and the poem can be read as an instance of self-giving, by which speaker and poet open themselves up to a presence that has the final word on what the poem means and who the speaker really is. For the speaker in “The Flea,” as I have already mentioned, this other presence is the mistress. For Donne the poet, this other presence is the reading audience, who gets to interpret and evaluate the rhetorical or comic success of the poem. It is always the text, though, by which the self is opened up to the other. Donne’s poetry, moreover, gives no sense that this vulnerability to the other ought ultimately to be seen as a threat. There are of course moments in Donne’s religious poetry where the overwhelming otherness and power of God make the speaker afraid. Yet even in those poems, God’s battering of the speaker – his breaking, blowing, and burning down of prideful self-sufficiency—is ultimately something the Christian ought to desire.

That Donne finds comfort in this opening up of the self to the other becomes helpfully evident in a poem Donne wrote for a friend: his Latin poem “To Mr. George Herbert, with One of My Seals, of the Anchor of Christ.” Not coincidentally, this poem quite evidently presents itself as a sacramental present, a token that represents the poet but also defines the poet as necessarily in a *communion* with both text and addressee. The token, an engraved image of Christ affixed to an anchor as to the cross, was a traditional devotional emblem Donne adopted as his new crest after taking orders. According to Walton, Donne had this image “engraven very small in ... stones, ... set in gold, and ... sent to many of [his] dearest friends,” among them

George Herbert.⁵³ As in “The Flea,” Donne invites a playful identification of this depicted object with the poem that depicts it. In “To Mr. George Herbert” this correlation is developed both by the Latin syntax and ambiguous pronoun use. In the poem’s conceit, the cross, by “branching out at its bottom” becomes the anchor of hope from Hebrews 6:19:⁵⁴ *Hinc mihi Crux primo quæ fronti impressa lavacro, / Finibus extensis, anchora facta patet* (5-6, “Thus the cross which was impressed on my brow first in baptism, by branching out at its bottom, becomes an anchor”). The idea here is not only that Christ’s death is the spiritual anchor of the Christian, but also that a Christian’s personal hardships—his “crosses”—will be transformed by grace into the “anchor” of hopeful perseverance. As Donne explains to Herbert that Christ himself must perform this transformation, he takes advantage of Latin’s flexible word order to create a textual picture of the emblem he is describing:

*Anchoræ in effigiem Crux tandem desinit ipsam,
Anchora fit tandem Crux tolerata diu.
Hoc tamen ut fiat, Christo vegetatur ab ipso
Crux, et ab affixo est Anchora facta Jesu. (7-10)*

(The cross at length gives over to the form of anchors, because a cross long-born become an anchor. So that *this* becomes [an anchor] too, the cross is quickened by Christ himself, and made into an anchor by Jesus who is affixed to it.)

The *hoc* in line 9 of the poem is pointedly unqualified, leaving it up to the reader to determine whether the thing becoming an anchor is the gifted token or *this* text being read, which comes as part of the gift. Developing this ambiguity, Donne makes use of the Latin syntax to create a visual pun by which the text extends outward in the same manner as the anchor it describes. Earlier, in line 6, Donne describes the base of his cross bifurcating to become the arms of the anchor (*Finibus extensis*). In the following two lines (7-8), the word *crux* appears in the middle

⁵³ *Lives of Donne and Herbert*, 39.

⁵⁴ “... hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.”

of the line, so that the words extend out from the “*crux*” just like the arms of the anchor. This visual pun is especially underscored in line 7, where the first and last words in the line, *anchora* and *ipsam*, both refer to the image of the anchor Donne describes. In line 7, therefore, *crux* branches out in both directions so that “*anchora*” and “*ipsam*” become the flukes of this textual anchor. Likewise, in line 10, where Donne claims that Jesus is the one who transforms the cross into an anchor by being crucified upon it, he arranges “*Jesu*” and its modifying adjective, “*affixo*,” so that they surround the word “*Anchora*.” Visually, just as the image of Christ is affixed with extended arms to the physical token Donne describes, the name “Jesus” and its modifier are likewise fastened to the edges of the phrase *est Anchora facta*. Jesus’ name is visually attached to the very phrase where the cross “is made anchor,” performing in the shape of the text the process explained by the very same words. The “material” properties of the text, therefore, appear to have a natural as well as an arbitrary relation to what they signify, much as the bread of the eucharist bears a natural relation to the nourishing power of Christ.

As we can see, Donne’s syntactical play presents the text itself as a sacramental token that acts in parallel to the engraved image he gave to the young George Herbert. Yet the whole point of the token, whether we understand that token as the emblem-engraved pendant or the poetic text, is that it represents Donne himself. As representations of the self, though, the poem and the pendant are designed to be given to another. Donne gives Herbert his seal, a token that powerfully communicates his own presence. In that act of giving, however, Donne’s speaker has a remarkable revelation about his own identity, that it is not entirely his. In the opening lines of the poem, Donne is not at first fully able to understand this:

*Qui prius assuetus serpentum fasce tabellas
Signare, hæc nostræ symbola parva domus,
Adscitus domui Domini, patrioque relicto
Stemmata, nanciscor stemmata jure nova. (1-4)*

(Though I was accustomed to seal the writing tablet with a sheaf of snakes,
the symbol of my poor family, now, adopted into God's household, having
abandoned my native arms, I acquire new arms by right.)

In these opening lines, the speaker imagines himself undergoing a radical transformation from one kind of person to another. His shift from "Jack" to "Doctor," though, appears as a fairly assertive narrative of self-creation. The first person verb, *nanciscor*, despite its passive deponent grammatical form, suggests an active attainment on the part of the speaker: "I obtain," "I acquire." The break between the old identity and the new also seems strikingly clear-cut. The speaker's old arms are *relicto*, abandoned, while the new are his "by right" (*jure*). Thus there appears a strong sense of self-fashioning control, of the speaker's apparent ability to disavow his old self and define a new one of his own choosing. This initial self-representation, however, counterintuitively leads him to discover how he is shaped by the text and by the silent presence of the other to which the poem is addressed. To put this another way, as the poet strives to make himself present in the text, he becomes aware of his own formation by the text and by the other people for whom that text is written. Writing, in "To Mr. George Herbert," opens the self up to *communion*. In line 11 of the poem, this emerging awareness of the self's contingency begins to become apparent. There, the speaker gives up on abandoning his old identity, and instead recognizes his need to take into account and re-comprehend what he calls his "native serpents":

*Nec natalitiis penitus serpentibus orbor,
Non ita dat Deus, ut auferat ante data.
Qua sapiens, dos est, qua terram lambit et ambit,
Pestis, at in nostra sit medicina Cruce
Serpens fixa Cruci si sit natura, Crucique
A fixo nobis gratia tota fluat. (11-16)*

(Nor am I inwardly deprived of my native serpents; God does not give new gifts and take the old away. As the serpent is wise, he is my dowry. As he eats and encircles the earth, he is poisonous, but our medicine is the cross,

and if the serpent is crucified, so is nature, and all the grace of him who was nailed to the cross pours out to us.)

Even though he recognizes that his old family symbol is in several senses the emblem of sin, Donne does not efface it, but chooses instead to create a heraldic hybrid, nailing his family's secular snakes to the anchor-crucifix of his priestly vocation. This move to include his "native serpents" is a significant one. It already indicates an attentiveness to the self which Donne has been "given" by his past. It shifts subtly away from a notion of the subject-created self, and towards an idea that the self must, in part at least, be *received*. To explain this using Donne's own eucharistic framework, Donne's old secular identity does not have to be expunged to make room for his new religious identity any more than the bread-ness of the bread has to be transubstantiated away to make room for the presence of Christ. In fact, for Donne, just as bread-ness is essential to the eucharist, so too is his "snaky-ness" part of and consecrated to his new divine role.⁵⁵

Donne's refusal to repudiate his past self, but rather to transform it into a part of his new identity, overlaps with a number of other related transformations of the self and its activity that occur in this poem. Through the text, Donne makes himself "present" as a gift to Herbert and to other subsequent readers. This sacramental self-presentation transforms the self by allowing it to recognize how it is shaped by the text and by the other presences the text acknowledges. In "To Mr. George Herbert," this giving over of the self to text and through text leads to four other key

⁵⁵ In a sermon on the theology of the eucharist, Donne uses an analogy very similar to this one, though he uses the idea of vocation to explain the nature of the elements, rather than as I have here, the nature of the elements to explain Donne's vocation. Donne also uses the figure of the judge rather than the figure of the priest, but the point is the same: "That bread which thou seest after the consecration is not the same bread which was presented before; not that it was transubstantiated to another substance, (which is the heretical riddle of the Roman Church...) but that it is...appropriated by God in that ordinance to another use. It is other bread, so as a judge is another man upon the bench than he is at home in his own house" (7.294). The everyday "substance" of the judge does not have to be erased to allow his special ordination. In fact, if he is a good judge, his life and experience as a layman will helpfully inform his judgment. As judge, however, he remains a specially ordained limb of the state that, like the elements of the eucharist, has "another nature in the use, though not the substance" (7.296).

correlative transformations. The first involves the speaker's transition from an active to a passive conception of identity formation. Whereas, in the opening lines the speaking "I" *obtains* a new representational seal, in the lines further down, it is Christ himself who both creates the emblem and imbues it with power: *Crux ... ab affixo est Anchora facta Jesu* (10, "the Cross is made into an anchor by Jesus who is nailed to it"). At the end of the poem, likewise, divine grace is no longer something that the speaker takes or procures; it is rather something that "flows out" (*fluat*) to the speaker: ...*Crucique / A fixo nobis gratia tota fluat* (15-16, "all the grace of the man nailed to the cross *flows out to us*").

An even more important shift appears as the speaker moves from thinking he can have only one identity at a time to recognizing that, like Christ, he has two. Donne's new hybrid-seal recognizes two natures that cannot be separated: a secular-earthly nature, pictured by the "sheaf of snakes," and a spiritual-priestly nature, pictured by the anchor-cross. Donne thus comes to understand himself in the same *both/and* terms that define Christ, the same *both/and* terms that tie together his treatments of sexuality and the body throughout his work. He is himself a *communion* between the material and the spiritual. Yet Donne creates not only a picture of the self as a *communion* between the divine and the worldly, but also of the self in *communion* with Christ and with others. As Donne the poet, through the act of writing, sees himself more and more as the image of Christ, he necessarily opens himself to other human beings, his fellow image-bearers. This self-giving makes particular sense in the context of "To Mr. George Herbert." In his new role as priest, Donne's identity will now never strictly be his own, but always a representation of Christ, the man affixed to his amalgamated arms. His new role, as Herbert himself describes it in "The Windows," will be to add "colour" to God's "light and glorie." Donne has now, in fact, a representative personhood that, like the token and the poem

given to Herbert, must always be offered as a gift to the Church and to his community of readers. This is why “To Mr. George Herbert” ends in the plural; all the grace of God flows out *nobis*, to “us,” the communion of the saints and the community of readers.

“To Mr. George Herbert” presents a markedly eucharistic encounter with the text. This encounter, I have stressed, is not sacramental primarily in the sense that it treats the poem or the artefact it describes as some reified or consecrated manifestation of a stand-alone presence. Rather, the poem is eucharistic in the sense that it becomes, like the bread and wine of the communion, a material medium by which the autonomy and agency of the individual speaker is made aware of its dependence on agencies outside itself. And if we understand poetic “sacramentality” primarily in this way, as a model of agency, rather than as a desire merely to “re-enchant” poetry, the text takes on the same kind of dual-identity that Donne believed defined both Christ himself and the elements of his supper. In a poem like “To Mr. George Herbert,” this eucharistic structure is particularly evident, even though the sacrament itself is never directly mentioned. The Reformer’s favourite analogy for explaining the eucharist, after all, was a seal, an object that communicates the virtue or authority of a person without being identical to the person himself. Because of its extended meditation on Donne’s two seals, “To Mr. George Herbert” thus quite naturally lends itself to being read as having a “material” and a “spiritual” nature at once. As an artefact, the poem has a texture and substance that cannot be reduced to what it signifies. The “materiality” of its play with Latin syntax and Donne’s identification of the text with the physical emblem act, for the reading experience, like the flavour and physical nourishment of the bread do for the communicant. But “To Mr. George Herbert” also has manifold “spiritual” meanings. On the one hand, it acts as the seal—a kind of virtual presence—of Donne himself. On the other, the poem clarifies that this presence is never fully bounded or

buffered from its relation to the other—that is, both Christ and other human beings—who always already shape and define it. These “spiritual” meanings act like the spiritual substance of the eucharist, which reveals to the communicant that though he appears to eat, in fact he is eaten, and incorporated into a body much larger than himself. Thus, we may usefully understand poetic texts in Donne’s oeuvre as having the same *communion* of the spiritual and the material that Donne sees as defining the eucharist. But just as Christ makes himself present in the sacramental bread and wine in order to give himself to others, and so that others may be incorporated into his body, so the poet, for Donne, presents himself poetically in order that his presence may be understood in relation to others outside itself. Poetry, in other words, both elucidates the *communion* between the two natures of the self, and aspires to *communion* with the other.

Conclusion

Almighty God ever loved unity, but he never loved *singularity*. God was always alone in heaven, there were no other Gods but he; but he was never *singular*.

Sermons 5.113

Christ could not be a *Singular testis*, a single witness; He was alwayes more then one witness, because he had alwayes more than one nature, God and man; and therefore Christ instructing Nicodemus, speaks plurally.

Sermons 5.141

For Donne, the shared mistake of both transubstantiation and memorialism is the confusion of singularity with unity, of sameness with *communion*. Transubstantiation tries to make the bread and wine all presence, but in doing so makes the elements themselves stand in the place of Christ’s presence. Memorialism, in making the elements nothing more than mnemonic placeholders, denies the ability of God to mediate himself via the material world. In his critique of these two extremes, Donne has quite usefully anticipated the two opposing ways that early modern English poetry has been deemed sacramental. In one version (that of Mackenzie Ross, Schwartz, and to a certain extent Read), the subject-poet attempts to

“transubstantiate” himself in the text, fails, and so ultimately affirms the rigid boundaries of selfhood that anticipate and create modernity. Writing, ironically, only further buffers the self, recapitulating the limits of the body and reifying the abyss that separates each individual from everyone else. In the other “Zwinglian” version (Netzley’s and Johnson’s), because the poetic “body” of writing resists truly communicating anything, writing itself becomes a reified presence, irreducibly “here.” This second account of sacramentality, though it invokes the logic of memorialism, actually turns writing into the kind of “pure presence” that so offended Protestants about transubstantiation. Writing becomes presence itself, but only in a peculiar sense; it is presence without intention, relation, or (least of all) subjectivity.

As we have seen, Donne understands writing as sacramental precisely when its dual nature is realized, when it is both the mediator of meaning *and* the “thing itself.” Poetry has a surface, a materiality that can and should be enjoyed for its own sake, just as the body is valuable to Donne on its own terms. But just as Donne does not, by valuing the body, deny the existence of the soul, neither does he see the material encounter with the text as something that resists its referential function, its pointing beyond itself. Rather, Donne is interested, like Herbert and Southwell, in the way that the “bodily” features of poetic devices, or the “accidental” implications of an extended metaphor, enrich rather than resist meaning. The eucharist, in its paradoxical duality, ultimately points to the paradox of Christ’s subjectivity. Christ’s presence, counterintuitively, is more present when the bread is itself as well as Christ than if Christ merely displaces the bread. Poetry, understood sacramentally, allows the poet the same paradox. The author is more present in the poetry when his presence co-exists with materialities and subjectivities that do not reduce to his own. Poetry reveals to the poet that his own subjectivity is never merely his, but something given to him by language, by his readers, and, ultimately, by

God. This complicated idea of the self in *communion* appears throughout Donne's work, but it is usefully summarized in the fourth stanza of "A Litanie," where Donne addresses God as Trinity:

O Blessed glorious Trinity,
 Bones to Philosophy, but milk to faith,
 Which, as wise serpents, diversely
 Most slipperinesse, yet most entanglings hath.
 As you distinguish'd, undistinct,
 By power, love, knowledge bee,
 Give me a such selfe different instinct,
 Of these; let all mee elemented bee,
 Of power, to love, to know, you unnumbered three. (29-36)

Like the serpents on Donne's old family crest, the persons of the Trinity interweave with each other and animate a multiform identity. God is at once "distinguish'd" and "undistinct," unified and yet in *communion* with his own three selves. For Donne, of course, the ultimate aim of the human subject is to be like God. So he prays to be likewise "different" and "instinct" [indistinct], at once other to himself and in accord with that otherness, "elemented... / Of power, to love." Being truly himself, Donne thinks, requires directing that self towards a God whose very being challenges the notion of a purely bounded subjectivity, the "buffered self" of modernity. Poetry, for Donne, provides a powerful way to achieve that self-understanding.

This Donnean notion of personhood remains vibrantly distinct from the accounts of subjectivity his recent modern interpreters have produced, and it only anticipates a history of secularization if it is sledgehammered into a presentist teleology. Read on its own terms, it might offer an imaginative alternative to the contemporary diagnosis of writing as the boundary of the self. It might challenge critics to see writing as an act of *communion*, in which the poet gives himself over to the very symbolic system he makes himself within. The author, in this imaginative prospect, not only gives himself over to writing, but to his readers, who create him even as they consume him, both in the way their reading makes the author present to themselves

and in the way their presence is anticipated and accounted for in the act of writing. In eucharistic terms, the writer eats even as he is being eaten. As it did for Southwell and would do for Herbert, the eucharist thus enables Donne to see poetry as an image of himself, at once sexual and spiritual, body and soul, author and text. The self Donne's writing imagines is the self in *communion*, created in the text and giving itself over in the text to be read by others. As "A Litanie" names it, this is a self "distinguish'd" and "undistinct."

Communion in Two Kinds: Milton's Bread and Crashaw's Wine

John Donne died in 1631, and George Herbert just two years later. This meant that neither was forced to openly declare sides in the English Civil War. Richard Crashaw and John Milton, both about twenty years older than Herbert, were not spared that choice, nor do their political allegiances make it difficult to see why they each chose the sides they did. The political and religious dissimilarities between these two poets, though, has often been read by literary critics as a partial explanation for the different status each has within the English tradition. Milton, the fierce republican, has long been read as establishing his place in the canon by asserting a rigorous poetic individualism. Credited at once with consummating the English epic and killing it as a genre, Milton tends to be defined by his literary strength and singularity. For many critics, John Milton's individual talent also makes him a major player in the emerging secularization of the Enlightenment and its concomitant construction of the liberal "buffered" self.¹ Crashaw, in contrast, is usually characterized as representing a Catholic sensuality, a continental style, and a medieval way of thinking. Nandra Perry, for example, in a very recent essay, claims that Crashaw "can be read as the last stand of ... late-medieval 'presence culture.'" According to Perry, this "last stand" of the medieval is especially tied to Crashaw's sacramentality. In his poetry, she claims, "nearly all signs are imbued with some measure of the sacramental power concentrated in the Eucharist."² According to this reading, Crashaw becomes the antonym of Milton. Milton is always thrusting himself into his own poetry, abandoning the communal structuring of self inherent to medieval sacramental thought. Crashaw, however, is

¹ As collections like *Milton Now: Alternative Approaches and Contexts* (New York: Palgrave, 2014) and Feisal Mohamed's monograph *Milton and the Post-Secular Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011) make clear, Milton's association with this history is not always now seen as a good thing. Even these books, though, which are deeply critical of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideological projects, still frequently make Milton a kind of progenitor of the projects they mistrust.

² "Turning the Tables: Richard Crashaw Reads the Protestant Altar," *Studies in Philology* 112.2 (2015): 324.

always striving to lose himself in mystic ecstasy, always longing to reinvigorate that moribund eucharistic way of being. The present chapter aims to challenge this reading of Crashaw and Milton. It will argue, on the contrary, that Crashaw's poetry is counterintuitively modern, while Milton's remains much more in continuity with the sacramental thinking Perry terms a "medieval presence culture." What follows, though, will make this claim precisely by attending to the two poets' appropriations of the eucharist, arguing that though Crashaw and Milton *both* construct a thoroughly sacramental account of poetry, they do so in radically different ways. This difference, I claim, can be usefully mapped onto the two different elements in the Lord's Supper: the bread and the wine. In order to explain why bread and wine might have such opposite implications for poetry, however, it will be necessary first to provide a brief history of these two elements in the tradition of sacramental thought and practice.

Wine and Bread in the History of the Eucharist

After the turn of the first millennium, as theologians in the western Church came to a rough consensus that the elements in the eucharist were really Christ's body and blood, there also emerged a tendency to see sacramental bread as more important than sacramental wine. This shift occurred for two related reasons: a growing practical concern about dignified treatment of the elements, and an increasing theological focus on the various meanings of Christ's body. The concern about treating the elements appropriately arose quite logically; the Church was concerned that Jesus himself might be physically mishandled or mistreated. Liturgical rubrics, therefore, started to detail the requirements for decorous handling and distribution of bread and wine. Rules about the storage of the consecrated host also became more specific, and since the reserved sacrament was considered to be Christ's real body just as much as the consumed host was, its exhibition in procession rituals became an integral part of the Mass. A desire for ritual

deference also had practical effects on the production and distribution of eucharistic bread. The earlier tradition of laypeople bringing homemade bread to the altar for consecration ended, and the Church now oversaw the production of wafers from start to finish. The use of unleavened bread was also prescribed after 800, and in the centuries following it became standard to serve individual wafers to communicants rather than breaking apart a single piece of bread.³ This latter practice was designed to reduce the risk of consecrated breadcrumbs falling unnoticed to the ground, and perhaps being eaten by rodents.⁴ For the same reason, the high middle ages introduced the practice of baking host-wafers in wax, so that even the wafer that was broken in the prayer of consecration would do so cleanly without fragmenting.⁵ To prevent the laity from handling or chewing the host, priests were now directed to place it directly on the tongue.⁶ This requirement addressed concerns that the host might be smuggled out of the church to be used in witchcraft. Initially, the Church developed similar protections for sacramental wine. From the seventh century, for example, churches in northern Italy required communicants to suck communion wine through a straw made of gold or silver.⁷ A more common practice, though, was *intinctio*, dipping the host wafer in the consecrated wine. Ultimately, however, these measures proved unsatisfactory, and concerns about consecrated wine being spilled or misused made it too dangerous to serve to laypeople. In the early thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III formally abolished *intinctio*,⁸ but in doing so he was only officially requiring what had become standard practice across western Christendom: the reservation of wine for the clergy alone.

³ Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist*, 40.

⁴ As we have seen, this anxiety was later co-opted by Lollards and others in their critiques of transubstantiation.

⁵ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 42.

⁶ Snoek, 362.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

During this same period, as the Church increasingly emphasized dignified treatment of the elements, the theology of the eucharist became more and more intertwined with the idea that the Church is Christ's mystical body. There were thus two modes of Christic "body" that, in their interaction with each other, mysteriously guaranteed Christian identity, ecclesial unity, and the operation of divine grace. The unity of Christ's mystical body, the Church, was made possible by its consumption of Christ's "true" body, the host.⁹ Yet if the host and the Mass worked to incorporate the faithful *into* the body of the Church, they also policed the boundaries of that body, enforcing the moral, doctrinal, and political conformity of its members. Anyone who had wronged his neighbour, or who rejected orthodox teaching, or who disobeyed his prince could be denied access to the host, and to the grace and corporate identity it proffered. In this theological context, where concepts of *body* became absolutely central, Christ's blood became ideologically supplementary. Sacramental wine in turn became, strictly speaking, unnecessary. The waxy host, carefully confected to remain un-crumblly, symbolized the cohesion of the church-body. It guaranteed Christian identity by distinguishing who was incorporated into that body, and who was not. And just as the host defined and contained the mystical unity of the Church, it began to be considered a container of Christ's eucharistic blood. According to the doctrine of concomitance, which western theologians developed in this period, Christ was fully present in both elements. Theologians, however, almost always explained this doctrine by arguing that Christ's blood was necessarily concomitant with his flesh, and not the other way round. Thus the twelfth-century theologian Robert Pullen explains that those who practise *intinctio* do so in bad faith, "as if the flesh lacks the blood, or the blood exists outside the flesh."¹⁰ Christ's blood is necessarily *in* his body, he argues, just as any piece of meat necessarily contains the blood of the

⁹ See chapter one, pgs. 34-5, where I discuss the semantic history the *corpus mysticum* and the *corpus verum*.

¹⁰ Qtd. in Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 71.

animal. Sacramental wine, therefore, has a secondary kind of existence, since it is already contained within the more fundamental element of the host. Theoretically, of course, consecrated wine was fully Christ just as much as the host was, but the logic of concomitance did not emphasize this. The host always *contains* the blood. By around 1200, then, consecrated wine had primarily become a sign of clerical privilege, and it bore far less theological and liturgical weight than the host. All the key issues in the period—Christian unity, the operation of grace, individual identity, ecclesial structure—were thought through using the language of *body*, and were quilted together in the ritual practices surrounding what was now called Christ’s *corpus verum*, his true body, the host. As G.J.C. Snoek puts it, by the high middle ages, “Eucharistic devotion became, in fact, devotion to the host.”¹¹

In the later medieval period and the Reformation, a whole variety of dissenting movements strongly condemned communion in one kind. These movements saw the reservation of the chalice as both unscriptural and as inappropriately elevating the role of the clergy. In fifteenth-century Bohemia, Jan Huss’ insistence on communion in both kinds became a defining feature of the movement he initiated, so much so that the term “utraquism” emerged there to describe the Hussite position on the reception of the elements. For Huss, as for other critics of the orthodox position, refusing to serve wine to the laity ignored Christ’s direct instructions in scripture to “take this cup... in remembrance of me.” The choice to serve wine to the laity, though, also implied a lower view of the priesthood and the elements themselves. Utraquism, which became one of the very few practices common to most forms of Protestant worship, had the practical consequence of giving wine a more significant place in the sacramental life of reforming and reformed worship. Eucharistic wine, in fact, was a powerfully symbolic image of Protestant theologies of grace, since these often particularly employed terms that made Christ’s

¹¹ *Medieval Piety*, 40.

blood both the currency that purchased salvation and the cleansing liquid that washed sinners. In England, Thomas Cranmer made much of this connection in the Book of Common Prayer, where the eucharist is most frequently referred to as “The sacrament of Christ’s body and blood.” This name stresses the parallel action of both elements, as does Cranmer’s communion service. We see this in the prayer of humble access, which precedes the reception of the elements, where the petition underscores the corresponding work of Christ’s body *and* Christ’s blood:

Graunt us therefore gracious Lorde, so to eate the fleshe of thy deare sonne Jesus Christ, and to drinke his bloude, that oure synful bodies may be made cleane by his body, and our soules washed through his most precious bloud, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.¹²

For Cranmer, in this prayer at least, Christ’s body purifies human flesh, while Christ’s blood washes the soul. In stressing this parallel activity, the *BCP* pointedly departs from the text that preceded it in southern England, the Sarum rite, which almost always specifically addresses the “host” rather than both elements. Cranmer’s communion text not only equalizes the role of bread and wine, it makes repeated reference to the salvific function of Christ’s blood, the liquid represented by the sacramental wine.¹³ For Cranmer, of course, wine always represents blood shed, in the past tense, and cannot re-perform any kind of propitiatory exchange; the wine points to a completed action on the cross. Even so, though the *Book of Common Prayer* rejects Catholic notions of divine presence *as* the elements, it actually aims to make divine presence more intimately available. The fact that Protestant laypeople did not have to be ordained to receive wine reminded them that they had more immediate, cherished, and personal access to God than Catholic laypeople did. Likewise, because drinking wine was seen as a particularly pleasant

¹² 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, 136.

¹³ “...we should alwaie remember ...the innumerable benefits (which by his precious blood sheading) he hath obtained to us” (133); “... drinke this in remembraunce that Christes bloude was shedde for thee, and be thankful” (137); “...graunte [God], that by the merites and death of thy sonne Jesus Christ, and throughe faith in his bloude, we (and all thy whole Church) may obtaine remission of our sinnes” (137-8).

sensual encounter, Protestants were often encouraged to think of God's presence as similarly pleasurable. Richard Crashaw's puritan father, William, makes exactly this connection in his pamphlet *Meate for Men*, a catechism for lay-Protestants seeking to understand the sacraments. Wine, he insists, is an appropriate element for use in the eucharist not only because it resembles blood and is "pressed out of the grape" as Christ's blood was "pressed out of his blessed body," but also because "wine is fit drinke for the sorrowfull and heavie-hearted man." Christ's blood, like a good glass of wine, "cherisheth the heart of man."¹⁴

In George Herbert's poetry, this Protestant attention to sacramental liquid becomes quite apparent. If one goes by frequency, *The Temple* even exhibits a modest preference for the liquid element, since the words "wine," "blood," "drink," and "juice" (44 times) appear more often than "bread," "body," "food," "eat," or "meat" (32 times).¹⁵ For Herbert, as for William Crashaw, sacramental wine manifests a sensual experience of divine proximity and care. In "The Agony," to cite one specific instance, Herbert writes that "Love is that liquor sweet and most divine, / Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine" (17-18). The strange claim that he "feels" wine, rather than simply tasting or drinking it, points out just how significant a role wine plays in Herbert's imagination of divine presence. It stands in opposition to what the poet might see as a bland and waxy Catholic host, which dissolves on the tongue without being chewed and without being experienced like regular food. God's wine, however, can be savoured, rolled around in the mouth, and enjoyed for its sensual materiality. Herbert can "feel" wine's substance as well as its effects, the warming of the body and the cheering of the heart. For Herbert, as for so many other

¹⁴ *Meate for men, or, a principall service of the sacraments* (London: 1626), 14.

¹⁵ "Food" occurs 11 times; "meat," once; "bread" 5 times, "eat," 8 times. "Body" appears 7 times, but only 3 times referring to Christ's body. "Drink" occurs 5 times; "juice," 4 times; "wine" occurs directly 11 times, and a handful of other times under kennings such as "grapes' good store" ("Bunch of Grapes," 24). "Blood" appears a remarkable 24 times.

Protestants, sacramental wine powerfully exhibits God's goodness, love, and presence, even as it reminds him that such presence was not literally the wine itself.

It remains broadly true, however, that Protestant theology followed the medieval tradition of thinking primarily in terms of "body," even as it rejected medieval and early modern Catholic understandings of what "body" is and means. It was a standard Protestant argument against transubstantiation, for example, that Christ's body could not be literally present in the eucharist because it *was* literally present in heaven. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton gives one instance of this argument, insisting that transubstantiation is "irreconcilable ... with the human nature of Christ, and ... with the state of glory in which he is to remain till the day of judgement."¹⁶ Christ has a human nature, according to Milton, only capable of one mode of extension; to suggest that his body could be in multiple places at the same time contradicts that fact, and so threatens the central claim of Christianity: that Christ was divine *and* human. The problem for Protestants like Milton, however, is that they had to re-formulate their understanding of exactly how Christ's body *was* present in the elements. They also had to rearticulate precisely what kind of mystical unity was actually being celebrated in the sacrament, a task that became increasingly challenging as reforming movements across Europe became more and more estranged from each other. For Protestants, the unity of the Christian mystical body was no longer guaranteed by the consumption of Christ's literal blood and body, and access to the eucharist was no longer guarded by a single ecclesial authority. In this new theological context, the relationship between individual Christian identity, corporate belonging within the body of the Church, and the work of the sacraments became increasingly problematic. Most often, these problems remained thought through via conceptions of "body." Because of this, despite Protestantism's theological

¹⁶ *De Doctrina Christiana*, in *The Complete Works of John Milton*, Vol. 8, ed. John K. Hale and Donald Cullington. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 415. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent quotations of *De Doctrina* come from this version.

departures from the medieval Church, it tended to keep its focus on eucharistic bread. Even so, Protestant attention to communion wine constituted an important new feature of sacramental thought and practice. It stood alongside a historically mainstream prioritization of “bread” and “body” and, as we will see in the case of Crashaw’s poetry, provided an alternative set of resources and vocabulary for thinking against the grain of that theological mainstream.

Crashaw’s Wine and Milton’s Food

Poets like Donne and Herbert responded to the new uncertainties of early modern sacramental theology creatively and originally. Both authors are also deeply invested in treating poetry as a para-eucharistic activity, whereby the consecration of poetry becomes something more than a change in subject matter, and instead becomes a change in the mode of *presence*. This chapter contends that Richard Crashaw and John Milton both continue in this tradition, each finding in the eucharist a way of understanding, invoking, and locating divine presence in themselves and in their poetry. The key difference between these two authors, I claim, is that they understand these eucharistic operations in relationship to one particular element of the sacrament. For Crashaw, this element is wine, for Milton, it is bread. This difference, I will show, helps us understand not only their radical stylistic dissimilarities, but also the divergent themes they return to and the problems they see themselves as trying to solve. It is in the context of this difference, I claim, that we can understand these authors as having two distinct models for constructing their own sacramental poetics. This reading, though, will position Milton and Crashaw rather differently within literary history than they usually have been placed. It reads Milton as in many ways the conservative heir to a theological tradition that thinks in terms of “bread” and “body,” considering a number of ways that Milton’s thought is deeply continuous with a “medieval” intellectual and spiritual tradition. As I will address, Milton does make his

own radical and idiosyncratic contribution to that tradition, but his poetic goals, concerns, and even his poetic style remain clearly within the terms of that tradition. Crashaw, in contrast, becomes much more of a poetic innovator than critics have usually given him credit for, and his poetry represents a new way of imagining the relationship between sacrament and poetry. My argument will go even further to assert that Crashaw's new sacramental poetics, rather than representing Perry's "medieval presence culture," actually anticipates post-Enlightenment modes of subjectivity. By reversing the normal historical positions attributed to these poets, moreover, I aim to cap off the broader literary narrative of eucharistic poetics I have been revising in this dissertation, showing both how complex that narrative is, and the counterintuitive ways it moved alongside the emergence of secularism. To set up the close readings that will demonstrate this argument, however, it will be helpful to briefly lay out exactly what it is I mean when I claim that *poetry* can be described in terms of bread and wine.

To be clear, when I claim that Milton thinks in terms of "bread," I do not mean that he has quite the same fixation with the actual foodstuff as Crashaw has with wine. It is only very occasionally that Milton's poetry deals specifically with bread at all. Milton *is*, however, interested in the same theological dynamics that occupied the medieval Church, and shares with that tradition a specific attention to the way that food, rather than drink, relates to and makes sense of different Christian concepts of "body." The sacramental consumption of food becomes, in fact, the figure around which Milton organizes his account of the interaction between individual human subjectivity, divine presence, and the mediating realities of matter, culture, Church, and history. In Milton's thought, food has this broad-ranging function, while drink does not, because food and the eating of food most clearly articulate how any single entity may become part of some other distinct entity. In *Paradise Lost*, however, though the poem attends to

images and representations of eating more generally, Milton continually returns to the specific kind of eating that happens in the eucharist. The epic does this because eucharistic eating does not depend on the destruction or dissolution of the thing that is eaten. The sacrament, as we have seen, involves a version of consumption that does not rely on absorption or erasure. So, though the communicant eats Christ, Christ is not absorbed by or dissolved into the communicant; instead, the operation works in a reverse order, and Christ incorporates the communicant into his body. At the same time, even in this process of incorporation, the communicant does not cease to be his own self; he is not *merely* consumed or digested. In fact, as Donne's poetry so eloquently insists, he only truly becomes himself through that incorporation. This model of incorporation becomes extremely important for Milton's articulation of what it means to be human, exactly because he is so insistent on human autonomy, individual freedom, and the authority of the conscience. The eucharist, I claim, provides Milton a way to imagine and comprehend the co-existence of subjective autonomy and mystical incorporation.

For Milton this possibility yields poetic as well as theological results. Indeed, without some way of understanding his own relationship to a larger mystical body, Milton could never truly achieve his goal of writing *the* great Christian epic. At most, apart from some sense of how the individual talent can speak on behalf of and to the traditional community of Christian faith, Milton's poetry could only testify to the poet's singular and solitary genius. Milton's bold ambition was much greater than this: he wants his poem to speak on behalf of the divine, to "justify the ways of God to men." What Milton's poetry seeks in the eucharist, therefore, is a sacramental conception of the author's literary body, his poetic *corpus*, and it is this conception that allows Milton to satisfy the conflicting impulses of his verse. On the one hand, Milton desires his poetry to channel the voice of God, to be an extension of the divine Word, even a

manifestation of God's presence in the world. As he confesses in the invocation to Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, Milton believes his poem will fail "if all be mine" (9.46), rather than the work of his divine muse,¹⁷ "who brings it nightly to my ear" (9.47). On the other hand, Milton clearly does want the poem to be his own in some sense, to be "*my* adventurous song" (1.13, my italics). He needs it to do justice to the "one talent" that had so long been "lodg'd with me useless" ("On his blindness," 3,4). Yet these two goals are only in conflict if the poet's identity and God's remain mutually exclusive. As Herbert and Donne both recognize, the special ideological significance of eucharistic eating is that it denies such exclusion, insisting instead that two distinct identities can co-exist within each other. This is a feature of the eucharist that Milton explicitly addresses in his discussion of the sacrament in *De Doctrina Christiana*. One of the reasons, Milton claims, that the eucharist cannot involve a literal consumption of Christ's flesh is that literal eating does not result in the mutual co-presence that the sacrament promises:

That living bread therefore which Christ calls *his flesh* [in John 5:53-58]... can be nothing but the doctrine of Christ's having become man ...; a doctrine which whosoever receives by faith, shall as surely attain eternal life, as the partaking of meats and drinks supports our brief term of bodily existence: nay, more surely; for thus, as above quoted, ***Christ dwells in us, and we in him; whereas the food which is received into the body does not dwell there, being carried off partly by natural transpiration, and partly in other ways***, as soon as the process of digestion is completed.¹⁸

When we eat normal food, Milton claims, the food itself does not "dwell" in us, but is broken down and its constituent parts are either absorbed or "carried off." The spiritual eating that goes on in the eucharist, though, is quite different, and results in a mutual "dwelling," such that Christ is *in* the believer even as the believer is *in* Christ. The spiritual eating of the sacrament, therefore, is of a fundamentally different character than the physical eating that represents it.

¹⁷ The muse that the invocation to Book 1 seems to identify as the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ *De Doctrina*, 415.

Paradise Lost, though, backs away from the absolute distinction between literal and sacramental eating the poet makes in *De Doctrina*. In the epic, in fact, Milton's idiosyncratic contribution to sacramental theology actually depends on bringing literal and figurative eating closer together. This truly original contribution to the tradition of eucharistic poetics, I claim, is Milton's strange consecration of the bodily process that makes eating work: digestion. Rejecting the distinctions Milton makes in his doctrinal summa, *Paradise Lost* transforms digestion, both literal and figurative, into *the* process that sustains the possibility of mutual indwelling. In fact, as Raphael explains to Adam in Book 5 of the poem, *Paradise Lost* is set in a universe where almost every activity is somehow sacramentally digestive, and where almost every entity is simultaneously digesting and being digested. It is this radically counterintuitive model of sacramental digestion, I will argue, that *Paradise Lost* makes as its unique contribution to the longstanding theological tradition of considering the eucharist in "breadly terms," that is, as an interaction of solid bodies mediated by a process of mutual ingestion.

Richard Crashaw, in contrast, makes liquid wine the privileged element in the communion, and for the opposite reasons that Milton privileges food. Emerging out of the new Protestant attention to wine evident in *The Book of Common Prayer* and *The Temple*, Crashaw's poetry takes that new sacramental emphasis and runs with it. Crashaw's oenological poetics thus do arise out of the new eucharistic theologies of the Reformation, but his poetry ends up displacing bread almost entirely in favour of wine. Rather than exploring the theological ramifications of communion in *both kinds*, as Cranmer did, Crashaw figures wine—and the divine blood it represents—as an image of divine grace distinctly opposed to its normal modes of food and body. Because of its fluidity, wine represents for Crashaw a version of divinity that can take the shape of whatever it fills, and that is not limited to or concerned with the discreet

boundaries of a particular solid body, whether that body is Christ's human body, the poet's, or the Church's. In Crashavian poetic theology, in fact, communion wine becomes *the* archetypal non-solid, infinitely permeating and permeable, completely beyond any rigid form, and unrestrained by any laws of conservation. In the poet's work, in fact, sacramental wine and Christ's blood never really seem to run out. In complete opposition to the medieval host, the distribution of which is so carefully limited, guarded, and policed, Crashaw's wine manifests God and his divine activity as infinite, prolix, uncontainable, and everywhere available. Crashaw's wine, in other words, always expresses prodigality; it is never sipped, but always drunk deeply, without any concern that it might run out. We see this forcefully in his paraphrase on the Latin hymn *Stabat Mater*, "Sancta Maria Dolorum":

Oh let me suck the wine
 So long of this chaste vine [Christ],
 Till drunk of thy dear wounds, I be
 A lost thing to the world, as it to me. (101-3)¹⁹

Unlike Milton, who we will see makes temperance a cardinal virtue, Crashaw understands the goal of the Christian poet as a holy indulgence. This indulgence, for Crashaw, finds its objective correlative in the plenitude of God's wine, which he seems to see as continually pouring forth. Of course, Crashaw has no material explanation why his eucharistic liquid disobeys all laws of conservation. It simply stands against the historical meanings of eucharistic bread: the limits of access to divine presence, the demarcation of the insides and outsides in the body of the Church, and the distinction between the sacred and secular. For Crashaw, sacramental wine powerfully articulates theological and poetic possibilities unavailable to the dominant discourses of bread and body.

¹⁹ This and all subsequent quotations of Crashaw's poetry come from *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*, ed. George Walton Williams (New York: New York University Press, 1972).

Crashaw explores these possibilities by imagining his poetry itself as a sacred fluid, usually as a sacred *bodily* fluid. Blood, unsurprisingly, is of central importance in his work, and he often figures it as the medium by which he and Christ communicate and commune with each other. In his epigram “On the still surviving Marks of our Saviour’s Wounds,” for example, Crashaw echoes Southwell’s *Epistle of Comfort* when he imagines Christ’s wounds as letters written in blood. In the compressed final lines of the epigram, though, any distinction between Christ’s blood and Crashaw’s poetic ink becomes increasingly blurred: “Once I did spell / Every red letter / A wound of Thine: / Now, what is better, / Balsam for mine” (6-10). Crashaw claims that his writing (and perhaps his life as well) used to be an act of violence against God, recapitulating the violent “writing” done by the “nail, or thorn, or spear” at the crucifixion (2). “Now,” instead of creating wounds in the body of Christ, Crashaw is given healing “balsam” for his own injuries. The elision, though, of both subject and verb from the second clause is telling (“Now, what is better, / Balsam for mine”), as it makes the agency of the activity unclear. “Balsam” may be the object of “spell,” in which case the sense of the sentence would run something like, “Every letter I used to spell was a ‘red letter’ because it wounded you [Christ] by being sinful; now, instead of wounding Christ, I ‘spell’ balsam for my own wounds.” Just as easily, though, the final clause could aim to *contrast* the poet’s activity with Christ’s. In that case, it would mean something like, “I used to wound Christ with my writing, but now *he* uses the very blood I shed as a balsam for my wounds.” These two interpretations, both evident in the text, do not exhaust the possible meanings of this convolving text, but they do show how consciously the poem makes Crashaw and Christ bleed into each other. The poet is at once the “spelling” agent of the text, whose composing draws Christ’s blood, and the passive receiver of the bloody balsam Christ offers to the faithful. This complication of agency, as we’ve seen, is a

familiar feature in the tradition of eucharistic poetics. It is Crashaw's particular figuration of blood as *the* means by which human and divine agency are "mixed" that makes him stand out from his predecessors.

Crashaw, though, is famously exuberant in his poetic fascination with other bodily fluids besides blood, all of which seem to have similar sacramental powers in his poetry. In Crashaw's oeuvre, tears and milk especially exist alongside blood as privileged signifiers, and they often function as counterparts to divine blood. Crashaw, in fact, frequently compares his writing with the shedding of tears and blood, or the expression of milk. In famous lines from the earlier version of "The Weeper," for example, the poet describes Christ being followed around by Mary Magdalene's weeping eyes, which he calls "two faithful fountains; / Two walking baths, two weeping motions, / Portable and compendious oceans" (114-116). These lines "overflow" with a concatenation of images and descriptions quite clearly designed to both parallel and express Mary's profligate devotion. It is the very fluid excess of his lines that Crashaw expects will find the same divine approval Mary Magdalene herself receives in John 12, when Judas criticizes her extravagant use of expensive oil to anoint Christ's feet.²⁰ Crashaw's own willingness to shamelessly employ the rhetorical extravagance he does in "The Weeper" shows his fidelity and devotion to Christ. Only a poetic Judas, the text suggests, would begrudge the author pouring out all his poetic reserves to the praise of God.

Crashaw makes use of these oenological poetics to respond to problems quite specific to his historical moment. Crashaw is not the historical or stylistic outlier he has generally been made out to be, despite the obviously idiosyncratic features of his work. Crashaw's particular

²⁰ John 12:3-7: "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this."

focus on blood and wine, as Sophie Read rightly points out, attempts to retain a high view of sacramental presence without being forced to deal with the “bodily” objections Protestants had to transubstantiation proper. As Read puts it, Crashaw’s treatment of the eucharist, with its focus on wine and blood instead of bread, “sidesteps...the objection that it is unthinkable for the body of Christ to be torn and crushed in the mouth; it retains, therefore, without needing to confront, the possibility of an actual divine presence in the Host.”²¹ At the same time, his bloody poetry “offers Crashaw a way to articulate a eucharistic theology distinct from, but consistent with, both the memorialism of reformed orthodoxy and the transubstantiation of the Roman Church.” As Read understands it, this is a “theology that relies on the power of faith to render such distinctions ultimately irrelevant.”²² Though Read here problematically dichotomizes all eucharistic theology into either memorialism or transubstantiation, her basic point is right: attention to sacramental wine allows Crashaw to avoid choosing between the incompatible accounts of “body” held by Protestants and by Catholics. What Read doesn’t develop in her argument, however, is just how much this evasion marks Crashaw very distinctly as an early modern. His work, in its effort to make denominational distinctions ultimately irrelevant, quite surprisingly ends up anticipating a very secular understanding of religious belief. In its effort to overcome such “bodily” distinctions, Crashaw’s extravagant liquid devotion counterintuitively constructs a poetic subject in many ways more modern, more secular, even more individual than Milton’s poetry ever does. Milton is always concerned to respect the boundaries of the individual, even as his poetry strives to make possible the individual’s incorporation into a divine mystical body. For Crashaw, however, the power of sacrament is precisely its ability to overcome distinction, both in terms of theology and identity. In its very open-ness and

²¹ *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 150.

²² *Ibid.*, 151.

universality, Crashaw's work pays little heed to differences of any kind: subject and object, transcendent and immanent, human and divine, self and other. Such distinctions are washed away in his poetic deluge, leaving behind only his poetic voice, "self-rai'd and self-begot." It is my contention that this voice, rather than Milton's, more closely anticipates the experience of the modern subject. It is Crashaw's work that constructs a subject who is simply there, and whose being is above and prior to any act of incorporation.

In making these arguments, I do not mean to make Milton sound Catholic or even medieval, but simply to place him in a tradition that does not begin in modernity. Likewise, I do not want to make Crashaw narrowly Protestant, but to suggest that he belongs to a tradition that really does begin in early modernity. As I discuss Milton *and* Crashaw, however, I will be stressing the ways that the eucharistic elements have a double valence: they are as much figures of the self as they are figures of divinity. For Milton, divine presence is something that must be actively digested by and into the individual. The individual, though, must likewise undergo a simultaneous process of being digested. He must be "by gradual scale sublim'd" (5.483) into a divine body that will ultimately be "all in all" (3.341). For Crashaw, sacramental wine manifests a very different version of divine presence. The eucharistic liquid reveals Christ's unbounded and multiform presence. Crashaw, though, ends up figuring the self according to the same fluid terms: the poetic subject is both perfectly soluble and yet everywhere insisting on its own irreducible presence.

Crashaw's Wine

Like Robert Southwell a half-century earlier, Richard Crashaw translates Thomas Aquinas' eucharistic hymns. He was attracted to this poetic task for similar reasons. Both his and Southwell's English interpretations highlight three key transformations. Literally, these texts

celebrate the consecration of the elements in the Mass. As they transform the clerical language of Latin into English, though, they also consecrate the vernacular, making it an appropriate medium for the ancient Corpus Christi hymns. Finally, these poems perform a poetic act of consecration, announcing their author's intentions to make the text, like the sacramental elements, a medium of Christ's presence. Yet there are important ways in which Crashaw's poetic goals are quite different from Southwell's. Southwell's translation of "*Lauda Sion Salvatorem*," as we saw in chapter two, compensates for the inability of his Recusant audience to access the consecrated host by becoming itself a kind of sacramental presence. Southwell aims to poetically reintegrate his readers into the body of the Church from which they have been cut off. Crashaw's text, in contrast, is far less concerned with any lack of access to the divine body, and instead translates the text to emphasize a liquid mixing of God and believer.

Especially in his translation of the last stanza of "*Lauda Sion*," Crashaw resists the original function of the text as a hymn for the feast in honour of Christ's *body*, Corpus Christi. Medieval singers of this hymn would have sung these lines looking directly at a consecrated host, most likely one held aloft in a monstrance as part of a ritual procession. Crashaw's rewriting of the Latin original, however, totally disregards this historical function. Instead of the host, his text pointedly honours sacramental wine:

*Tu, qui cuncta scis et vales:
Qui nos pascis hic mortales:
Tuos ibi commensales,
Cohæredes et sodales,
Fac sanctorum civium. (76-80)*

(You, who are all-knowing and all-powerful, who feeds us mortals here, make us there [in heaven], your guests, the co-heirs and companions of the holy citizens.)

O let that love which thus makes thee
Mix with our low Mortality,

Lift our lean Soules, and sett us up
 Convictors of thine own full cup,
 Coheirs of SAINTS. That so all may
 Drink the same wine; and the same WAY. (72-77)

Crashaw replaces the feeding (*pascis*) of the original with fluid and drink. In a completely original addition to the Latin, Crashaw has mortality and divinity “mix” like the water and the wine of the communion chalice. This addition helpfully clarifies what Crashaw is up to when he replaces bread with wine. Aquinas’ hymnodist asks to be an equal participant in a heavenly meal; Crashaw’s asks instead for a more fundamental mixture of identity. Rather than imagining the mystical unity of the Church as Aquinas does, where the saints are *commensals*, literally “co-tablers,” sharing both food and drink, Crashaw’s Christian unity comes solely from drinking God’s “full cup” of sacramental wine, which always seems to be full. Emphasizing the inexhaustibility of this cup, Crashaw diverts our attention from any sense that there might be limitations on sacramental consumption, or that anybody might be excluded from it. There is a subtle but important difference, also, between the way Aquinas imagines the eucharist grounding a cosmic companionship (*sodales*) and the way Crashaw sees it creating a more ontological sameness. The Latin original figures the sacred meal as a communion between fundamentally different kinds of beings: those who are “here” on earth (*hic mortales*) and those who are “there” in heaven (*ibi*). Crashaw, though, asks God to “mix” these different groups to the point that they are indistinguishable. In line 117, he twice emphasizes the “sameness” he longs for: not only must saints and mortals drink the “same wine,” they must drink it in the “same WAY.” In Crashaw’s poem, Christ’s body doesn’t have to be broken, divided, or multiplied; his blood does all the work. Because of this, the poem does not have to overcome the discreet boundaries that distinguish the individual, the Christian community, and the heavenly saints. Instead, the *hic* and the *ibi* can simply “mix.”

Elsewhere as well, Crashaw's "Lauda Sion," eschews division. This is especially evident when he translates the stanza that, in the Latin, describes how the eucharist divides the wicked from the holy. Poetically explicating the doctrines he developed, Aquinas's original explains that the sacrament causes opposite results in the *boni* and the *mali*:

*Sumunt boni, sumunt mali:
Sorte tamen inæquali,
Vitæ vel interitus.
Mors est malis, vita bonis:
Vide paris sumptionis
Quam sit dispar exitus.* (49-54)

(The good receive, the bad receive, but to very different ends, life or destruction. Death for the bad, life for the good: Behold that such equal reception should have such different conclusions!)

For Aquinas, the diverse effects of the sacrament are a testament to its power. The reader is asked to "behold" (*Vide*) this magisterial potency and to recognize the way the eucharist, pre-empting Christ's ultimate judgement, already distinguishes the sinner and the saint. Crashaw is clearly uneasy about such distinctions, and his translation carefully refigures both the agency of division and the nature of the division itself:

Though in it self this SOVERAIN FEAST
Be all the same to every Guest,
Yet on the same (life-meaning) Bread
The child of Death eates himself Dead.
Nor is't love's fault, but sin's dire skill
That thus from LIFE can DEATH distill. (49-54)

Not only is the English here much more insistent on the fundamental sameness of the bread to all recipients (again twice emphasised), but he makes the agents of the passage either "the child of Death" or "sin" rather than the bread itself. Crashaw also seems to suggest that the "child of death" doesn't really eat the eucharist at all, but merely himself. Rather than thinking of the host as poison for the unholy, as Aquinas clearly does, Crashaw has the bread miraculously disappear

from the equation. It is almost as if, when the sinner tries to bite down on the bread, it suddenly evaporates and he ends up sinking his teeth into himself. Crashaw thus manages to absolve “Love” of any malicious sacramental activity. Instead, “Sin” becomes the agent of distinction. Sin’s “dire skill,” in fact, is “distillation,” that is, the separating out of some constituent part from a liquid solution. Thus, though Crashaw actually manages to mention bread directly here, he still ends up using liquid terminology to understand how the sacrament works. “Life,” according to the metaphor the poet gives us here, is a mixture, while Death is something separated out from life by Sin. In this translation, we get a clear sense of how Crashaw conceives the divine life made manifest in the elements of the eucharist. That “LIFE” is defined by its cohesion and integration; Death, in contrast, is defined by distinction and differentiation. So, when Crashaw claims here that “in it self this SOVERAIN FEAST / Be all the same,” he means something more than that everybody consumes the same elements. He suggests an ontological sameness, a homogeneous divine essence into which the human must be fully dissolved. This process makes no sense in relation to the *breaking* of bread, but expresses itself most fully in the liquescent properties of eucharistic wine, and the bodily fluids for which it stands, in Crashaw’s case, milk and tears as well as blood.

Many of Crashaw’s poems venerate a particular saint or sacred figure. Most of these venerating poems, however, end up dissolving their saint into one or several of the bodily fluids that flow everywhere in Crashaw’s texts. Crashaw’s Christ dissolves into blood, his Mary Magdalene into tears, and his Virgin Mary into milk. His saintly characters almost cease to be persons, and instead become manifestations of a divine movement or flow. In Crashaw’s “Nativity Ode,” for example, the Virgin Mary is an endless reservoir of milk, a fluid principle of divine nourishment, rather than the distinct saintly *person* we find in Southwell’s work. Though

Crashaw's poem venerates the infant Christ, it dwells significantly on Christ's mother and on her relationship with her son. In a way that resembles the rhetorical excess of "The Weeper's" two "compendious oceans," Crashaw extolls the Virgin's breasts, "Two sister-seas of Virgin-Milk" (1652, 87), as the fullest manifestation of the Virgin's care for her son. Mary's gift of breast milk, though, represents more than maternal nourishment; it ends up blurring any clear distinction between mother and son. The mother pours herself as milk into the son, and the son pours himself back in various liquid forms. In the earlier 1648 version of the poem, in fact, the apostrophe to Mary's breasts leads directly into a stanza where, even by Crashaw's standards, the distinction between agents, actions, and motions is incredibly hard to specify:

Shee sings thy Tears asleepe, and dips
 Her Kisses in thy weeping Eye.
 Shee spreads the red leaves of the Lips,
 That in their Buds yet blushing lye.
 Shee 'gainst those Mother-Diamonds tryes
 The points of her young Eagles Eyes. (65-70)

Perhaps even Crashaw felt this stanza was poetically excessive, and so he deleted it from the later version of the poem, but it remains a potent example of exactly the kind of fluid mixing that fascinates him. Christ is drinking from Mary, but here, as Mary "dips / Her Kisses" into Christ's weeping eye, she drinks from him, though she drinks his tears rather than his blood. Making Christ the "weeper" here is unusual, since the standard supposition of the Christian tradition was that the infant Christ did not cry.²³ The choice also perplexes the distinction between child and mother by attributing to Christ the activity normally assigned to his virgin mother, the *mater dolorosa*, the woman of sorrows. He mourns instead of her, and offers himself as a drink in the form of tears rather than blood. Christ's blood does make an oblique appearance in the poem, but only as it rouges the "blushing" "red leaves" of Christ's lips, which Mary "spreads" as she feeds

²³ Jeffrey Siker, *Jesus, Sin and Perfection in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 93.

and kisses the infant. Crashaw also describes Christ's lips as virginal "Buds," using a highly eroticized portrayal to again mix the attributes of Christ and Mary. The two are portrayed as lovers, but Christ's blushing lips gender him as the chaste female, while Mary's breasts and her piercing "Eagle Eyes" become the penetrating "masculine" organs. As Mario Praz describes this stanza, "Similes and conceits form in these few lines a monstrous cluster: the viewpoint shifts with such speed that what we see is a throbbing and dazzling chaos instead of a definite pattern."²⁴ This is precisely the point. The vertiginous concursion of images figures a reciprocal "pouring out" of mother into son and son into mother, destabilizing any one movement or pattern that might distinguish either's particular function within this "throbbing" activity of divine flow. If we use Miltonic language to explain Crashaw's ideas, it makes sense to say that this vision of divinity mirrors the "dark materials" of Milton's Chaos. Chaos is "a dark / Illimitable Ocean without bound, / Without dimension, where length, breadth, & highth, / And time and place are lost" (*Paradise Lost*, 2.891-4). Like the Christ of Crashaw's nativity hymn, who is himself a solution of "Sommer in winter, Day in night" (81), the realm of Chaos is composed "Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire, / But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt / Confus'dly" (2.912-14). The difference, of course, between Crashaw and Milton, is that while Milton views this primordial mixture as "Eternal Anarchie" (896), Crashaw drinks it in as the "compendious ocean" of religious ecstasy ("The Weeper," 1652, 114).

Crashaw revels in this divine, chaotic indistinction, and though he seems to have thought the mother/son stanza above needed some editing, it reflects a fascination with dissolution always present in his poetry. Crashaw's famously "icky" epigram, "Blessed be the Paps which Thou hast suckt," describes exactly the same blending of identities, though with more poetic concision and elegance than the early version of the "Nativity Ode" achieves:

²⁴ *The Flaming Heart* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1958), 249.

Suppose he had been tabled at thy Teates,
 Thy hunger feeles not what He eates:
 Hee'l have His teat e're long (a bloody one)
 The Mother then must suck the Son.

Like the “Nativity Ode” stanza, the epigram viscerally represents the double motion of eucharistic consumption. As with all of Crashaw’s English epigrams, it is based on an earlier Latin version from a collection he composed while at Cambridge. In the Latin version, which is grammatically clearer than its English counterpart, the first two lines are posed as rhetorical questions: *Et quid si biberet Jesus vel ab ubere vestro? / Quid facit ad vestram, quod bibit ille, sitim?* (“What if Jesus were to drink from your breast? What effect would his drinking have on your thirst?”). The implication in this version is that, though Mary nourishes Christ, she herself remains thirsty. In the English version, Crashaw puts this implication in the indicative, though he changes thirst (*sitim*) to “hunger.” “Thy hunger,” he writes, “feels not what He eats,” that is, “Your hunger is not satisfied by his eating.” Considering Crashaw’s usual preference for liquids, this stands out as an unusual change. It is also strange that the English replaces the Latin *bibere* (“to drink,” but also “to nurse”) with “tabled,” an odd verb that invokes contemporary debates about what to call that piece of furniture on which the eucharist was served. The overall effect of the English version, however, is still to dissolve the process of eating into a more fundamental activity of drinking, just as it muddies any distinction between the activities of Mother and Son. Because Christ “eats” at the “table” of Mary’s breasts, his literal drinking resembles eucharistic eating. Mary is the table/altar, her milk the host, and Christ the communicant. This model of eating, though, is treated as ultimately unsatisfactory. Mary cannot satisfy her appetite by feeding Christ, nor is the meal she provides Christ’s “true” nourishment. In the complicated metaphor that Crashaw compresses into the third line, Jesus must “have” some other “teat.” This “bloody”

teat, though, refers both to the experience of the passion, which Christ must “drink up,”²⁵ and to Christ’s own spear-wounded side, out of which he pours the sacramental blood that Mary must then “suck.”

This image, of Christ as a mother suckling believers with his blood, is not that unusual in the history of Christian literature and art, and in fact makes frequent appearances in the work of medieval women mystics;²⁶ what is unusual are the two key transitions that order Crashaw’s English epigram. The first is a shift from Christ “eating” to Mary “sucking,” so that the ultimate satisfaction of appetite comes from Christ’s liquid blood rather than the milk “He eats.” The second transition moves from what we might call a linear model of nourishment to a reflexive or circular one. In the first two lines, Mary simply feeds Christ, but this leaves her unsatisfied. In the final two lines, Mary must “suck” the body that she herself gave birth to and nourished from her own body. In this cycle of reflexive feeding, Mary’s motherhood is ultimately only a picture of Christ’s motherhood, and even her unique role as the Mother of God is drunk up into the fullness of Christ. According to complex terms of the metaphor in the third line, Christ becomes a figure of perfect self-nourishment, since the “bloody teat” he must “have” is his own wounded side. In the epigram, therefore, “eating” remains the activity that signifies distinction, that marks the difference between Mary and the infant Jesus even as she feeds him. The “sucking” that concludes the poem, however, incorporates Mary, and her roles as mother and nurse, back into the reflexive and ultimately self-sufficient activities that define Christ in this poem: his simultaneous shedding and drinking of his own blood.

²⁵ Crashaw here also alludes to fact that Christ, according the synoptic gospels’ account of his prayer in Gethsemane, calls his passion as a “cup.”

²⁶ Julian of Norwich, for example, devotes a significant passage of *Revelations of Divine Love*, to contemplating how “Jesus is our true mother, feeding us not with milk, but with himself, opening his side for us.” Ed. A.C. Spearing and Elizabeth Spearing (New York: Penguin, 1998), 60. See also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, esp. 269-76.

Many critical considerations of this poem have felt that it does not do a good job of communicating the kinds of “spiritual” content I have outlined above. These readings suggest that the “grossness” of the epigram’s imagery at least threatens its ostensible devotional goals. As Gary Kuchar puts it, “Crashaw’s poem comes remarkably close to annulling the spiritual reality beneath and within the corporeal surface.”²⁷ According to the recent work of Kimberly Johnson, the difficulty many readers have had getting “beneath or within” Crashaw’s imagery actually tells us something about how his poetry works. Crashaw’s “indigestible poetics,” as she calls them, intentionally resist any readerly attempt to “absorb” the material surfaces of the poem into some more abstract spiritual meaning. For Johnson, Crashaw’s poetry is a kind of eucharistic element, but only in the sense that it makes poetry itself the “presence” available in poetry. As she reads Crashaw, his poetry never points to anything “behind or under” the text. “For Crashaw,” she argues,

...the symbolic system is itself fully manifest in its corporeality, and that corporeality must constitute our experience of the divine, however incomplete. By substantiating his language into antiabsorptive symbol, Crashaw adopts a poetics that reflects the experiential, sense-able dynamics of sacramental worship.²⁸

The problem with this reading of Crashaw, besides the way it risks slipping into mere tautology (i.e., poetry is “presence” and “presence” is poetry), is that it doesn’t attend to the pointedly *liquid* language of his work. Suggesting that Crashaw’s poetry resists “absorption” appears rather problematic when we notice just how often his poems celebrate the multiform absorption of a whole variety of fluids. “Blessed be the Paps” exemplifies this: the mother absorbs her son’s bodily fluids so that she may be absorbed into his own perfect process of continual self-absorption. In “The Weeper,” similarly, though Mary Magdalene’s famous tears are repeatedly

²⁷ *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 113.

²⁸ *Made Flesh*, 121.

drunk or absorbed, they also seem able to absorb all things and forms into themselves. Since they have no rigid structure, these tears are able to assume a profusion of forms—“springs” (1), “rills” (2), bubbles (3), “thawing” snow (4), “starres” (8), seeds (9), sweat (12), milk (21), cream (22), “balsom” (50), “wine” (66), and “showres” of rain (83)—all of which emerge momentarily before being reabsorbed into a unified generative liquid. The tears rise up to heaven precisely so that they may be drunk and, in one of Crashaw’s most infamously bizarre images, breathed out as angel-song:

Upwards thou dost weep;
 Heaven’s bosome drinks the gentle stream.
 Where th’ milky rivers creep,
 Thine floats above; and is the cream.
 ...
 Every morn from hence,
 A brisk Cherub something sips,
 Whose sacred influence
 Adds sweetnes to his sweetest Lippes;
 Then to his music: and his song
 Tasts of this Breakfast all day long. (1652, 19-22, 25-30)

“Heaven’s bosome drinks” Mary’s tears, transforming them into the lactations of the Milky Way, where high-levels of devotional butter-fat cause them to rise to the surface of a galactic river. The transformed tears are then drunk again when the “brisk cherub ... sips” them as cream, transforming the milky tears again into sweet-tasting musical airs. In the theological universe laid out in “The Weeper,” the tears are always becoming everything else, being absorbed into a sacred oneness. The identity of any individual thing melts away. Crashaw’s images here are not so much indigestible as they are digestionless—absorption, incorporation, and transformation all occur instantaneously, without any mediating physiological or spiritual process.

For Crashaw, there seems to be no need at all for digestion, a process that is only necessary if the consumer is somehow different from the thing he consumes. This difference is

one that Crashaw denies. This treatment of digestion, moreover, stands in marked contrast to Milton's, which I discuss at greater length below but will anticipate briefly here. In *Paradise Lost* 5.407-413, Milton unusually insists that digestion occurs in both human and angelic bodies. This claim, as Jason Rosenblatt points out, jibes at a theological commonplace that angels, when they ate food in biblical stories, only appeared to do so.²⁹ In "The Weeper" too, Crashaw's angel eats real food. The angel in "The Weeper," though, doesn't seem to require any such process of mediation; he is able at once to absorb and transform Mary Magdalene's "eye-cream" into an even more amorphous substance, his musical breath. The difference in the way Crashaw and Milton treat digestion, though, affects more than their understanding of angelic bodies. In Milton's epic, digestion becomes the most important process in the universe; in Crashaw's poetry, it is entirely absent. Crashaw's prodigal and pluriform liquids, it seems, can be absorbed without such processing. In "The Weeper," Mary's tears have an immediate power to become what drinks them, as they do when the "milky" bosom of heaven imbibes them. It never concerns Crashaw that there might be too much fluid to manage, just as it does not concern him that his poetry might be too much to take in. "The Weeper's" tears are always manifestations of sacred superabundance, while Mary herself is the "precious prodigal! / Fair spendthrift of thyself" (1652, 127-8). Because Milton's poetic universe depends on a digestive *process*, his work is deeply concerned about overindulgence, worrying that too much of anything might overwhelm this process. In Book 7 of *Paradise Lost*, for example, the angel Raphael warns Adam that he ought to be temperate in his consumption of learning as well as his consumption of food:

But Knowledge is as food, and needs no less
Her Temperance over Appetite, to know
In measure what the mind may well contain,
Oppresses else with Surfet, and soon turns
Wisdom to Folly, as Nourishment to Winde. (126-30)

²⁹ "Celestial Entertainment in Eden: Book V of 'Paradise Lost'," *The Harvard Theological Review* 62.4 (1969), 414.

For Crashaw, spiritual knowledge is instead a kind of drink, rather than a “food,” while “Surfet” is both the method of consumption and its ultimate goal. This is why, though Milton imagines excessive consumption as necessarily producing indigestion and flatulence, the only “airy” release Crashaw can imagine is the angel’s music. The Cherub’s heavenly song seems rather like a heavenly belch, since it tastes of his “breakfast all day long” (30). Yet the poem has no sense of this gaseous emission being a digestive remainder, separated out and expelled by the body. Excretion, like digestion, has no place in the series of transformations that take place in “The Weeper.” The song, instead, is just one more evanescent form of the same “weeping motion” into which the poem always strives to dissolve itself.

The mistake at this point would be to align Crashaw’s ubiquitous and liquid sacramentality with a broadly defined set of medieval sensibilities and Catholic proclivities.³⁰ My claim is rather that Crashaw’s impulse to unify all difference within a liquid oneness significantly moves away from an older eucharistic model. In that model, *different* bodies simultaneously incorporate each other without losing hold of difference as such. The history of the eucharist in the west, this dissertation has argued, can usefully be thought of as a series of debates about how to best understand that paradox. Crashaw’s oenological thinking, however, leaves behind the logic of body, and with it the need to make sense of difference. There is a counterintuitive way, though, that Crashaw’s eschewal of difference tends make his own voice the only real presence that remains in his poetry. His poetry evidently strives to make the

³⁰ Barbara Lewalski famously made Crashaw an outsider to the school of English poets and their “Protestant poetics,” while both Heather Asals and more recently Sophie Read have diagnosed Crashaw’s use of metonymy as reflecting a distinctly Roman Catholic way of thinking. Most recently Nandra Perry has strongly re-asserted Crashaw’s supposedly medieval sensibility. See Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 197; Asals, “Crashaw’s Participles of the ‘Chiroscuro’ of Ontological Language”, in *Essays on Richard Crashaw*, ed. Robert M. Cooper (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1979), 35-49; Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 127-53; and Perry, “Turning the Tables,” 303-26.

boundaries of the self “porous,” but it tends instead to simply expand the boundaries of his own self until it swallows everything else. There is frequently an obvious violence at work in the way Crashaw’s poetry never really allows other people to be present *as* persons. Crashaw loses himself in the contemplation of saintly bodies, but he seldom tries to inhabit or understand their minds or thoughts. Thus, while the speaker of “The Flaming Heart” implores St. Teresa to “Leave nothing of my SELF in me” (106), it is actually Teresa who loses any recognizable selfhood. She can only ever be described as the throbbing centre of a nebulous flow of spiritual energies, “Bigge alike with wounds and darts” (76). This is totally unlike Southwell’s poetry, which imagines the internal lives of saints, especially in *St. Peter’s Complaint* and *Mary Magdalen’s Funeral Tears*. It is even quite different than *Pearl*, in which the Pearl-maiden has an insistent presence as a personal character within the text, even though she also has various allegorical functions. Crashaw’s saints are objects rather than subjects, and the omnipresent liquids of his poetry tend to dissolve these poetic figures into Crashaw, rather than the other way around. It is quite disturbing, in fact, how often Crashaw aggressively dissects his devotional objects into eyes, breasts, hearts, mouths, and so on, drinking in the blood and milk produced by this poetic dissection rather than being drunk. Southwell, in *St. Peter’s Complaint*, was drawn up into Peter, and Peter in turn into Christ; Crashaw’s Mary in “The Weeper” never speaks, only her tears do, once Nature has “extracted” them. It is they, and not Mary herself, who “go to meet / A worthy object, our Lord’s feet” (1652, 186).

Crashaw, to put it another way, can imagine metaphysical commerce between the poet and God, but he has difficulty representing any such commerce between anyone else. Lorraine M. Roberts makes a very similar claim about Crashaw, though rather accidentally, when she writes that the “impersonality of Crashaw’s voice suits his intent of creating an everyman who

can witness sacred events, be affected by their emotion and meaning, and engender the same response and significance in his reader.”³¹ Her specification of “events” is apt, as Crashaw’s primary interest is in the “feeling” of a particular moment, much more than its feeler. Even Christ, for Crashaw, is more a bleeding event than an individual, and his body fails to be a site of *personal* otherness. Again, a comparison with Southwell is instructive. In *Saint Peter’s Complaint*, as Christ gazes at Peter, and Peter sees his own reflection in Christ’s eye, Southwell figures a complex interaction between Peter’s agency and Christ’s. Crashaw, on the other hand, has no sense of Christ looking back at him. Christ’s only “eyes” are his bleeding wounds:

O these wakeful wounds of Thine!
Are they Mouthes? or are they eyes?
Be they Mouthes, or be they eyne,
Each bleeding part some one supplies.
(“On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord,” 1-4)

In one sense, the body of Christ is covered in eyes. Crashaw, though, has little interest in their gaze, and focuses on them as liquid-producing orifices. As Richard Rambuss describes it, Jesus’ divine body is “almost nothing but orifices.”³² In Crashaw’s poetry, even the incarnated body of Christ is not the seat of divine presence but a permeable membrane through which such presence must pass in its true liquid form. Radically departing from a Christian tradition that made Christ’s body the site of mediation between the human and the divine, Crashaw diminishes, even dissolves, the significance of the flesh of Jesus. If Christ’s body is anything in Crashaw’s poetry, it is an obstructive veil that must be passed through. This is apparent again in Crashaw’s “Hymn to the Name Above Every Name,” where Christ’s body is a doorway for blood rather than the meat of real presence: “What did their Weapons but sett wide the doors / For Thee: Fair, purple Doores, of Love’s devising” (216-12). Unlike Herbert’s “Windows,” where the stained-glass

³¹ “Crashaw’s Sacred Voice: ‘A commerce of contrary powers,’” in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, ed. John R. Roberts (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 78.

³² *Closet Devotions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 30.

ministers add “color” to the “transcendent” light of God (11,4), the opening in this poem is simply an aperture for transit. Christ’s flesh is a surface that must be pierced so that the liquid wine of “Love” may flow through: “It was the witt of Loue o’reflowd the bounds / Of Wrath, and made thee way through All Those Wounds” (223-18). In this reflexive metaphor, Love makes way for Christ *through* his wounds, such that Christ is more “way” than flesh, more means than end. So it is, I claim, that Crashaw’s enthusiastic desire for porosity usually transforms the poetic figures he considers rather than his own poetic voice. Christ becomes a door, but it always Crashaw who seems to be bursting through it.

This counterintuitive effect is most evident in the Teresa poems, especially “The Flaming Heart.” There, the speaker realizes his devotional agency by “reading against” the emblem of the poem, a seraph piercing Teresa’s enflamed heart. Rather than finding divine truth revealed *in* the emblem, as Quarles’ poems do in his famous emblem book, Crashaw corrects the imagined illustrator, chiding him for his failure to understand the underlying spiritual truth betrayed by his visual representation:

Painter, what didst thou understand
To put her dart into his hand!
See, even the yeares and size of him
Showes this the mother SERAPHIM.
This is the mistresse flame; and duteous he
Her happy fire-works, here, comes down to see. (13-18)

Teresa, the speaker claims, ought to be holding the symbolic dart of love. And because she possesses this phallic arrow, he claims, the “Painter” has also erred in representing Teresa as female: we must “Read HIM for her, and her for him” (11). Crashaw’s treatment of the material object, therefore, is decidedly less open than Donne’s or Herbert’s is to the possibility that it might impose itself on the poet. While his predecessors tend to represent themselves as being “taught” by artefacts, symbols, and images, Crashaw’s poetic agency is antagonistic to the

images and objects he considers. Herbert, in “Church Monuments,” discovers in the artistic and material elements of the funerary statues a useful lesson about self-mortification: “Mark here below / How tame these ashes are, how free from lust, / That thou mayst fit thy self against thy fall” (22-24). In Donne’s own poem to Herbert, Donne also finds meaning in his own personal emblem, the sheaf of snakes. Significantly, though Donne begins by rejecting his old insignia, he ultimately returns to it, discerning even in the “fallen” image of a snake a hidden sacramental meaning. For both Donne and Herbert, God always speaks in and through the material surfaces of world and art. The imagined emblematic surface of “The Flaming Heart,” however, is distinguished by the fact that it does not reveal the spiritual reality of Teresa’s saintly presence or action. The picture is nothing more than a “fair-cheek’t fallacy” (4). The emblem in “The Flaming Heart” becomes rather like the body of Jesus in “On the Wounds of our Crucified Saviour.” Both are solid “surfaces” that must be passed through in order to access a truth or presence they obscure. Here, unlike in Donne’s or Herbert’s work, the poet does not receive the image, the object, the body, or the other as that from which poetry then emerges. The poet must impose himself over and against these “solid surfaces.” The aim of this imposition is mystical—to draw poet and reader beyond the material surfaces of the world—but it can seem to make the poet the only thing that really exists.

This process of poetic assertion shows up again in Crashaw’s “Apology for the Foregoing Hymn,” where the poet defends his celebration of a Spanish counter-reformation saint to his Protestant audience. In that poem, Teresa becomes a projection of Crashaw’s own poetic ideal, a feminized image of her literary creator. She is a universal subject, stripped of its historical, social, and bodily particularity, embodying a religious experience that is ultimately private and apolitical. Crashaw, in fact, vigorously effaces from Teresa’s imagined essence all those

particularities that might offend a Protestant reader. All the particular things that would define Teresa in the normal course of human interactions—her nationality, her language, her Catholicism—become unreal surfaces that must, like the emblem representing her, be read past:

Forbid it, mighty Love! let no fond Hate
Of names and wordes, so far prejudicate.
Souls are not Spaniards too; one friendly flood
Of BAPTISM blends them all into a blood.
(“An Apology for the Foregoing Hymn,” 13-16)

For Crashaw, the simultaneously baptismal and eucharistic blood of Christ washes away all national and religious distinctions. Teresa is simply Christian, and Christianity is one homogenous confluence of blood. Much as Crashaw’s liquid poetics avoid metaphysical problems of distinction and difference, here they also do away with social and political ones. Differences of language, just like the differences between nations, are overwhelmed by Crashaw’s ocean of blood: “What soul so e’er, in any language, can / Speak heav’n like hers is my soul’s country-man. / O ’tis not Spanish, but ’tis heav’n she speaks!” (21-3). Unlike Herbert, who discovers theological truth in the particulars of his native language (as he does in “The Sonnet”), Crashaw sees devotion as a universal dialect, a liquid “heav’n” behind and beyond the forms of English or Spanish. Teresa herself becomes universalized in exactly the same way: she doesn’t speak Spanish, she isn’t especially Catholic, she never seems to age, she’s not really even a woman. She becomes the pure manifestation of devotional desire. Eventually, she even turns into another fluid for Crashaw to consume:

...Let my soul swell
With thee, strong wine of love! let others swimme
In puddles; we will pledge this SERAPHIM
Bowles full of richer blood than blush of grape
Was ever guilty of, Change we too ’our shape,
(My soul,) Some drink from men to beasts, o then
Drink we till we prove more, not lesse, than men,
And turn not beasts, but Angels. (30-7)

Just as we will see Milton doing in *Paradise Lost*, Crashaw here imagines sacramental ingestion transforming human into angelic bodies. For Crashaw, though, this sacrament comes only in liquid form, and the transformation it engenders is dependent on a sacred drunkenness, brought about by a holy indulgence. Crashaw's imperative could not be more different from Raphael's exhortation to temperate consumption. Crashaw and his readers must keep drinking "till [they] prove more ... than men."

In stating this desire to become something "more than" a human being, Crashaw hints at the contradictory impulses of his poetry. On the one hand, Crashaw desires to lose his own sense of self, dissolving his own particularity as one of these individual "men." He desires to become like Teresa, elevated beyond all particularity and immanence. On the other hand, in his ecstatic effort to dissolve all such boundaries of distinction, Crashaw always seems to produce the opposite effect. Instead of liquefying the poet into a transcendent holy otherness, his poems end up asserting his voracious thirst, as well as his uncanny ability to turn all other figures into a liquid draught for his own consumption. Crashaw's devotional exercise can be summarized in a stanza from his epigram "Upon the Bleeding Crucifix." Up to this point in the poem, the speaker has been cataloguing the individual wounds of Christ and tracing, in the manner of a blazon, the passage of each bloody rivulet down his body. The speaker's devotional realization is this:

But while I speak, whither are run
All the rivers nam'd before?
I counted wrong. There is but one;
But O that one is one all ore. (25-8)

Even the distinction between the wounds on the different parts of Christ's body (his head, his feet, his hands, his side) is supplanted by a singular flow of divine blood: "There is but one; But O that one is one all ore." For Crashaw, this is a unified "deluge of Deliverance" (35), a salvation

that dissolves all things into a homogeneous unity. Here, Crashaw's poetry imagines a perfectly "porous" relationship between the self and God, but it does so to disguise Crashaw's own insistent agency at work in the text. God is in every object and in every place for Crashaw, but so is the poet. In Crashaw's work, it becomes hard to tell if it isn't the poet who has become God.

This is a subtle but profound departure from the tradition of eucharistic poetics I have been describing in this dissertation. That tradition, in its many different forms, is unified by an attempt to express how different spiritual and material bodies can incorporate each other without effacing their difference. In Crashaw's vision of the divine, we do not find a paradoxical assertion of difference within unity; instead we find a homogenous liquid that overflows all difference, making the self ultimately the same as God. The mystical oneness that Crashaw strives after, to put it another way, has less in common with any medieval "presence culture" than it does with the "One Life" described in Coleridge's "Eolian Harp," which "meets all motion and becomes its soul" (28).

The secularizing shift that Crashaw participates in, then, is not so much the departure of God from the world, but the blurring of any clear distinction between self, world, and God. In such a theological dispensation, the real threats are any overly vigorous assertions of particularity or non-conformity. This is why Crashaw, in his "Hymn to the Name above every Name," bears such disdain for Puritans unwilling to kneel when the name of Jesus is said during worship:

They that by Love's mild Dictate now
Will not adore thee,
Shall Then with Just Confusion, bow
And break before thee. (236-9)

In a poem where "All things that Are" (56) come forth to praise the name of Jesus, the one real sin, perhaps the only possible one, is a refusal to accept Crashaw's mandate of pious exuberance, to resist the devotional dissolution into what Crashaw calls the "compacted / Body of Blessings"

(165-6). Crashaw can drink in the Roman Catholic Teresa, but he can't stomach these disobedient Puritans. They are, for Crashaw, defined by their resistance to the sacred unity of his liquid church. This poetic model, of course, would have been very conducive to the religious settlement that immediately followed the Restoration, where the English Church became increasingly tolerant to differences of belief so long as they didn't threaten the political and religious unity of the nation. In that period, before the Glorious Revolution, it was only those recalcitrant non-conformists who had to be stamped out and banished from the land. It is perhaps for this reason that Crashaw, like his own Teresa, was accepted by Restoration poets as a model for an ostensibly apolitical and universal mode of sincere "personal belief." Abraham Cowley, Crashaw's personal friend from Cambridge, famously eulogizes him as "Poet and Saint!"³³ but he takes a cue from Crashaw in the way that he excuses his friend's conversion to Catholicism:

Pardon, my Mother Church, if I consent
That Angels led him when from thee he went,
For even in Error sure no Danger is
When joyn'd with so much Piety as His. (47-50)

Surely no such comment could be made about Donne or Herbert, and certainly not of Milton. When the text of *De Doctrina Christiana* was discovered, Milton's pious "errors" were very much felt as dangerous, and Miltonists take a certain pride in the fact that they still sometimes are. Cowley, though, relegates Crashaw's errors quite safely to the realm of personal "Piety." "Ah, mighty God," Cowley laments, "Ah that our greatest faults were in Belief" (51-52), suggesting, in distinctly Crashavian fashion, that particularities of private belief are matters indifferent. And it wasn't just Crashaw's friends willing to read him this way. Even many years later, Samuel Johnson echoed Cowley by calling Crashaw a "Poet and Saint," extending him a

³³ "On the Death of Mr. Crashaw," 1.

religious and political tolerance he does not show to Milton.³⁴ Counterintuitively, therefore, even Crashaw's very early reception defines his religious subjectivity in recognizably modern and "buffered" terms. He becomes the representative of a private mysticism that remains, despite its extravagant images of dissolution, safely bounded within a spiritualized interiority. Though Crashaw's poetry longs to dissolve everything into "one all ore," his readers, both historically and in the present, have not generally read that desire as making an ethical claim on them. The epithet "Poet and Saint" aims to distance Crashaw, to relegate his exuberance to an admirably naïve spiritual realm, where each religious subject is his own universe unconnected to larger real-world political and social bodies. This reading of Crashaw responds to the model of subjectivity his poetry actually does present. For Crashaw, the religious subject transforms into a liquid principle capable of taking in any and all forms. The liquidity of Crashaw's poetic subject does not allow for the interpenetration of different and distinct bodies, but instead absorbs them into one singular identity, his own. Crashaw's readers, half accepting the terms of his bibulous texts, have tended to see his work as creating *a* world rather than swallowing *the* world. In other words, though Crashaw's poetry tries to absorb the universe into itself, it instead creates a parallel one, where all things are remade as extensions of the poet. This parallel universe, though, like any truly parallel line, can never meet the world it parallels; it remains bounded within Crashaw's saintly subjectivity. In this version of sacramental poetics, Crashaw has, accidentally perhaps, moved away from the devotional goals of Donne, Herbert, and Southwell, who all understand the self as always incorporated within a variety of overlapping yet distinct political, biological, and spiritual bodies.

³⁴ "Crashaw is now not the only maker of verses to whom may be given the two venerable names of Poet and Saint." *The lives of the most eminent English poets*, vol. 3 (Dublin: 1780-81), 147. Milton, on the other hand, Johnson accuses of being "an acrimonious and surly republican," and claimed the poet's political convictions were "founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence; in petulance impatient of controul, and pride disdainful of superiority." Vol. 1, 196.

Milton's Food

If Crashaw's poetry privileges wine—and its liquid properties—over bread, Milton's poetry has an insistent focus on solid food. When wine does appear in his work, it often represents some principle opposed to his poetic ideals and goals. In his early career, for example, Milton consistently treats abstention from alcohol as part of his preparation to become a great poet. In his *Elegia Sexta*, written to his best friend Charles Diodati, Milton contrasts two distinct kinds of poets: the elegiac and the epic. Describing the first kind, Milton writes that “It's good for such poets to have large banquets, and they often order vintage wine” (53-4, *Talibus inde licent convivium larga poetis, / Sæpis et veteri commaduisse mero*). The epic poet, however, ought to “live abstemiously in the manner of Pythagoras” (59-60, *parce Samii pro more magistri Vivat*) and “drink sober draughts of water from the pure spring” (62, *Sobriaque e puro pocula fonte bibat*). Milton's poetry is equally averse to blood, wine's sacramental counterpart.³⁵ Even when Milton deals with traditionally bloody sacred topics, such as the circumcision, he pays little attention to the fluid. So, while in Crashaw's poem on the Circumcision, Christ's “lesser flood” promises an eventual “Sea” of blood (3-4), Milton's version directly mentions blood only once (Christ “now bleeds to give us ease,” 11). For Milton, the circumcision is much more about the supersession of one system of divine “law” by another (15-20). *Paradise Lost*, similarly, has in its entirety only one mention of Christ's blood, and there it appears solely as the typological fulfillment of Jewish law: “The blood of bulls and goats” reveal that “Some blood more precious must be paid for Man,” (12.292-3). The language of “body” and “food,” however, is present everywhere in *Paradise Lost*. As I have already argued, this presence reflects the epic poet's

³⁵ In this chapter, references to Milton's shorter poetry come from *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Stella P. Revard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), and all quotations of *Paradise Lost* come from *Paradise Lost*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

engagement with a “bodily” sacramental tradition as well as his peculiar poetic presentation of digestion within that tradition. Milton, in fact, by making digestion the heart (or rather the gut) of his eucharistic poetics, sacralizes exactly that process which Crashaw so pointedly avoids. For Crashaw, this avoidance stems from a desire to subsume all forms of difference or mediation into a uniform self. Milton, however, finds in digestion a way for the distinct identity of the individual to coexist with the corporate claims inherent to Christian theology.

As I pointed out above, there is an obvious tension between the way that Milton addresses the eucharist in *De Doctrina Christiana* and the way he treats the sacrament in *Paradise Lost*. This contrast is especially striking in how each text treats the idea of eucharistic digestion. Milton’s theological tract, following the old rhetorical trope, attacks transubstantiation by reeling in horror at the idea of Christ being passed through human organs:

...the Mass brings down Christ’s holy body from its supreme exaltation at the right hand of God. It drags it back to the earth, though it has suffered every pain and hardship already, to a state of humiliation even more wretched and degrading than before: to be broken once more and crushed and ground, even by the fangs of brutes. Then, when it has been driven through all the stomach’s filthy channels, it shoots it out—one shudders even to mention it—into the latrine.³⁶

In *Paradise Lost*, however, digestion is presented as a divine process of sanctification, by which not only humans, but all of creation interrelate in a great chain of digestive being. The operations of this digestive universe are revealed to Adam in Book 5 by the angel Raphael, when he comes to earth and shares a meal with the humans. In this passage, the meal becomes both medium and message. It is Adam’s desire to know how Raphael can eat human food that prompts the angel to reveal the nature of Milton’s universe to the man, and this question too that leads into the celestial history by which the angel informs Adam about Satan. This whole central section of the poem begins when Raphael explains why he is able to eat earthly food. “O Adam,” he elucidates,

³⁶ From John Carey’s translation, reprinted in *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen Fallon (New York: Random House, 2007), 1290.

“one Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed, and up to him return, / If not deprav’d from good” (469-71). All food comes from the same creator, the angel claims, but this only partially explains why Raphael is able to eat it. Even more importantly, all foods (and all things) are made up of the same essential substance. Creation, he claims, is composed from “one first matter all,” though it is “Indu’d with various forms, various degrees / Of substance” (473-475.) The whole universe, the humans discover, is made out of a single substance, ordered as a single living organism according to something like density. In this cosmology, Raphael asserts, all things “up to [God] return” (471) through a process of digestion, in which each lower form of the first matter feeds the one above it:

For know, whatever was created, needs
To be sustaind and fed; of Elements
The grosser feeds the purer, Earth the Sea,
Earth and the Sea feed Air, the Air those Fires
Ethereal... (414-18)

Here, Milton’s epic clearly belies the absolute distinction between literal digestion and sacramental incorporation he makes in *De Doctrina*. The cosmic alimentation Raphael describes, in fact, suggests a number of ways that the meal takes on the usual functions of the eucharist.

In fact, as Milton describes the meal Adam and Eve share with the angel, he is at pains to draw parallels with Reformed versions of eucharistic ritual. Eve’s “Tribute large” (342), first of all, is laid on a Puritan “table” and not a Catholic or high-church altar. This table is also “Square” (5.394) with no one side privileged over the other, so that all parties have equal access. Likewise, Eve serves her “dulcet creams” in “fit vessels pure” (5.347-8), which John King has argued alludes to the “simple wooden-mouthed beakers used in the administration of communion in puritan Parishes.”³⁷ In yet another Reformed gesture, Milton makes Eve into a low-church

³⁷ *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 136.

“minister” presiding over the celebration. She is so low-church, in fact, that she wears no vestment of any kind; instead, she “ministers naked” (5.444). The parallels here between the Edenic meal and eucharist may seem at first rather inappropriate, since neither of the ritual’s standard elements are present. Though the narrator tells us that “For drink the Grape / [Eve] Crushes,” he insists that the beverage she makes is unfermented “inoffensive moust” (5.344-5). Similarly, the meal lacks bread, both because Adam and Eve only eat raw fruit and vegetables in Eden (5.396), and also because bread is intimately tied to the curse God lays on Adam in Book 10: “In the sweat of thy Face shalt thou eat Bread, / Till thou return unto the ground” (205-6). The Edenic meal also is unable to perform, for Adam and Eve at least, its normal memorial function, since Christ hasn’t died and been resurrected yet. The meal, though, in all its other functions, does the same work as the eucharist: it celebrates the mystical unity of its participants, it anticipates an eschatological alteration of the human body, and it makes Christ (or rather, the Son) present in alimentary form to the communicants.

As Christopher Ricks pointed out in his 1963 book, *Milton’s Grand Style*, Milton often uses the Latinate sense of a word to pointedly exclude its normal “fallen” pejorative meaning. A word like “error,” derived from the Latin *errare* (to wander), describes the perfectly innocent wandering of an Edenic river, its “mazie error” (4.237). Though we inevitably bring our fallen reading to the text, these Latinate usages, Ricks contends, aim to “re-create something of the prelapsarian state of language,” imagining a version of English spoken in the garden before any pejorative connotations had emerged.³⁸ Milton’s backward projection of the eucharist into Eden works in a similar way, allowing him to strip it of what he would have considered its “tedious pomp” (5.354) without abandoning the ritual’s claim that God’s sacramental presence is available in the material world. Structurally, as we’ve seen, the meal resembles Reformed

³⁸ (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 110.

iterations of the eucharist, sharing their emphasis on equality, *de*-vestment, and on the literal eating of literal food. Unlike Roman Catholics, who only “eat” the accidental forms of bread and wine, all Milton’s communicants, even the angel Raphael, are *physically* nourished by the natural properties of the elements they consume:

...So down they sat,
And to thir viands fell, nor seemingly
The Angel, nor in mist, the common gloss
Of Theologians, but with keen dispatch
Of real hunger, and concoctive heate
To transubstantiate. (5.433-8)

It is striking here that Milton would describe the process of digestion in Roman Catholic terms, but doing so points to the complex sacramentality at work in his poem. Many critics have noted this odd use of “transubstantiate,” and have tended to read it as an ironic or sarcastic critique of Roman doctrine.³⁹ Whereas the Mass, with all its pomp and ceremony, treats transubstantiation as a miraculous transformation of bread enacted by the priest, Milton makes transubstantiation the everyday process of consumption and digestion, an action anybody is able to perform. In Milton’s Eden, we might say, the miracle of transubstantiation and the mysteries of the eucharist are integrated into the natural operations of the cosmos and its rational beings. This pre-fall sacrament is not the result of human sin, nor even the consequence of a divine sacrifice. Because it does not depend on these tragic events, Milton’s organic universe implicitly but profoundly underscores his account of freedom. Milton’s God does not *need* sin or sacrifice to make himself sacramentally present in the world. Even if humans had never sinned, they would still have had access to the intimacy made available in the post-fall version of the Lord’s Supper. Before the fall, in fact, all creation seems to have been a kind of perpetual supper, working its way back to God through a natural hierarchy of digestion.

³⁹ Anthony Low, “Angels and Food in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 1 (1969): 135-146, esp. 141.

Even in this “naturalized” account of transubstantiation, though, there is a sense in which Milton’s use of the word “transubstantiate” comes closer to its conventional sense. Even though the food Adam and Eve prepare is their normal, everyday fare, Raphael repeatedly hints that the food itself may have an innate potency to alter the humans’ bodies. Since all food consists of the same “one first matter” (5.469) that makes up the universe, he implies, Adam and Eve’s daily consumption of food draws them up into a cosmic digestive hierarchy, through which all creation “tends” from “body up to spirit” (5.478). Because they participate in this digestive chain of being, Raphael tells the first couple that “from these corporal nutriments perhaps / Your bodies may at last turn all to Spirit, / Improv’d by tract of time, and wingd ascend / Ethereal” (5.496-9). The “from” here is ambiguous, as it may suggest either a simple contrast (a shift “from” eating corporal food *to* possessing an immaterial body) or a more causal relationship (that their bodies will become spiritual “from” or “by” the nutriments themselves). The first meaning seems to correspond with Milton’s idea that the Edenic “sacrament” is not fundamentally set apart from any other kind of food. Adam and Eve, Raphael may be implying, will one day leave off the everyday food they eat now and consume instead, when their bodies rarefy, some angelic alternative. The second meaning, though, that the food has some innate physical power “from” or by which the humans will achieve this ascension, makes a good deal more sense in the context of what the angel has been explaining. The whole thrust of Raphael’s cosmographic discourse has been to stress the continuity of eating and digestion that runs through all creation. He is able to eat the humans’ “corporal nutriments,” he says, precisely because their elements are not foreign to his constitution. His normal heavenly food, the claim has been throughout, relates to its earthly analogue just as his reason does, “Differing but in degree, of kind the same” (5.490). Considering this emphasis on the material continuity of heavenly and earthly food, it seems

strange that human beings would ever have to turn away “from” Edenic sustenance. Even Raphael, the native of heaven, does not have to do this.

Raphael’s “from,” therefore, seems to entertain some efficient causality, some way that the Edenic food generates this bodily rarefaction. This implication alone would point to a much higher sacramental theology than we might expect from Milton, but I claim that Milton opens the possibility for something even higher: that the innate power in the food is the Son himself. Angels are able to eat human food, Raphael claims, because all created things are composed out of “one first matter,” a singular primordial substance that precedes all the particular things it composes in creation. This assertion, though, recalls a description used by the narrator in Book 3 of the poem to describe the Son. In that passage, Milton beautifully describes the angels “hymning” the Son as they celebrate his “begetting” and elevation by the Father:

Thee next they sang *of all Creation first*,
 Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,
 In whose conspicuous count’nance, without cloud
 Made visible, th’ Almighty Father shines,
 Whom else no Creature can behold; on thee
 Impresst the effulgence of his Glorie abides,
 Transfus’d on thee his ample Spirit rests.
 Hee Heav’n of Heavens and all the Powers therein
 By thee created. (3.383-91, my italics)

In these lines, the angels describe the Son as both created and creator. Contrary to orthodox Christian doctrine, the Son is God’s first creation rather than a co-eternal person of the Trinity. He remains, however, the visible manifestation of the Father and the mediator of creation. It is through the Son that the Father created “Heav’n of Heavens and all the Powers.” Milton, just as he does in *De Doctrina Christiana*, presents this unorthodox account as thoroughly scriptural,

constructing this whole passage as an allusion to Colossians 1:15-16.⁴⁰ Yet what it most significant for my reading about this angelic song is the way it informs Raphael's later delineation of the poem's cosmology. If the Son is "of all Creation first," and if in Milton's universe *all* created things are made out of singular original matter, a matter that Raphael claims precedes all other creation, it is reasonable to at least entertain the possibility that the Son can be identified with Raphael's "one first matter all." To reiterate my logic here, if the Son is created, and Book 3 insists he is, and he is also the "first" thing to be created, it is reasonable to identify him with *the* first matter, which Raphael claims is the first thing to be created. As I will discuss further below, this identification is in tension with Raphael's description of the Son separating out creation from Chaos, which seems in Book 7 like it might be the "one first matter." This apparent conflict, however, does not mean we should ignore the implications of the Son as first matter. Conflicting accounts of creation are, after all, par for the course in *Paradise Lost*.

If we do take into account the possibility of the Son as first matter, even to treat it simply as one more Miltonic "or" the poem leaves unresolved,⁴¹ then Milton's strange use of the verb "transubstantiate" becomes an especially complex instance of his back-projected Latinisms. It functions exactly like his other faux archaisms insofar as it signifies simply "to digest," since this meaning just translates the literal denotations of the word's Latin components. Raphael *transforms* the material *substance* of food by consuming it and incorporating into his own body. Yet "transubstantiate" also functions as Ricks describes, so that "the [usual] evil meaning [of a word] is consciously and ominously excluded."⁴² In this case, the excluded "evil meaning" is

⁴⁰ "[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him."

⁴¹ See Peter C. Herman, "Paradise Lost, the Miltonic 'Or,' and the Poetics of Incertitude," in *Destabilizing Milton: "Paradise Lost" and the Poetics of Incertitude* (New York: Palgrave, 1998), 43-60.

⁴² *Milton's Grand Style*, 110.

Roman Catholic doctrine. Finally, “transubstantiate” functions on a third level, holding out a possibility that would radically redefine the Catholic teaching to ameliorate an assertion of Christic presence in the sacrament—the “one first matter of creation”— with a Reformed insistence on the agency of the communicant. Here, the word at once describes an active process performed by the communicant *and* gestures towards a Son that may inhere within all creation. Milton’s “transubstantiation,” thus involves a complex interaction between eaters (Adam, Eve, and Raphael) and eaten (The Son). On the one hand, the angel opens up the possibility that the transformation of human bodies into Spirit will occur “*from* [i.e. by] these corporal nutriments,” nutriments the text gives us the option of reading as constituted by the “first matter” of the Son. On the other, Raphael is clear that the food cannot transform human bodies *ex opera operato*; it requires the cooperation of the human will manifested in obedience. Raphael avows that the sublimation of human bodies will only occur “If ye be found obedient, and retain / Unalterably firm his love entire / Whose progenie you are” (5.501-3). There is, therefore, an ambiguous interaction between simultaneous agencies in this process of change. While only suggesting rather than explicitly confirming the notion, Milton hints that the food may already carry a sacramental divine presence able to transform material bodies into spiritual ones. At the same time, though, Milton insists any such presence cannot operate without the co-operation of human will.

The option that Milton gives his readers here, to read the Son himself as a primordial substance, yields poetic fruit, especially in the section of the poem where literal fruit and poetic text come so close together. In Book 5, Milton repeatedly presents his poem as the literary counterpart to the luscious Edenic meal it describes. Like the meal, the poem is carefully “contriv’d as not to mix / Tastes, not well joynd, inelegant, but bring / Taste after taste upheld

with kindest change” (5. 334-6). Mirroring the scope and exoticism of the epic genre, the meal includes fruit from every conceivable land:

Whatever Earth, all-bearing Mother, yields
 In India East or West, or middle shoare
 In Pontus or the Punic Coast, or where
 Alcinous reign’d... (5. 338-341)

The allusion to Phaeacia (“where Alcinous reign’d”), the paradisaical garden island where Odysseus made the last stop on his journey home, particularly highlights the parallel Milton is making between Eve’s culinary art and his poem. Eve and Milton both gather the fruit of the Homeric tradition, reorganizing and supplementing these raw materials so that they surpass any imaginable classical *topos*. The text we read imitates the sensual delight of the Edenic meal, its careful ordering and “kindest change” testifying to the artistic skill of the poet behind it. And as the various fruits of Eve’s meal may all consist of a divine primordial “first matter,” so Milton’s work, the poem implies, may manifest an identical primordial divinity informing and inspiring the text. Yet just as no innate power within the Edenic food can guarantee the transformation of Adam’s body, but requires the co-operation of his will, so too does Milton’s text depend on the agency of the reader. He must discover and “transubstantiate” into himself the divine presence that Book 9 explicitly claims “nightly...dictates” (9.22-3) the poem to Milton. It is significant, of course, that Milton only obliquely suggests the identity of the Son as first matter, providing an alternative account (as he often does) of the first matter in Book 7. The poem simply does not claim to know exactly where to isolate divine presence in the world. It cannot help hoping, however, that Adam and Eve’s obedient eating might find it in their every meal. Milton, I claim, posits a similar hope for his great poem, the fruit of all his labours and ambitions. He resists isolating God’s presence within the text, leaving it to his “fit audience” to discern and “transubstantiate” whatever substance of the divine Word may compose his poetic words.

Sindigestion

The meal in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost* is the eucharist before eucharist, projecting back into the garden a version of the sacrament that preserves its essential functions while adapting them to Milton's particular poetic concerns. By retroactively transcribing these functions onto prelapsarian consumption, Milton beautifully imagines a eucharistic intimacy not dependent on either sin or sacrifice. Even the very best things (theologically speaking) that came about after the fall, the poem claims, might have been realized apart from that act of disobedience. Adam and Eve, by eating their way up Milton's digestive chain of being, might have experienced a version of the Christian resurrection that did not require a prior death. Indeed, the rarefied bodies that Raphael promises Adam and Eve, which "may at choice / Here or in Heav'nly Paradises dwell" (5.499-500), recall the mysterious properties that the Gospels ascribe to Christ's resurrected body. That body is also able to exist on earth or in heaven and is unrestrained by material boundaries like walls.⁴³ Furthermore, if we take seriously some possibility that the Son of *Paradise Lost* not only creates the world, but is himself part of its very substance, we discover that even a version of the Incarnation is possible without the fall. By his very nature, the Son would be already involved in a movement of kenosis from God. That descent, moreover, would already result in both his own exaltation and the apotheosis of his creatures along with him, that is, the same movement prophesied in Book 3: "thy Humiliation shall exalt / With thee thy Manhood also to this Throne" (3.313-14). Even before human sin, the Son was able to descend as God's "vice-gerent" (5.609), making the world out of his own "first matter." The substance of the Son, in turn, naturally "tends" to return back to its divine origin ("Oh Adam, One Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed and up to him return," 5.469-70), drawing up as it does so the humans into a "purer" spiritual form. Milton never fully commits to this implied theological

⁴³ See John 20:26, where Jesus suddenly appears to the disciples gathered in a locked room.

speculation, which makes sense given just how much it depends on imagining things turning out other than they did. That the poem can imagine such an alternative theological history, however, reminds us that the Son does not *need* the fall to express his natural motion of emanation and return. The Son already has other ways making himself incarnate in the world.

For Milton, the nature of the Son's presence, like his Father's, can never be perfectly isolated, distilled, or captured. As I have been arguing, eucharistic structures in the poem's Edenic meal mediate the relation between those divinities and the earthly realms. All things are a kind of food, and actively participate in the simultaneous provision, consumption, and digestive transformation. Every created thing shares in the movement of the one first matter "up to [God] return[ing]" (5.470). The sun itself, tells Raphael as an example, "receives / From all his alimantal recompense / In humid exhalations, and at even / Sups with the ocean" (5.423-6). Almost nothing seems truly inert in Milton's animistic universe; all things, including the human eaters of the meal, share the grand task of creation: to "Tast[e], concoct, digest, assimilate / And corporeal to incorporeal turn" (5.413). As a number of critics have pointed out, this process rather looks like transubstantiation in reverse, whereby food (and all matter in Milton's world is food) is transformed back into God rather than God into food.⁴⁴ What most of these critics have missed, however, is just how much this reciprocal logic is built into the history of the eucharist, since the point of the ritual is never simply to make God present to the communicant, but also to transform the communicant into the very body of God. What these critics have also failed to comment on is how Milton's hallowing of digestion makes it possible for a eucharistic conception of poetry to co-exist with his assertive account of human freedom. Digestion is, I claim, a paradigm that tries to bring together what Peter C. Herman has defined as the two opposing impulses of *Paradise Lost*: on the one hand, "a strong, totalizing desire for unity and a

⁴⁴ See Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 199 and Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics*, 64.

movement toward organicism,” and on the other, “an equally powerful counter-tendency toward undoing unity.”⁴⁵ The first of these impulses is quite evident in the way that Milton’s “bready” sacramentality, like the long theological tradition that preceded it, aims to draw all things into the “organic” unity Herman describes. The necessary mediating function of digestion within this sacramental universe, however, reflects Milton’s simultaneous “counter-tendency,” though I would modify Herman’s terms slightly here from “undoing unity” to “insisting on difference and distinction” even within one account of unity. Digestion is, as we shall see, perhaps most important in the way that it supports Milton’s “counter-tendency” towards differentiation with regards to individual persons. It is *the* process, surprisingly enough, that articulates how Milton’s strongly individualist ethics can exist within the poem’s desire to imagine a mystical community of all created things (including the poet himself). Milton’s sacramental digestion, I claim, allows him to have his individualism and eat it too.

As Milton understands it, the great sin of Roman Catholic eucharistic theology is its absolute identification of the elements, bread and wine, with their effect, the presence of Christ. Two distinct bodies become absolutely identical, rather than related, interpenetrating, or even virtually bound together (as the elements and Christ are in Calvin’s thought). Like so many Protestant critics of the doctrine, he accuses Roman Catholics of confusing two distinct things because of their metonymic proximity:

In speaking of sacraments, as of most other subjects between whose parts an analogy exists, a figure is frequently employed by which whatever illustrates or signifies any particular thing is used to denote, not what it is in itself, but what it illustrates or signifies. In sacraments, on account of the peculiarly close relation between the sign and the thing signified, this kind of identification is not uncommon; an inattention to which peculiarity has been, and continues to be, a source of error for numbers.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ “The Miltonic ‘Or,’” 43.

⁴⁶ *De Doctrina Christiana*, 416.

In *Paradise Lost*, though, Milton makes it clear that the confusion of sign and signified is not simply an instance of faulty logic, but the manifestation of a nefarious desire to efface difference more broadly. Milton even makes this “Catholic” impulse the impetus for Eve’s fall, positioning it at the very origin of human sin. When Satan tries to persuade Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, his appeal depends on convincing Eve to totally identify the fruit with what the fruit represents: knowledge. If you eat the fruit, Satan suggests, you will surely become like God: “And what are Gods that Man may not become / As they, participating God-like food?” (9.716-717). Satan, here, promises only what Raphael has already promised, that eating Edenic food will lead to a spiritual elevation or divinization. The difference is that, for Raphael, this process depends on the action of digestion, both literal and spiritual, which occurs over time. According to Satan, this same end can be achieved instantly, by purely physical eating. Eve falls for this, and gives in to the temptation to skip the delay necessitated by digestion. This shift in her thinking is evident in the apostrophe she gives to the fruit just before she takes the fatal bite: “[You] taught / The Tongue not made for Speech to speak thy praise: / Thy praise hee also who forbids thy use, / Conceales not from us, naming thee the Tree / Of Knowledge, knowledge both of good and evil” (9.748-752). Because the fruit bears the name “knowledge,” and because it seems to have given the serpent knowledge of human speech, Eve treats it as fully identifiable with what it represents. It does not matter that God has “forbidden its use,” Eve thinks, because the nature of the tree is evident in its appellation. She has no sense that the fruit might be a sign of knowledge, or even that it might be forbidden because the time is not yet ripe for her to eat it.

The narrator of *Paradise Lost* underscores Eve’s error by suggesting that, when she does eat the fruit, the ecstatic pleasure she feels may be entirely psychosomatic:

Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else
Regarded, such delight till then, *as seemd*,

In Fruit she never tasted, *whether true*
Or fansied so, through expectation high
 Of knowledg, nor was God-head from her thought. (9.786-790, my italics)

Eve expects the fruit to manifest some immediate divinizing change, and so may be making herself feel that such a change is taking place. The fruit of knowledge, the narrator hints, may only *seem* different from the other fruit Eve has tasted. It may have no more inherent power than Eve's everyday food. That food, even if it does contain some inherent presence or power, can never be perfectly identified with or treated as immediate to that presence. Eve, however, loses hold of the distinction between the fruit and the knowledge it promises to mediate. Because she does so, she also loses hold of other kinds of distinction. For Eve, "Intent now wholly on her taste," the world dissolves into a single sensory experience, a single moment outside of which "nought else [is] / Regarded." As Maggie Kilgour has pointed out, Eve's fall involves a "synesthetic feast," in which all the senses dissolve into each other "to create one enormous, undifferentiated appetite":⁴⁷

Fixt on the Fruit she gaz'd, which to behold
 Might tempt alone, and in her ears the sound
 Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregn'd
 With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth;
 Meanwhile the hour of Noon drew on, and wak'd
 An eager appetite, rais'd by the smell
 So savory of that Fruit, which with desire
 Inclined now grown to touch or taste
 Solicited her longing eye. (9.735-43)

Here, the temptation to autonomy and "God-head" (790) is felt as the ecstatic dissolution of difference. "As the senses come together," as Kilgour puts it, "order and degree is lost; they dissolve into one another until touch cannot be distinguished from taste, which has subsumed all

⁴⁷ *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 126.

the other senses.”⁴⁸ It is striking here that Kilgour’s description of Eve’s fallen experience might equally describe Crashaw’s poetry, which precisely aims to discover “God-head” in such sensory dissolution. That Milton would ascribe such Crashavian thoughts to Eve points to his complex understanding of the relationship between ecstasy and self-assertion. For Milton, the problem with Eve’s synesthesia is that it falsely ascribes agency to some outside force—the fruit—only to hide the fact that Eve is at this moment of first disobedience vigorously asserting her own autonomy. Like Crashaw, she experiences or “fancies” this assertion as the dissolution of subjective boundaries, such that everything in the world becomes “taste” (9.786).

Eve’s fall occurs because she loses the ability to recognize any difference or delay between sign and signified, between apple and divine knowledge, and ultimately between herself and God. She conflates all sensory input into a singular, imagined, and interior experience: the one “taste” she “fancies” has turned her into a god. The world ceases to be outside her, and she fantasizes herself as the ultimate singularity, as a “God-head” for whom the world is just an extension or projection of herself. When Adam falls, his disobedience mirrors Eve’s unwillingness to accept difference. Adam is not tricked like Eve, and eats the apple knowing that he is sinning. Nevertheless, he rationalizes his choice to eat because he “feel[s] / The link of Nature draw me” (9.914). He cannot tolerate the idea that he might separate from Eve, either physically or metaphysically. He and his spouse, he ultimately concludes, must remain together. To him, their unity is fundamental to his identity. He is dependent, though, not only on their proximity, but on their sameness: “Flesh of Flesh, / Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State / Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe” (9.914-916). After Adam does eat the fruit, therefore, there is something especially ominous at play when he tells his wife: “Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste” (9.1017). Adam intends his pun here to mean that Eve has refined taste

⁴⁸ Ibid.

and that she is sexually “tasty.” Yet Adam’s use of the adjective “exact,” besides referring to Eve’s “perfect” taste (OED 1), also implies a “perfect correspondence” (OED 6) between Eve and Adam’s sexual appetite. Eve is, as Adam sees her, the projection of his desire. She has become “exactly” what he wants, so much so that he loses his sense of her as a *different* person, whose desires do not line up perfectly with his own. As the apple was to Eve, therefore, so Eve becomes to Adam; the means becomes the end. The woman, who in the pre-fall course of things already satisfied his sexual desire, now gets confused with the desire itself. Here we get some sense of the moral stakes of Milton’s insistence on difference. Adam’s refusal to be parted from Eve by sin seems like an act of love, but Milton makes the immediate effect of this refusal lust, that form of human desire that reduces the other to a consumable object. Adam makes this plain to Eve after he eats the fruit: “For never did thy beauty... / ... so inflame my sense / with ardor to enjoy thee, fairer now / Than ever: bounty of this virtuous tree” (9.1029-1033). Adam’s syntactic ambiguity here suggests that Eve herself has become the “bounty of this virtuous tree,” a tasty piece of fruit upon which he may project all the fantasies of immediate gratification. In these lines, significantly, Adam turns away from his own earlier understanding of Eve’s identity and purpose.

When Adam narrated to Raphael his memories of his first hours, he explained how, from his perspective, God made Eve only after Adam had requested him to do so. Adam, according to his own relation, had asked God for a partner because he intuitively recognized that human beings can only find perfection in their multiplicity and difference. “Thou in thyself art perfect,” Adam tells God, “Not so is Man” (8. 415-6):

But man by number is to manifest
His single imperfection, and beget
Like of his like, his image multiplied,
In unity defective. (8.422-5)

Before the fall, Adam desires his “image multiplied,” but he wants that multiplication to create difference and variety. Though his image will be like him and reflect him, she will not be the same as him. Indeed, her purpose is to correct Adam’s “defective unity.” After the fall, though, Adam desires Eve as an extension of himself and his desire. In that moment, Adam becomes like Satan, who lusts after Sin, the woman who actually *is* a projection of the fallen angel’s desire. As Sin tells the story in Book 2, Satan is attracted to his daughter because of his narcissism: “full oft” she says to her lover and father, “Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing / Becams’t Enamored” (2. 763-5).⁴⁹ In the fall, therefore, it is Adam rather than Eve who falls in love with his own image. When they sin, though, both Adam and Eve end up following the same model of desire, by which the other becomes seen as something to be consumed, something to be assimilated into the self. The fantasy of their fall, therefore, is one that denies the need for any process or delay to mediate incorporation. According to that fantasy, no such mediation is required because difference is ultimately an illusion. Like Crashaw’s liquid poetics, Eve’s all-consuming taste and Adam’s lust leave no room for digestion.

The way that Adam and Eve try to sustain this fantasy of digestionless incorporation, though, results in a certain poetic justice: they end up excluded from the digestive processes that organize Raphael’s cosmology. Rather than being incorporated into a system of digestive ascent, they are excreted as indigestible matter. As God explains in Book 11, the “harmonious” elements of creation reject humankind (here referred to as “him”) as incompatible with the healthy digestion of the universe:

⁴⁹ There is a sense, of course, in which Sin is differentiated from Satan by her gender. As an allegorical character, however, whom only Satan and the narrator clearly acknowledge existing *as* a character, Sin is female in an entirely different sense than Eve is. Eve possesses a femininity that adds something to the world, rather than simply projecting a latent aspect already present in Adam. Sin, in contrast, manifests instead a “feminized” version of a principle of something already within Satan, which is why he can create her from himself, and also why only he (and the narrator) seems aware of her presence.

Those pure immortal Elements that know
 No gross, no unharmonious mixture fowle,
 Eject him tainted now, and purge him off
 As a distemper.... (11.50-53)

Because of their sin, the direction of Adam and Eve's digestive movement is reversed; rather than ascending, they are purged downwards, potentially forever. This ejection, appropriately, also condemns them to a diet of "mortal food" (11.54), which will "dispose [humans] best / For dissolution wrought by Sin" (11.54-55). This new food will ultimately cause human bodies to dissolve into their "grosser" elements, rather than help them ascend into "purer" spiritual bodies. This special effect of dissolution stands out in marked contrast to the promise of incorporation Raphael offered earlier. In that dispensation, Adam and Eve would have become more autonomous subjects through the digestive incorporation they would have been subjected to. In exerting their "free obedience," the first humans would eventually have been freed from the physical restrictions of their "grosser" bodies. They would have been able, as Raphael tells Adam, "at choice, / Here [in Eden] or in heavenly Paradises dwell" (5. 499-500). In the new fallen way of things, human bodies will dissolve rather than sublimate, break apart and be purged rather than rarefy and be granted greater freedom.

The purgation of sinful humankind from the garden, though, recalls and re-enacts one of the most controversial digestive moments in the poem, the creation of the world. In one of Milton's most striking divergences from orthodoxy, Book 7 of *Paradise Lost* has the Son create the cosmos out of the "fluid Mass" (7.237) of Chaos. This account radically alters the standard Christian doctrine that the world was created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, as a pure act of God's will. It remains an open question within Milton criticism, it must be said, what exactly Milton is up to with this *ex Chao* account of creation, and readers continue to disagree forcefully about the moral implication of Milton's Chaos. John Rumrich, building his argument on passages in *De*

Doctrina Christiana that claim God created the universe out of himself, makes the case that Chaos is essentially good, providing an “infinitely versatile” material “sufficient to answer an infinite God’s creative purposes,” including the creation of Hell.⁵⁰ John Leonard, in contrast, makes the best argument for the dissenting view, that Chaos is essentially evil, manifesting an anxiety Milton cannot help writing into his poem even as he tries to assuage it. For Leonard, Chaos represents a Lucretian account of the universe, in which existence is primarily dark (rather than light) and random (rather than ordered by providence). When the Son “circumscribe[s] / This universe” (7.224-5), therefore, he does so to protect it from what Leonard reads as the threat of Lucretius’s dark, atomist universe. Yet even in the act of separating out creation from this frightening metaphysics, Milton cannot help but gesture at its spectre: “Milton does his best to confine Night [as well as Chaos] to outer darkness, but she still casts her shadow over us and him.”⁵¹ It is not the intention of my argument to settle this debate, but to suggest that an attention to digestion might expand our understanding of Milton’s Chaos. In particular, I want to consider why digestion is the process the Son uses to transform Chaos into creation, a change that Raphael describes in Book 7:

...on the watrie calme
His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspred,
And vital vertue infus’d, and vital warmth
Throughout the fluid Mass, but downward purg’d
The black tartareous cold Infernal dregs
Adverse to life: then founded, then conglob’d
Like things to like, the rest to several place
Disparted.... (7.234-41)

Here, Christ’s activity is exactly the opposite of his activity in Crashaw’s poetry. Rather than dissolving all things into one fluid unity, the Son separates out constituent parts mixed together

⁵⁰ “Of Chaos and Nightingales,” in *Living Texts: Interpreting Milton*, ed. Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2000), 220-21.

⁵¹ “Milton, Lucretius, and ‘the Void Profound of Unessential Night,’” in *Living Texts: Interpreting Milton*, 214.

in Chaos. This separation requires an enigmatic process of digestive “purging.” There are some elements of this Chaotic raw material, it seems, that are “adverse to life,” which must be distilled out of creation as extraneous “dregs.” This obviously contradicts Raphael’s earlier claim that “all things” were created out of a singular “first matter” (5.470,472), since it implies that there are at least two distinct kinds of material within Chaos, one that can be incorporated into the cosmos, and one, adverse to life, that cannot. The presence of two kinds of matter at this moment in the poem, though it troubles the consistency of the text, can also help make sense of a number of other key moments in the poem, especially Adam and Eve’s ejection from Eden. Read against the Son’s Book 7 creation, their exclusion from the garden, with its parallel language of “purging” (11.52), strongly resembles this moment of primordial excretion. In this light, their expulsion is no longer simply geographic banishment, but an ejection from the digesting organism of creation they had once participated in. It is as if, because of their sin, Adam and Eve have changed states and become “adverse to life.” Yet the very fact that the fall seems to resemble something that came before it may have significant implications for Milton’s theodicy. For critic John Rogers, who echoes Leonard’s anxious reading of Chaos, Milton’s need for the Son to excrete “tartareous dregs” from the creation poses a serious danger: it calls into question the unified goodness of Milton’s “one first matter.”⁵² In Milton’s day, as Rogers points out, “tartar” and “dregs” had senses specific to medical discourse, and described inassimilable substances blamed for all kinds of maladies. With rather hyperbolic rhetorical bravado, therefore, Rogers claims that the “presence of these dregs empties Milton’s natural philosophy of its theodicial force,” since it implies that evil pre-exists the fall. “In three simple lines,” he claims,

⁵² *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Politics and Poetry in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 136-7.

“Milton, it can be safely said, has sabotaged his attempt to justify the ways of God to men.”⁵³ If evil pre-exists the fall, he claims, God cannot be just, since God unfairly punishes Adam and Eve for introducing an evil that was already always there, however latent in the “Eternal Anarchie” of Chaos (2.896). Rogers’ reading, though, depends too much on those same kinds of feverish anxiety about digestion common to early modern anti-Catholic polemic. Those polemic writers (Milton included) often employed a rhetorical horror at the idea of Christ passing through the bowels without giving any charitable attempt to understanding the theological problems transubstantiation was attempting to address. Rogers’ reading, similarly, becomes so fixated on the scatological implications of Milton’s digestive image that he misses the *poetic* problems it is trying to resolve. Rogers also treats Milton as a systematic theologian, and reads the description of creation in Book 7 as the only and authoritative perspective of the event. *Paradise Lost*, though, is not a work of systematic theology, and frequently presents conflicting accounts of key events. This is no less true regarding the matter of creation.

The theodicy of *Paradise Lost*, I venture, does not depend on perfect consistency to be compelling. And if we read the excreted dregs of Book 7 as one Miltonic proposition, in tension with others in *Paradise Lost*, we may also see ways that even the excreted dregs of creation might be a positive addition to his theology rather than a looming threat. Positing creation as a form of digestion, in fact, makes a lot of *poetic* sense. Since the Son acts on some version of pre-existent stuff, his creation of the world becomes much more like Milton’s own creative endeavour, the composition of an epic poem, a work that so evidently depends on the “Chaos” of the literary tradition. The Son, working like Milton the poet, “circumscribe[s] / This universe and all created things” (7.226-7), arranging “Matter unformed” (233) and infusing it with his particular “vital warmth” (236). Like the composition of *Paradise Lost*, the Son’s free creativity

⁵³ Ibid., 133-5.

involves both originality and selection. There are certain things that the Son must exclude and purge from his artistic work. Treating creation as a kind of digestion, therefore, turns out to be consummately theodicial, since it makes Milton's own artistic activity an image of the Son's. If God creates *ex nihilo*, the poet can never truly resemble God, and the absolute difference between divine and poetic creation would fundamentally threaten Milton's ability to "justify the ways of God to men" (1.26). His poetic creation could never truly reflect or participate in the creative powers of the Son. If, however, even God must create out of some pre-existent Chaos, and purge those dregs that cannot be digested into his *poiesis*, then it remains possible for Milton's work of poetic digestion to be an image of God's.

The choice to figure creation itself as a kind of digestion, though, also necessarily results in the distinction between two kinds of existence within the larger context of Milton's monistic universe: the "stuff" distilled from Chaos "infus'd" with the creative and digesting life of the Son (7.236), and the "dregs" that must be "downward purged" (237). Whatever the Son draws up out of Chaos becomes one digestive body; whatever he does not draw up is excluded from this incorporation, and even excreted out of it. This distinction, then, also makes sense of the different kinds of *persons* that appear in the poem, particularly the allegorical figures that seem so out of place in Milton's normally naturalistic text. These characters, Sin, Death, and Chaos himself, have a parasitic existence. They are place-holders for meaning, rather than true "characters" within the story, and they famously rubbed Dr. Johnson the wrong way because of this fact. But what he found objectionable is exactly the point: the one-dimensional relationship Sin and Death have to their meanings stands in opposition to Adam and Eve's more complex relationship to their archetypal function within the poem.⁵⁴ As Kenneth Borris has rightly pointed

⁵⁴ "Milton's allegory of Sin and Death is undoubtedly faulty. Sin is indeed the mother of Death, and may be allowed to be the portress of hell; but when they stop the journey of Satan, a journey described as real, and when Death

out, the difference between these two kinds of “subjectivity” in *Paradise Lost* is defined by participation, or lack thereof, in the divine substance that pervades the universe. Adam and Eve, before the fall, participate fully in this animistic unity, daily consuming the “divine substance [that] sustains the cosmic correspondences that pervade Milton’s universe.”⁵⁵ Sin and Death, on the other hand, are the dregs that do not.⁵⁶ As beings with only a subordinate mode of existence, excluded from the vital life animating Milton’s organic digestive universe, the poem’s strictly allegorical characters are excreted both physically and literarily. Physically, at least until the fall, they can only exist on the borders of hell or in the tumult of Chaos. Literarily, they have a diminished reality, acting as the undigested remainder of an older allegorical tradition Milton has otherwise purged from his epic.

It should come as no surprise then that Adam and Eve take on something of this diminished “excretory” existence after they fall. When they sin, Adam and Eve become much more “allegorical,” and are treated in the text as increasingly “representative.” Like the allegories Sin and Death, the two humans become place-holders for a pejorative meaning, so much so that their representative roles threaten to efface their particularity. In the judgement scene in Book 10, for example, the humans are repeatedly hailed by their genders instead of their proper names. Both Adam and God continually refer to Eve as “Woman” and “wife” (10.137, 158, 179, 192). Likewise, the narrator’s frequent designation of “Man” applies equally to humankind and the individual Adam (10.97, 101, 170, 209), so that Adam ceases to be himself and becomes a mere avatar for his species. This “representational” mode of existence, moreover, becomes a feature of

offers him battle, the allegory is broken. That Sin and Death should have shewn the way to hell might have been allowed; but they cannot facilitate the passage by building a bridge, because the difficulty of Satan’s passage is described as real and sensible, and the bridge ought to be only figurative.” *The lives of the most eminent English poets*, vol. 1, 147.

⁵⁵ *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature: Heroic Form in Sidney, Spenser, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 190.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

human life after the fall. As Michael relates in his prophetic vision of history, most people seem less like autonomous subjects and more like fated typological repeaters of the original sin.

According to the angel, original sin vitiated human reason, and with it any capability to express the kind of liberty that would lead to meaningful difference:

...yet know withall,
Since thy original lapse, true Libertie
Is lost, which alwayes with right Reason dwells
Twinn'd, and from her hath no diuidual being. (82-85)

Humans as a species simply no longer have the same ethical power to stand out from each other, and instead will tend to repeat the first sin over and over again. Even the drastic intervention of flood does not stop this inertia towards repetition. As soon as the waters have receded, Noah's Son, Ham, will sin against his father, and so fall again as soon as the world has been made new (12.101-4). "Thus," laments Michael, "will this latter, as the former World, / Still tend from bad to worse" (12.105-6). Fallen humanity, as Michael reveals it, moves away from being a body of distinct but incorporated members, and tends instead towards a series of identical repetitions, where each new human generation is and means the same thing as the one before.

In the world of *Paradise Lost*, therefore, what might be called "true subjectivity" stands in contrast to this repeated sameness, depending instead on a fundamentally sacramental idea of individuation *through* participation and incorporation. It is only as long as Adam and Eve remain part of a system that digests them (even as they digest) that they continue to be distinct persons and autonomous subjects. Apart from that shared life, they become mere iterations of the same. In this desire for difference within a mystical unity, Milton's thought remains deeply continuous with that of Christian poets like Herbert and Donne, who claim that any authentic selfhood depends on a participation in the divine life. Milton names this liberty "filial freedom" (4.292), but he expresses a similar logic as Herbert's "The Hold-fast," where "all things [are] more ours

by being His” (12). Kenneth Borris helpfully sums up this paradox: “Although Milton has been called the prototypical ‘bourgeois individualist,’” his poetry insists that participation in a “Christian spiritual community... is not only the definitive mark of right thinking persons, but the ground of possessing genuine, free personality, as opposed to being enthralled to self and exorbitant desires.”⁵⁷ Before the fall, *Paradise Lost* imagines such participation as perfectly integrated with the natural operations of a sacramental universe, in which material, spiritual, and intellectual processes all reinforce each other within the incorporated body of creation. In this prelapsarian digestive hierarchy, eating, learning, faithful obedience, and sex cannot be separated from each other. Even in something as basic as the digestion of food, the exact interaction of divine presence and human agency remains ambiguous, and opens up the possibility of their coexistence and cooperation. In Eden, human freedom and divine agency do not exist within a zero-sum game, where the assertion of one diminishes the other. The two bodies may digest without consuming each other.

This coexistence that digestion allows for resists what the poem treats as a desire closely connected to the fall, perhaps even its direct motive: a perverse desire to make the world and the other into “me.” This desire is exemplified best in Satan himself, the architect of the fall. All of Satan’s actions in the poem are spurred on by what he considers the greatest slight to his dignity, the elevation of the Son. Responding pathologically to this perceived injury, Satan’s primary goal in *Paradise Lost* is not to recover his lost position of prestige *within* the universe, but to swallow everything into himself, to efface all difference from the universe forever, even if it means destroying everything. He announces this explicitly in Book 9, just before his successful temptation of Eve:

Nor hope [I] to be myself less miserable

⁵⁷ Ibid., 234, 198.

By what I seek, but others *to make such*
As I, though thereby worse to me redound. (9.126-8, my italics)

Even though Satan knows his desire will ultimately “worse to me redound,” he hungers to make everything “such as I,” especially the new human creatures. It is as if Satan has misconstrued the impetus for his fall, the elevation of the Son, as the introduction of a different entity into what he had thought was the stable order of his universe. To resist the subordination implied by this difference—for him, a “strange point and new” (5.855)—Satan responds hysterically by attempting to deny difference as such. In the garden, hoping to achieve this denial of difference, Satan tries to turn the humans into versions of himself. This is a revenge he thinks particularly fitting because he considers the humans, like the Son, to have usurped his rightful place.⁵⁸ His desire is to consume them, as he desires to consume all things, so that nothing may remain outside himself to threaten that self’s absolute autonomy. To use Maggie Kilgour’s phrasing, Satan “is threatened by differences, and his aim is ... to create a world of total identity—his.”⁵⁹ Satan’s impossible desire to make all things “such as I,” though, only perpetuates the experiences of subjugation and isolation he has been railing against. Rather than becoming the epitome of interior freedom he anticipated he would become in Book 1, able “to make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven” (1.255), Satan instead becomes a prison for himself: “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (4.75). He tries to bring the world under his control by incorporating it completely into himself. This goal, of course, is impossible, and because he cannot achieve it he begins to see *all* places, *all* others, and *all* differences as diminishments of his supposedly “self-begotten” identity. Because Adam and Eve fall into a similar pathological (and impossible) desire for absolute identity, they likewise fall into a version of Satan’s self-imprisonment.

⁵⁸ See Book 4.105-7: “...behold *in stead / Of* us out-cast, exil’d, his new delight, / Mankind created, and for him this World” (my italics).

⁵⁹ *From Communion to Cannibalism*, 125-6.

Subjective isolation and the repetition of sameness become the unfortunate reality of human existence.

Yet even in Milton's bleak vision of human history, there remains a small possibility of escape from this black hole of sameness. In a famous scene in Book 10, Milton describes how it is that the devils fall, like the humans they seduce, into a perpetual reiteration of the same thing over and over again. When Satan returns to Hell to announce his victory over humans and God "with an apple" (10.487), he finds himself and his subordinates transformed into snakes, who "hiss" rather than cheer his seeming victory (10.508). The devilish serpents then find themselves irresistibly attracted to fruit trees "like that / Which grew in Paradise" (10.550-51), plants that seem to have suddenly sprung up and fruited in that very moment. They rush to glut themselves, but the fruit proves illusory, transforming into "bitter ashes" in their mouths (10.566). The fallen angels, we then find out, are forced to endure this "annual humbling" (10.576.) again and again, so that Satan's own deception of Eve is re-inflicted on him and his cohort every year.⁶⁰ Yet it is at this point that Milton chooses to distinguish between the fate of the devils and the destiny of humankind: "so oft they [the devils] fell / Into the same illusion, not as Man / Whom they triumph'd *once lapst*" (10.570-72, my italics). The contrast the narrator makes here, between the humans who sinned "once" and the demons who repeat the same sin year after year, is surprising given the grim future of repetition revealed in the books that follow this episode. In those books, humans seem precisely *like* the devils in book 10, performing again and again a version of the original sin. Here, however, the narrator suggests that men and women will not forever remain within the unbreakable pattern of sameness that defines the devils' existence. Their sin may,

⁶⁰ Milton here also implicitly connects this annual humbling to the medieval Roman Catholic practice of receiving the eucharist only once a year. This may intentionally parallel what Milton would have seen as a Catholic and a "devilish" desire to make consumption and incorporation contemporaneous. Like the Roman sacrament, this pseudo-eucharist of the devils is defined by the impossibility of digestion; the devils can only taste and "chew" (10.566), but they cannot incorporate their food or satisfy their hunger.

somehow, be relegated to the past tense: “once lapst” instead of always lapsing. This hope, of course, finds its fulfillment in the incarnation, resurrection, and second coming of Christ, when at last the Son will renew the world as he created it, in an act of digestive purging. In that final consummation, Michael tells Adam, “thy Savior and thy Lord... [will] raise / From the conflagrant mass, purg’d and refined, New Heav’ns, New Earth” (12.544, 547-9). Yet even before this digestive promise finds its fulfillment, Michael advises Adam which virtue will best resist the devilish tendency to sameness, and in doing so anticipates both the Christ of *Paradise Regain’d* and the Son’s final digestive purge at the end of history.

Appropriately, it is the same virtue that aids human digestion: temperance. Indeed, apart from a sense of how significant digestion is in the poem as a whole, Michael would seem inordinately fixated on temperance in both its literal and metaphorical senses. In one poignant instance, just after Adam recoils in horror at seeing Abel’s murder, Michael spends a good deal of time explaining all the various causes of human death. He seems strikingly insensitive in this passage, however, when he makes a bizarre aside on human diet, claiming that intemperance will cause far more deaths than human violence ever will:

Some, as thou sawest, by violent stroke shall die;
 By fire, flood, famine, *by intemperance more*
In meats and drinks, which on the earth shall bring
 Diseases dire, of which a monstrous crew
 Before thee shall appear; that thou mayest know
 What misery the inabstinence of Eve
 Shall bring on Men. (11.471-7, my italics)

Instead of comforting Adam, Michael seems to jump on Adam’s concern as yet one more opportunity to decry human failure. Yet Michael’s seemingly tangential tirade against intemperance has a larger significance. Alimentary intemperance, according to Michael, is the primary cause of death after the fall because it reflects the original intemperance of Eve. In these

lines, Michael clearly overstates Eve's responsibility for the fall (and he completely ignores Adam's role), but he also suggests why temperance might be seen as the virtue that best resists its effects.

Milton harkens here back to his early works, which treat abstemiousness as next to godliness. Michael, in fact, presents temperance as the primary virtue of the *saeculum*, the age before the return of Christ when "Earth / Shall all be Paradise" (12.463-4). Through temperance, Michael tells Adam, humans can at least mitigate the curse of death, avoiding pain "if thou well observe / The rule of not too much, by temperance taught / In what thou eatst and drinkst" (11.530-32). What is interesting about Michael's advice to Adam, though, is that it translates into postlapsarian terms a version of what Raphael had already commended. In Book 8, the "genial spirit" had exhorted Adam to the same principle of "not too much," though he was speaking specifically about the consumption of knowledge (7.115-30). This parallel suggests that life after the fall may retain some glimpse of the sacramental operations that had knit things together before sin entered the world. Now, however, the virtue that makes possible such a glimpse does not come naturally to either body or mind. Both alimentary and intellectual ingestion must be carefully disciplined and restrained, otherwise they will inevitably tend to the overconsumption that wrought the fall.

Milton is far from suggesting that temperance is the perfect antidote to all the effects of sin, but he does contrast it with the Satanic impulse to make everything immediately one with the self. Temperance is the discrimination that rejects that pathological need to make all things "such as I." It is attentive to differences that cannot or should not be digested, and to the time digestion requires to incorporate what is other; it also knows that even good "nourishment" can transubstantiate into "winde." Temperance, as Milton understands it, fundamentally recapitulates

the functions of the eucharist, since it posits that something of God's presence remains in the world to be digested, and anticipates the ultimate incorporation of the faithful at the end of time, when "God shall be All in All" (3.341). At the same time, though, temperance and the delay it insists on ultimately respect the boundaries of difference, refusing to allow any one entity to be totally consumed or perfectly identified with another. Temperance, therefore, in Milton's world at least, ultimately inhabits the same kind of *temporal* complexity as the eucharist as well: it remembers, it celebrates, and it anticipates. For Adam and his descendants, temperance remembers and responds to the sinful consumption in the garden. Even in this remembering, though, temperance insists that the fall has not totally emptied the world of a divine presence that may be ingested, experienced, and enjoyed. After all, when Adam asks Michael if he will ever again "seek / [God's] bright appearances, or foot step trace?" (11.228-9), the angel reminds Adam that the God's "Omnipresence fills / Land, Sea, and Aire, and every kinde that lives, / Fomented by his virtual power and warnd" (11. 336-8). God's presence still fills and feeds the world. After the fall, however, temperance is the virtue that mediates human access to this presence, manifesting as it does a patient willingness to wait for the perfect incorporation of humanity with God to occur in the deity's own good time. The patience manifest by temperance, then, like the eucharist, anticipates that ultimate re-ordering of the universe, when the historical process of digestion will at last be complete. This ability to wait, that *Paradise Lost* associates primarily with temperate digestion, becomes the moral tool by which human beings may partially reintegrate themselves into Raphael's sacramental cosmology. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Milton's idiosyncratic elevation of temperance as the cardinal virtue finds its consummation in his unique version of the atonement. In *Paradise Regain'd*, after all, it

is Christ's "temperance invincible" (*Paradise Regain'd*, 2.408) rather than an act of forensic substitution that atones for the sin of the world.

Digesting Milton, Drinking Crashaw

If temperance is the virtue by which Adam and Eve begin to reintegrate themselves into the digestive hierarchy of life before the fall, it is also the virtue Milton suggests is necessary for reading his great work. Milton's political and even poetic singularity make it easy to see why his poem has often been read as promoting a stalwart subjective isolation. Yet Milton's poetic ambition also depends quite explicitly on the creation of a distinct community, his "fit audience... though few" (7.31). Like all the poets I have discussed, Milton founds this literary community by consecrating his own words, offering them up to readers as sacred food, the new meal by which a distinct group of temperate readers may "repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright."⁶¹ For Milton, of course, whose poetry is everywhere haunted by the double sense of the Latin *sapere*—both "to know" and "to taste"—"knowing God aright" depends on tasting and ingesting him in the right way as well. It is the particular challenge posed by the incorporation of food into the body that both threatens Milton's individualism and allows him to imagine a subjectivity that can participate in otherness without dissolving. Temperate digestion is, for Milton, at once an act of discrimination and an act of communion, simultaneously guarding the boundaries of subjectivity and dependent on the fact that those boundaries are not absolute.

For many critics, Milton has seemed the quintessential example of a "buffered" poet, "self-fashioned" with such conscious care that even the literary canon appears perfectly consumed and subsumed in his work. Milton's poetic subjectivity, in other words, is read as self-

⁶¹ *Of Education*, in *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 2, 366.

sufficient, exerting a divine authority over the poetic universe of *Paradise Lost*.⁶² There are evident impulses toward this mode of self-representation in Milton's poetry, but there are also strong resistances to it. Satan is famously sympathetic because Milton understands the desire to be "self-raised" and "self-begot." Yet Milton's frequent paralleling of himself and the "Arch-Fiend" is designed to curb and critique that very temptation. Indeed, recent critical attention to Milton's "uncertainty" has increasingly recognized the ruptures in Milton's apparent project of perfectly bounded self-creation. This is why I find the presence of excreted "dregs" in Milton's universe less problematic than critics like John Rogers. These dregs acknowledge Milton's inability to create either himself or his poetry *ex nihilo*. They also provide a hermeneutic for reading Milton's poetry from a fallen position. This reading, if we take Michael's advice, will depend on temperate consumption and on imaginative acts of digestion. We will not become Milton and he will not become us. Nevertheless, as any fit reader of Milton's poetry can attest, there are ways that we will incorporate his work into ourselves, and find aspects of who we are newly Miltonic.

It becomes easier to read Milton in this way—as resisting any notion of self-begotten poetic individuality—if we accept the alternative history this chapter has been proposing. It has attempted to reposition Crashaw and Milton within the history of the subject and the emergence of secularism. Setting Milton in contrast with Crashaw, it has highlighted the aspects of the epic poet's work that remain stridently within a sacramental preference for "body," and stressed the various kinds of eucharistic incorporation that define Milton's Christian subject. I have also implied that Milton would read Crashaw's oenological poetics as Satanic, concerned as they are with the dissolution of boundaries. For those critics inclined to see Milton as more sympathetic

⁶² See Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism*, 139: "...we see Milton as the modern equivalent of God: the individual and Author, who is seen as origin of his own text and meaning."

to the devil's party than he lets on, this reading might provide the impetus for a reassessment of Crashaw, and make him something other than a literary oddity or a vestigial remnant of the middle ages. Crashaw, after all, appealed in many ways more naturally to his immediate successors in the Restoration than Milton did, thirsty as they were for forms of religious expression that highlighted unity, and might dissolve the differences that had so recently rent the body politic.

For those who see Milton as a major poetic contributor to the emergence of secular modernity, his unique account of sacramentality might help reframe what exactly the "secular" is. Whatever role Milton played in the construction of modern subjectivity, his poetry is continuous enough with the sacramental thinking of Chaucer, Southwell, Herbert, and Donne to strongly mistrust any severing of the subject and subject's body from a network of larger bodies. Subjective isolation remains for Milton an ongoing curse of the fall, the postlapsarian shadow of true personhood. The authentic self, in contrast, still has its ultimate home incorporated in the body of Christ, just as Milton's *corpus* can only live in his "fit audience." Milton realizes this necessity, which is why his poem ends as it does with a paradox of isolation and dependence, the paradox of our fallen condition. Adam and Eve "hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow, / Through Eden took their solitary way" (12.648-9). After the Fall, Milton insists, we are "solitary," but even that solitariness finds some promise of a remedy in the life of the other, especially if we are temperate enough not to make the other just an extension of ourselves. This is some consolation to those who would rather read Milton as a literary friend than a poetic God.

Epilogue: The Future of Presence

In 1980, under Pinochet's military dictatorship in Chile, a group of bishops decreed the excommunication of known torturers within their dioceses. As political theologian William Cavanaugh explains, denying these torturers access to the eucharist was "a way of making the Body of Christ visible where it had become invisible because of the way that both torture victims and their torturers approached the same communion table."¹ Refusing to allow the perpetrators of violence access to the body of Christ, though, was not merely an institutional censure, it exposed torture as a kind of anti-sacrament. In Cavanaugh's terms, torture is the liturgy of the totalitarian state, aiming to sever "the victim's affective ties and loyalties" by reducing him utterly, through the application of pain, to the contours of the body and the present moment of agony, outside of which there is neither past nor future. "One way to think about this destruction of the victim's world," Cavanaugh explains, "is to say that the effect of torture is the creation of individuals."² The eucharist, in contrast, posits that the self exists as part of a social and a mystical body, the body of Christ. Likewise, the eucharist asserts an understating of time in which the "now" is always the gift of the past and the foretaste of the future, such that the eschaton is seen as already rupturing into the present moment. For those suffering under Pinochet's dictatorship, the Church's refusal to serve eucharist to torturers was a profound realization of such a rupture, since it undermined the regime's self-justifying claim that it was in charge of time, the body, and history, while the Church only had jurisdiction over the soul. Denying communion to torturers was thus quite different than other secular forms of communal resistance, since its imaginative ability to defy the regime drew its force from the idea that the invisible unity of a mystical body was actually more real than the social fragmentation terrifyingly asserted on the bodies of

¹ "The Church in the Streets: Eucharist and Politics," *Modern Theology* 30.2 (2014): 390.

² *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 38.

Chileans. To borrow Elaine Scarry's terminology, the state aimed to inscribe its presence on "the sheer material factualness of the human body," which it "borrowed to lend [its] cultural construct the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty.'"³ The Chilean bishops, in contrast, offered the eucharist to insist on a different reality, and as a way for individuals, isolated by pain and the fear of pain, to be made present to each other as members of a divine body upon which the state had no power to act. This eucharistic assertion of a reality other than the state's, as Cavanaugh points out, was profoundly significant even to non-Catholic Chileans, galvanizing many of them to join what would later be known as the Sebastian Acevedo Movement against Torture, a protest organization led by Catholic clergy, monks and, nuns.⁴

I draw attention to this recent episode in the history of the eucharist not only because it clarifies how forms of eucharistic exclusion can be essential to the realization of an authentic sacramental openness (as they are for Milton), but also because it challenges the idea that, after the Reformation, the eucharist was emptied of any real power. This latter claim, which informs most of the recent studies that have considered the relationship between poetry and sacrament in early modernity, tells a version of the old Enlightenment story that secular cultural forms inevitably displace religious ways of thinking. It is only by taking for granted such a teleological narrative—one that has a hard time accounting for the persistent social, political, and identity-forming significance of religious belief and practice—that art can be read as the new (though less effectual) secular liturgy of modernity. It is only because they imagine that religious ways of thinking and living really have departed from the world that critics like Regina Schwartz and Sophie Read can conclude their studies of sacramental poetics as they do. For Schwartz, what remains after the demise of transubstantiation is the "hope that the potential of reconciliation

³ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 14.

⁴ "The Church in the Streets," 390.

harboured by communion could still inspire, in new cultural forms, a world of community.”⁵

Read’s rhetoric is rather more reserved, but there remains something of the same story—that the “figures” of poetry take the place of religion—in her book’s closing statement that, following the Reformation, “the suggestion that poetry is sacramental becomes just a figure of speech.”⁶ A fundamental assertion of the eucharist, however, is that the presence of one thing does not exclude the presence of another. So, if the poets in this study may teach us anything about the relationship between religion and art, it is that one does not need to displace the other or usurp its functions. When Herbert concludes “The Church” with a resolution to “sit and eat,” he is not suggesting that *The Temple* has taken the role of the eucharist. He is rather proposing that sacrament and poetry give each other new kinds of significance.

Like this dissertation, the recent flurry of criticism on eucharistic poetics in early modern England has been motivated by two main impulses. The first is a desire to affirm the sense, quite commonly felt by poets and literary critics alike, that poetry depends on a fundamentally religious or mystical understanding of language. The second is a desire to attend to the presence of the other within poetry. In a way that resembles literary-critical attention to the subaltern, or the eco-critical turn to the non-human, studies of the eucharist in poetry have rightly recognized how sacramental poetics draw attention to the way poetic signs admit other presences than the self that makes them into verse. Ironically, however, as we have seen, most of these studies end up rather committed to demystifying poetry since, even as they make it take the place of liturgy, they treat it as the merely figural hangover of religion. Similarly, even as these critical readings have gestured at the role of the other in the eucharist, they have continued to treat Holy

⁵ *Sacramental Poetics*, 141.

⁶ *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 207.

communion as if it were merely a mechanism for capturing, assuring, and reifying presence. They have, in other words, failed to think eucharistically about presence and about the present.

Jean-Luc Marion helpfully summarizes what I consider to be the fundamental hermeneutic principles of thinking eucharistically, and which I have pursued in the preceding chapters. With regard to the notion of eucharistic presence, Marion writes, “I may transform my approach to the eucharistic present—and model myself by its dimensions—only if the eucharistic present itself is distinguished from me and from the consciousness that I have of myself.” Neither the communicant nor the sacramental presence itself is just “there,” as a purely immanent entity; they are always present in relation. Christ and the communicant can only be present to *each other* in the sacrament, and always in the mode of a gift. The elements “persist in an otherness,” Marion claims, “not to assure any ... permanence, ... but to continue to give themselves without return.”⁷ To rephrase this using language from Herbert’s poetry, the presence of the eucharist is not something that the communicant can “hold fast,” it is only something he can “sit and eat,” as a guest receives a meal. Concomitantly, the eucharist also comprehends the presence of the present moment as a gift, given to the subject through the sacrament’s memory (to invoke Donne’s paradox again) of both past and future. As Marion explains, from a eucharistic perspective, “the present is understood as a today to which alone the memorial, as an actual pledge, gives meaning and reality.”⁸ This understanding that the present time is a gift, of course, is part of what inspires Milton’s poetics of sacramental digestion. Even in his bleak account of human history as an eternally present repetition of original sin, Milton sees the willingness to wait, to take time digesting one’s encounters with the world, as a way of resisting Satan’s claim that “We know no time when we were not as now” (*Paradise Lost*, 5.859). In the

⁷ *God Without Being*, 176-7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

fallen angel's way of thinking, the present cannot be received from other moments in time, it must assert itself as the absolute horizon of reality, and consume both past and future. For Milton, this is a temporal gluttony, reflecting the same desire to efface boundaries and distinctions that motivated Eve to sin, that is, to deny what Marion calls the "distinct separation of terms [that] renders communion possible."⁹

This dissertation has thus offered a eucharistic reading of eucharistic poetics. Following the understanding of eucharistic presence just described, it has argued against explaining poetic sacramentality as a form of clandestine self-assertion. I have argued instead that the poets in this study turn to the eucharist as a way of understanding their own words as a mode of presence that gives itself as gift, both back to the poet and to its reader. I conclude, therefore, by suggesting that these same poets give us a eucharistic way of considering our own present moment in literary history. If we take them at their words, rather than pathologizing their work as the product of an unconscious secularity, we will call into question the tendency to treat poetry as the rival of religion. We might thus free poetry from the burden of having to be a new secular liturgy, and see it instead as a mode of presence with something still to learn from the religious accounts of meaning that, so far, refuse to depart from the world.

⁹ Ibid., 169.

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