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Hallowed ground: literature and the encounter with god in post-reformtion england, c. 1550 - 1704

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**HALLOWED GROUND: LITERATURE AND THE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD IN
POST-REFORMATION ENGLAND, C.1550 – 1704**

by

MICHAEL MARTIN

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2012

MAJOR: ENGLISH

Approved by

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

for Bonnie

“since all Divinity is love or wonder”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could never have completed—or even contemplated—this dissertation without the direction, help, and support of mentors, colleagues, friends, and family members. I could never begin to repay them for their generosity, which has given me a deeper appreciation for the admission, “Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks.”

Ken Jackson’s forthrightness, insightful readings of my drafts, and knowledge of both early modern English literature and Continental philosophy were of great benefit to me as I worked through the issues of this study. Likewise, Jaime Goodrich’s scholarly integrity and recommendation that I move away from considering my subjects exclusively in the light of “mysticism” impelled me to ever more careful scholarship and attention to detail. Michael Joseph Giordano, with his rich knowledge of mysticism, early modern religion, and blessing of my use of “contemplation” as a critical term, did much to help me develop each of the chapters and their relation to the whole. And finally, my advisor Arthur F. Marotti’s guidance throughout my doctoral candidacy as well as through the writing of this dissertation made significant contributions not only to the contents of this study, but also to the development of its author as a scholar. To all of them I am deeply grateful.

I am also indebted to the library staff at Marygrove College. Laura Manley, Christy Malmsten, and, especially, Sylvia Turner went to great lengths to secure texts for me that were otherwise unavailable. Without their help, this study would be severely deficient.

I also extend my thanks to Cheryl Blumenstein and Ryan O’Rourke, my colleagues at Marygrove, and to fellow Wayne State University graduate students Bradley Stabler and Ken Faulkner, who all read parts of my work at different stages throughout the process of writing and

made valuable comments and suggestions. Elizabeth Sklar's guidance through a study of late-medieval English mysticism helped me considerably by giving me a thorough grounding in the English mystical tradition and she simultaneously reaffirmed the joy of scholarly discovery and the necessity for intellectual openness. I likewise extend my thanks to Professor Simone Chess for her advice during an earlier phase of my doctoral studies, as well as to Professor Michael Scrivener whose approach to religious issues in literature encouraged me to pursue the subject of this study. Likewise, I offer my heartfelt gratitude to professors Lynne Schaeffer, Maureen Desroches, and Edwin DeWindt, my mentors from an earlier pair of lives.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the friendship and support of Carissa Handrinos, Johanna Borman, and Carly Czajka, whom I mercilessly treated as sounding boards when stuck on a particular problem. And I am particularly thankful for the support and encouragement I received from my dear friend, the poet, teacher, and writer Donald Levin, Chair of the Department of English and Modern Languages at Marygrove.

Outside of Wayne State University and Marygrove College, several other colleagues have lent their scholarly insight and support to the project, particularly Harold Bloom and Yaakov Mascetti. Professor Bloom kindly responded to my queries about metalepsis as I worked through the Digby chapter, and Professor Mascetti's humor, kindness, and enthusiasm for metaphysical poetry reminded me why I was doing this in the first place at a time when I was starting to forget. Fr. Cyril Attack, O.F.M. was a wonderful resource and shared much of his considerable knowledge of theology and Church history with me in our many conversations over sips of green tea and/or Metaxa. I am also indebted to the anonymous readers of an earlier draft of my chapter on Kenelm Digby which was published in the journal *Prose Studies* under the editorship of

Ronald Cortshell. I am thankful to Taylor & Francis Publishing for allowing me to include that material in this study.

In Genesis, after the creation of Adam, the Elohim observe, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (2:18). This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and encouragement of my wife, Bonnie. I, surely, have sacrificed much in order to see this study come to completion. She has sacrificed more. Her encouragement, patience, and support while I worked on this project have been immeasurable. Dissertation-writing can be an often lonely undertaking. But I was never alone.

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INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A CRITICISM OF CONTEMPLATION

In his important study, *God Without Being*, philosopher Jean-Luc Marion argues that “theological writing always transgresses itself, just as theological speech feeds on the silence in which, at last, it speaks correctly.”¹ For Marion, this is due to the fact that theology is underwritten by the writer’s awareness that he or she writes in the presence of the absolutely other, the presence of God. As a result, such a discourse “diverts the author from himself... it causes him to write outside of himself, even against himself, since he must not write what he is, on what he knows, in view of what he wants, but in, for, and by that which he receives and in no case masters.”² Anyone who has ever undertaken the issue of God in writing is surely cognizant of the inability to speak from a position of absolute authority. Even Aquinas, toward the end of his career, concluded that his voluminous theological writings and hymns were unequal to his subject matter.³ In discourses that treat of God, no one can ever say, “*Consummatum est.*” Such an endeavor is never accomplished, always contingent.

The figures whose work I examine in this study, each in his or her way, wrote and spoke of God. All of them hoped to awaken in their readers or audiences an experience of God, or at least to offer them a way of access into God. And such an experience would not necessarily need to be confined to the writers’ historical moment. Indeed, the early 20th century French philosopher Simone Weil describes a way in which one example of the religious writing of early modern England initiated for her a kind of religious experience:

¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 1.

³ “Everything I have written seems like straw by comparison with what I have seen and what has been revealed to me.” From “Aquinas: Introduction,” in *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings*, ed. Simon Tugwell, O.P. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 266.

There was a young English Catholic...from whom I gained my first idea of the supernatural power of the sacraments because of the truly angelic radiance with which he seemed to be clothed after going to communion. Chance—for I always prefer saying chance rather than Providence—made of him a messenger to me. For he told me of the existence of those English poets of the seventeenth century who are named metaphysical. In reading them later on, I discovered the poem of which I read you what is unfortunately a very inadequate translation. It is called ‘Love.’ I learned it by heart. Often, at the culminating point of a violent headache, I make myself say it over, concentrating all my attention upon it and clinging with all my soul to the tenderness it enshrines. I used to think I was merely reciting it as a beautiful poem, but without my knowing it the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of these recitations that, as I told you, Christ himself came down and took possession of me.⁴

Weil’s deep attention to George Herbert’s poem “Love (III)” —even in translation—brought her to an encounter that surely would have pleased the seventeenth-century Anglican pastor: an intimate experience of Christ. This study strives to understand such events as they are disclosed or implied in the work of the figures I examine. Such events are central to religious experience and conviction, and even more particularly to the Christian religious experience. Each subject in this study faced a religious event—an actual, lived experience—whether gradual and subtle, as in the case of John Donne, or immediate and profound, as in the case of Jane Lead, and it impelled each one of them to live a life in conformity to its revelation.

Indeed, a significant amount of the writing produced in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was created with the sometimes conflicting ideas of religious conversion and social conformity in mind. Much of this religious writing was written with at least a marginal polemical intent as authors attempted to sway their readership into Calvinist, Roman Catholic, or Anglican religious commitments resulting in “the emergence of a vernacular religion” which overtook English Christianity from that point forward.⁵ This project of conversion is clearly evident in the glosses to the Geneva (1560) and Douai-Rheims (1582;

⁴ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1951), 68 – 69.

⁵ Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 187.

1610)⁶ bibles which, to varying degrees and through very different rhetorical and pastoral strategies, engage readers in religious polemic and attempt to call them to what each set of glosses proposed as the only authentic expression of Christian religion.⁷ Likewise, the Authorized Version of the Bible, first issued in 1611, makes its religiopolitical agenda clear by its absence of glosses and in the way it avoids the polemics of interpretation, asserting its royal authority in a text unadorned by (apparent) human interpretations, figuring, in a manner, the divine *fiat* of the original Hebrew and Greek.

It comes as no real surprise, then, that so much contemporary scholarship, arising from the critical discourses of New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, as well as Marxist and Feminist criticism has focused on the political aspects of the religious writing of the period.⁸ Nevertheless, the presence of political or polemical elements in the religious writing of the time does not mean that the more obviously “religious” elements of the work are insincere. To the contrary, what these elements betray is just the opposite: a commitment to religion and a desire to communicate that commitment to others and perhaps spur readers to their own conversion experiences, guiding them into what the writers believed to be an authentic religious life.

⁶ The glosses in the Geneva Bible (New Testament published in 1557, entire text in 1560) are pointedly polemical and heavily didactic for a Bible published with the value of one’s “private relationship” with scripture in mind. The glosses of the Douai-Rheims Bible (New Testament first published in 1582, an entire text not appearing until 1610) are less polemical and were intended to woo Protestants back into the Catholic fold. For an interesting discussion of the rhetorical and cultural contexts of these bibles, see Kevin Sharpe, “Reading Revelations: Prophecy, Hermeneutics and Politics in Early Modern Britain,” in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125 – 26.

⁷ Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), has called the marginal glosses to the Geneva Bible “near to being a revolutionists’ handbook” (2).

⁸ The catalogue of these studies is too enormous to list, but important texts in this line, all from the 1980s, when this critical approach gained significant traction in literary studies, include Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning, from More to Shakespeare* (1980; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1984); Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

Recent work on the religious writing of the period has examined it from a number of perspectives, from New Historicist examinations of rhetoric, to work informed by Lacanian analysis, to work considering the devotional and innately “religious” sensibilities of the religious writing of the period in the light of Continental philosophy and postmodern theology.⁹ My study will go a step further and show how some writing of the period—in early modern scientific discourses, poetry, sermons, and accounts of mystical experiences—figures the encounter with God and the ways in which the writers hoped to awaken in their readers and audiences an awareness of their own potential encounters with God as ultimate good. In the aftermath of the Church of England’s break with Rome and the cultural changes it entailed, this encounter with God manifested in a variety of ways. Some of these drew on earlier methods for approaching

⁹ Among the studies treating the period are several important works. First, Brian Cummings, in *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (2002), attends to the explosion of vernacular religious writing in England during the period and the interrelatedness of the literary and religious controversies of the period. Gary Kuchar’s *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), on the other hand, considers early modern English religious writing from a Lacanian standpoint and examines the ways in which God’s subjection of believers enacts their self-realization as subjects. Kuchar views “devotion as a form of symbolic action” in which the believer interiorizes personal and cultural anxieties as a “transmutation of suffering into joy, of apathy into desire” in the uncertain religious atmosphere of early modern England (34 – 35). Ceri Sullivan’s study, *The Rhetoric of Conscience in Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), splits the difference between the work of Cummings and Kuchar and looks at the ways in which rhetorical figures (*subjectio*, *antanaclasis*, *aposiopoesis*, *chiasmus*) are used by religious poets of the seventeenth century to subvert their own language in order to perform their (in)ability to know God. In resonance with Kuchar’s critical stance, Gregory Kneidel, in *Reconsidering the Turn to Religion in Early Modern Literature: The Poetics of All Believers*, *Early Modern Literature in History* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), considers the pastoral, rhetorical, and cultural influence of St. Paul on the religious writing of the period and reads it as an anticipation the kind of universalism Alain Badiou celebrates in his own book on Paul. Regina Schwartz, on the other hand, moves toward more purely religious concerns in *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World*, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), seeking to discover how early modern attitudes toward the idea of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist impacted some of the religious writing of the period and how various poets—including Donne, Herbert, Shakespeare, and Milton—“were actively engaged in retrieving the holy when its cultural presence seemed most threatened” (12). More recently, James A. Knapp, in *Image Ethics in Shakespeare and Spenser* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011), has considered the visual culture as it is manifested in early modern English literature using the tools of phenomenology and Continental philosophy

These studies are representative of a body of scholarship that started to move toward considerations of more intimate and private expressions of religious experience and away from the cultural, social, and historical revisionist concerns of critical work from the 1990s, such as Achsah Guibbory’s *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Frances E. Dolan’s *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), and Alison Shell’s *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558 – 1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

God, while others looked to developments in science and philosophy touching on both metaphysics and the natural sciences, what would eventually be thought of as biology and chemistry.

Prior to the Reformation, English faithful inclined to a life of prayer and intimacy with God had the cloister as an alternative to life “in the world”: after the Reformation, this option did not exist. Rather, the desire for a life of prayer and communion with God characteristic of contemplative religious orders—Carmelites, Carthusians, and Benedictines—was, after the Dissolution, disseminated throughout an increasingly secularized English culture.¹⁰ As a result, the desire for intimacy with God demanded new, individualized, sometimes idiosyncratic and often unexpected avenues for expression. For this reason, it is difficult to arrive at a formula for description of what occurred in the religious lives of individuals in this period in their quest for communion with God. Without the structures of formal spiritual direction and its methods of discernment, the experience of God might take any form. This is exactly what happened.

Simultaneous with the dynamics of literary religious polemic running through English religious life in the period, a new emphasis on the spiritual lives of individuals appeared, as can be seen by the popularity of devotional manuals and contemplative works throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Devotional manuals, many of them derived from the work of Catholic authors and often published without any indication of their Catholic origins, flourished throughout the period contributing what has been called “Rome’s almost uniquely acceptable offering to Protestant England” in the absence of a Protestant devotional literature.¹¹

¹⁰ Alexandra Walsham is inclined to describe this movement in the period as a “de-sacralisation” rather than as the more common “secularization.” She reasons that what is at issue here is “the decline of belief in divine immanence rather than the rejection or marginalization of religion per se.” See Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 2 (June 2008): 504.

¹¹ William H. Halewood, *The Poetry of Grace: Reformation Themes and Structures in English Seventeenth Century Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 73. Indeed, the devotional works of the Catholic writers Fray

Likewise in edited and theologically de-Catholicized form, the Jesuit Robert Southwell's poetry and prose works found a ready, Protestant readership during the period,¹² one piece of evidence that seventeenth-century England "had taken to its heart the fruits of the Counter Reformation in the realm of inward devotion."¹³ Even more "purely" literary works such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1597, 1600) and Philip Sidney's *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (first published in 1590 and reprinted regularly through the first half of the seventeenth century) engaged religion as their authors sought to represent the ascendancy of English Protestant culture in imaginative form. The "runaway bestseller" of the period, however, was the Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter which went through two-hundred-plus editions between 1550 and 1640, a staggering number by anyone's standards.¹⁴ The spread of devotional and religious materials among the laity throughout the period, for its "sheer numbers," has been called perhaps "the most striking use of the printing press in early modern England."¹⁵ In addition, the effects of religious literature were long-lasting: readers would meditate on devotional works, scripture,

Luis de Granada (1505 – 1588) and Francois de Sales (1561 – 1695), to name only two, found a ready readership in translation among English Protestants.

Granada was a Spanish Dominican. Beginning with the English translation (attributed to M. K.) of his *A breefe treatise exhorting sinners to repentance, commonly called, the conuersion of a sinner* in 1580, at least forty editions of devotional works by Granada appeared—in both Catholic and Protestant "versions"—by 1702. Robert Persons' *Christian Directory* drew heavily from Granada's work. See Victor Houliston, ed., *The Christian Directory (1582), The First Booke of Christian Exercise, Appertayning to Resolution*, by Robert Persons, S.J., *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1998)

The French priest and mystic Francois de Sales (1567 – 1622) published *Introduction à la vie dévôte* in 1609 and it was quickly issued in an English translation by John Yakesley as *An Introduction to a Devout Life* in 1613 which was reprinted at least ten more times in the seventeenth century.

¹² Robert Southwell, S. J. is an extraordinarily important figure in early modern English devotional literature and religious poetry. While his *Epistle of Comfort* (1587) was composed with a recusant Catholic readership in mind, his prose *Marie Magdalens funerall teares* (1592) and *The triumphs over death* (1596) as well as the poetical works, *St. Peters complaint* (1595) and *Moenia, or Certaine excellent poems and spirituall hymnes* (1599) were intended for both Catholic and Protestant readers. On Southwell's popularity among Protestant readers, see Susannah Brietz Monta, "Anne Dacre Howard, Countess of Arundel, and Catholic Patronage," in *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production, 1500 – 1625*, ed. Micheline White (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 67 – 70.

¹³ Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 9.

¹⁴ Peter C. Herman, *A Short History of Early Modern England: British Literature in Context* (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 8. On the Sternhold-Hopkins psalter, see Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern British Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially the chapter entitled "'Very mete to be used of all sortes of people': The 'Sternhold and Hopkins' Psalter."

¹⁵ I. M. Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), vii.

psalm books, and sermons, returning to them regularly.¹⁶ Such enthusiasm attests to the popular desire for intimacy with God that was becoming a feature of post-Reformation English religion as it moved from religious *culture* to religious *faith*,¹⁷ and as instruction in methods of contemplation migrated from the cloister to the marketplace.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the proliferation of devotional materials among lay classes was primarily a Protestant cultural phenomenon. As Eamon Duffy and others have argued, there was a substantial precedent for the availability of printed devotional material in circulation among the laity—among all classes—well before the advent of the Reformation.¹⁸ Indeed, the proliferation of devotional texts in cultural contexts outside of clerical orders may have *hastened* the Reformation in that these texts emphasized the individual’s participation in Christ at the expense of the community’s. This was not a danger in the monastic communities in which this literature was originally generated, since the contemplative life of individual monks or nuns was integrated into the life of prayer, ritual, and the *regula* of the community, an idea implicit in the Benedictine motto *ora et labora*.¹⁹ Indeed, the reforms of religion that became institutionalized with and after the Reformation, it has been argued, were “in the line of continuity with medieval reform, attempting to raise general standards, not satisfied with a world in which only a few integrally fulfill the gospel, but trying to make certain pious practices

¹⁶ Ibid., 234.

¹⁷ See C. John Sommerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). See also the chapter entitled “From Faith and Reason to Fideism: Raymond Lull, Raimundus Sabundus and Michel de Montaigne” in Paul Richard Blum, *Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2010).

¹⁸ See especially chapters six and seven of Duffy’s *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400 – 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹⁹ “In general, the monks did not acquire their religious formation in a school, under a scholastic, by means of the *quaestio*, but individually, under the guidance of an abbot, a spiritual father, through the reading of the Bible and the Fathers, within the liturgical framework of the monastic life.” Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 3.

absolutely general.”²⁰ As a result, images, “the people’s book” as they were called, disappeared from popular Protestant worship and were hidden behind the barrier of text from those who could not read.²¹ Furthermore, the proliferation of devotional texts and the emphasis on the written word it implies worked to reify “language as the means of communication between Man and God.”²² The printing press, certainly, had much to do with popularizing and accelerating this “reform,” capitalized or not. In early modern England, as elsewhere, the printing press was without question an agent of change.²³

The interest in devotional literature characteristic of the period is symptomatic of another aspect of English culture: the disappearance of monastic life. The earlier strains of what Christopher Haigh has called “the English Reformations”²⁴ were intensely anti-monastic. Monks and nuns were often caricatured as immoral, pampered parasites living off the sweat and charity of others in a ruse of alleged “holiness.” This had been the case since long before Chaucer made light of not-so-holy monastics in *The Monks Tale*, though with the advent of the Reformation what had been in the fourteenth century a comical stock character increasingly became a malicious and politically-motivated piece of anti-Rome propaganda. Monasticism was also accused of gobbling up valuable resources that could be set to better use elsewhere in society. Henry VIII, indeed, used just such an excuse when he undertook the Visitation of the Monasteries (1536 – 1541), his systematic confiscation of Church properties, though Archbishop Thomas Cranmer opposed Henry’s desire to bestow the spoils on nobles, encouraging the king,

²⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 2007), 82.

²¹ See Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially the chapter entitled “Images: The Reformation of the Eyes.”

²² Graham Howes, *The Art of the Sacred: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Art and Belief* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan-St. Martin’s Press, 2007), 9.

²³ The classic study on the subject remains Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 2 vol. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

²⁴ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1993).

instead, to consider the poor.²⁵ Henry ignored him (and the poor),²⁶ and, as Alec Ryrie has argued, “no English government has ever received such an enormous windfall, nor spent one so recklessly.”²⁷ Though it made a brief reappearance during the reign of Mary I (1553 – 1558), with the accession of Elizabeth I English monasticism, it seemed, had permanently disappeared from England, though it persisted through the seventeenth century in exile in a handful of Continental enclaves.²⁸

Traditional Catholic spiritual direction was (and remains) intimately related to Catholic practices of Confession.²⁹ During the early modern period, following a precedent established in 1215 at the fourth Lateran Council, all Catholics were required to confess their sins to a priest at least once a year, usually during Lent and in preparation for receiving the Sacrament at Easter.³⁰ In monastic and eremitic communities, however, Confession was much more frequent. In Catholic cultural contexts both prior to and after the Reformation, Confession was a private

²⁵ Jasper Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), 95 – 96.

²⁶ As Ridley observes, “after the seizure of the monastic lands by the King, the reformers witnessed, to their disgust, the gifts and sales of the lands to favourites and speculators; and a few years later they were forced to admit that though matters had been bad under the monks, they were even worse under their successors.” *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁷ Alec Ryrie, *The Age of Reformation: The Tudor and Stewart Realms 1485 – 1603* (Harlow, UK: Pearson-Longman, 2009), 135.

²⁸ It was not until the nineteenth century that monasticism returned to England. See William M. Johnston, *Encyclopedia of Monasticism, Volume 1* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), 399. On early modern English monasticism outside of England, see Jaime Goodrich, “‘Ensign-Bearers of Sainte Clare’: Elizabeth Evelinge’s Early Translations and the Restoration of English Franciscanism,” in *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production, 1500 – 1625*, ed. Micheline White (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 83 – 102; Clare Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

²⁹ An important study of the *cura animarum* is John T. McNeil, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1951). See also Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession, Hearing Confession: A History of the Cure of Souls* (Collegeville, PA: Michael Glazier-Liturgical Press, 2010).

³⁰ “Wherefore, whereas the secret sacramental confession, which was in use from the beginning in holy Church, and is still also in use, has always been commended by the most holy and the most ancient Fathers with a great and unanimous consent, the vain calumny of those is manifestly refuted, who are not ashamed to teach, that confession is alien from the divine command, and is a human invention, and that it took its rise from the Fathers assembled in the Council of Lateran: for the Church did not, through the Council of Lateran, ordain that the faithful of Christ should confess,—a thing which it knew to be necessary, and to be instituted of divine right,—but that the precept of confession should be complied with, at least once a year, by all and each, when they have attained to years of discretion. Whence, throughout the whole Church, the salutary custom is, to the great benefit of the souls of the faithful, now observed, of confessing at that most sacred and most acceptable time of Lent,—a custom which this holy Synod most highly approves of and embraces, as pious and worthy of being retained,” from *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), 99.

affair³¹ and, for those in religious life in particular, it opened up opportunities for exploring and, hopefully, removing the difficulties found on the road to contemplation. The early Reformers still valued confession,³² but they moved to corporate modes of confessing and absolution. For example, “A General Confession, To be said of the whole congregation after the minister, kneeling,” included as part of the Order for Morning Prayer in the 1559 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*, exemplifies this new religious sensibility:

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways, like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore thou them that be penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind, in Christ Jesu our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy name.³³

Furthermore, in Protestant religious contexts confession was no longer regarded as a sacrament, but was held instead as “an option rather than an obligation.”³⁴ Private confession to a priest or minister still had value, and reform theologian Heinrich Bullinger acknowledged its occasional necessity, but only in cases where the believer might feel the sin to be too much to contend with on his or her own.³⁵ In general, “the priesthood of all believers” characteristic of Protestant spirituality downplayed the role of ministers or pastors in the spiritual lives of believers, holding

³¹ “...as to the manner of confessing secretly to a priest alone, although Christ has not forbidden that a person may,—in punishment of his sins, and for his own humiliation, as well for an example to others as for the edification of the Church that has been scandalized,—confess his sins publicly, nevertheless this is not commanded by a divine precept; neither would it very prudent to enjoin by any human law, that sins, especially such as are secret, should be made known by a public confession,” from *Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, 99.

³² McNeil judges Martin Luther a very capable “guide of souls.” *History of the Cure of Souls*, 170.

³³ *The Book of Common Prayer 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, ed. John E. Booty (Washington, D.C.: Folger Books, 1976), 50 – 51. On Puritan spiritual direction, see Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: From Earliest Times to 1700* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 379 – 80.

³⁴ Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 30.

³⁵ Kidder, *Making Confession*, 142 – 43.

that every believer in Christ could have direct, personal access to God.³⁶ The movement in which the *cura animarum* migrated to corporate forms in lay, Protestant religious contexts during England's long period of Reformation was paralleled in Catholic religious contexts by a similar emphasis on lay spiritual direction as lay recusants strove to practice a religion under persecution.³⁷

The idea of private spiritual direction, however, was generally antithetical to Protestant spiritualities which emphasized the believer's inner awareness of God and reliance on scripture. As Jóhann Páll Árnason has observed, the Reformation's "reaction against late medieval forms of spiritual direction was double-edged" as reformers asserted the primacy of the inner conscience at the expense of the "institutional controls of the Church as well as the compromises and concessions due to its involvement in the spheres of social power."³⁸ This eventually, especially in the latter half of the seventeenth century, manifested in an "anything goes" ethos in some quarters of ostensibly Protestant spirituality and resulted in a range of religious expressions that would have alarmed Calvin and Luther: prophecies, visions of angels and other divine beings, not to mention antinomian religious sensibilities that questioned not only Church authority but the authority of scripture as well.³⁹

³⁶ Carl R. Trueman, "Reformers, Puritans and Evangelicals: The Lay Connection," in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. Deryck W. Lovegrove (London: Routledge, 2003), 19 – 20.

³⁷ Recent scholarship has examined how this kind of spiritual direction functioned in the lives of Catholic women, particularly of the aristocracy. See, for example, Ellen A. Macek, "'Ghostly Fathers' and Their 'Virtuous Daughters': The Role of Spiritual Direction in the Lives of Three Early Modern English Women," *The Catholic Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (April 2004): 213 – 35.

³⁸ Jóhann Páll Árnason, *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 156.

³⁹ Important studies on this subject include Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640 – 1660* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989); Nicholas McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630 – 1660* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2003); Ariel Hessayon and David Finnegan, ed., *Varieties of Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism in Context* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2011). Preceding and to some extent informing all of them is Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1974).

Because of this, the varieties of religious experience in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries outside of Catholic monastic contexts were multifarious, individualized, and singular. No one category can contain all of them. The desire for intimacy with God characteristic of many who entered the cloister persisted in the lay, predominantly Protestant, culture of sixteenth and seventeenth century England, but, in the absence of the forms and controls institutionalized in the monastic tradition, this desire found new forms of expression.

These forms at times took on more or less conventional—or at least familiar—attributes: as an outgrowth of one’s life of prayer; as the result of a conversion experience; as an attempt to claim a religious life in an uncertain world; as an assertion of identity. This was often the case with lay Catholic believers still connected, if at a distance, to Church traditions and structures—such as spiritual direction, for one—as well as with more “traditional” elements of the Anglican Church.⁴⁰ In Calvinist and Puritan religious contexts, where the notion of election bore greater influence, the very fact of election provoked some believers to assume God’s presence in their inner lives and pushed some to boldly proclaim that they were “vessels and instruments of the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹ Some Puritans, on the other hand, regulated their daily lives by prayer and study of scripture to such a degree that, as one scholar has noticed, they “made the disciplines of medieval monasticism the basis of their lifestyles,”⁴² though it is not likely that many of them would have welcomed this comparison.

Nevertheless, in the decades following England’s break with Rome, though the monastic tradition’s long history of a regulated prayer life persisted as a kind of cultural palimpsest,

⁴⁰ Indeed, the traffic of believers between the Anglican and Catholic communions during the period—with certain individuals, such as William Alabaster (1567 – 1640), moving back and forth a number of times—gives some indication of this nervous harmony.

⁴¹ Walsham, “Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World,’” 510.

⁴² Robert W. Brockway, *A Wonderful Work of God: Puritanism and the Great Awakening* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2003), 193.

because religion was becoming a more personal affair, the encounter with God took on a surprising variety of personalized forms. For some, such as John Dee, the religious intuition asserted itself as a willed experience, or, rather, as a scientific experiment. For others, as in the case of John Donne, it was in response to personal conflicts and anxieties combined with a serious study of the questions raised in this age of schism and vehement theological debate. For some, as with Sir Kenelm Digby as well as in the cases of Henry and Thomas Vaughan, it appeared almost spontaneously, unconsciously even, at the nexus of religious, existential, biographical, and historical elements triggered by researches into science and the physical world and in no small part inspired by developments in Cartesian dualism and Baconian empiricism.⁴³ Following the Restoration, as the anxieties of the age began to settle and culture moved away from the religiopolitical tensions with which England had been embroiled since the early 1530s, forms of ostensibly Protestant mysticism received new life due to the discovery of the revolutionary mystical writing of the German Lutheran Jacob Boehme whose works first began to be published in English in 1648. As a result, for believers such as Jane Lead and the Philadelphians, the desire for communion with God manifested in visionary experiences not unlike those familiar from medieval times, though, being that they were produced outside of the controls of Church authority, their spiritual discoveries, in general, found freer expression than earlier visionaries had been allowed and moved close to ideas thought heretical by the mainstream. Despite the breakdown of a “mystical tradition” and the anxieties that some Protestants felt about the truth claims of traditional mysticism, individuals continued to seek—and find—ways to encounter the divine.

⁴³ Counter to what could be called “the Enlightenment Narrative” that often accompanies “the Whig Narrative,” early modern English scientific inquiry was often stimulated by deep religious commitment. See Walsham, “Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World,’” 522 – 25.

During the period, the growing preference for reason over intuition and the arrival of what Charles Taylor has described as a “new ethic of rational control”⁴⁴ made significant impacts on religion. The rational approach to God advocated by the humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536) is a symptom of this movement which had long been lurking in Western European Christian culture.⁴⁵ Erasmus wished to strip Christianity of all superstition and contaminations of popular and folk religion, an intellectual stance that lent a massive level of stimulus to reform due to his formidable reputation. For Erasmus, Catholicism had been soiled by clergy “enveloping the superstitious common folk (*plebecula*) with ceremonies, so that they were led by the nose, and never grow up into a true teaching of Christ.”⁴⁶ In England, Erasmus’ friend and colleague Thomas More upheld a similar agenda, and, like Erasmus, valued elite ethical and expressive elements of religion over popular forms of piety such as pilgrimages and the veneration of saints.⁴⁷ As Taylor has observed, Christian humanists of Erasmus’ inclinations “fell into the negative judgment that élites all too easily make on popular piety, seeing it from the outside, and missing all too often the spirit which animated it.”⁴⁸ Erasmus and his humanist peers, then, turned to reason as the salvation of Christianity rather than to Christianity as the salvation of reason. The trajectory was set and became more fully realized in the work and thought of René Descartes.

Descartes (1596 – 1650), educated by Jesuits at La Flèche and the University of Poitiers, was influenced by the late-Scholasticism of Francisco Suarez.⁴⁹ Despite his profoundly rational philosophy, however, Descartes was somewhat inclined toward mysticism. Indeed, his entrance

⁴⁴ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 134.

⁴⁵ Susan E. Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise?: The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12.

⁴⁶ Erasmus, *Enarratio in Ps. 1*, LB V, 179EF, quoted in James D. Tracey, *Erasmus: The Growth of a Mind*, Avaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance CXXXVI (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1972), 147.

⁴⁷ Sommerville, *Secularization of Early Modern England*, 34.

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 71.

⁴⁹ Magaret Dauler Wilson, *Descartes* (1978; repr., London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 216.

onto the stage of history as a philosopher of note was initiated by a series of what he believed to be significant dreams he had on the night of 10 November 1619.⁵⁰ Descartes recognized the dreams as momentous and scribbled a note into the margin of his diary recounting them: “11 November 1619. I began to understand the foundation of the wonderful discovery.”⁵¹ At the end of his Third Meditation he writes in this same spirit, as one informed by mystical theology:

I should like to pause here and spend some time in contemplation of God; to reflect on his attributes, and to gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it. For just as we believe through faith that the supreme happiness of the next life consists solely in the contemplation of the divine majesty, so experience tells us that this same contemplation, albeit much less perfect, enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life.⁵²

However, it is not as a mystical theologian that Descartes’ reputation rests. On the contrary, Descartes is recognized as contributing to what has been called “the exile of God” through his philosophy’s extreme dualism. This dualism, which divides body and mind, creation and God into discrete and unmixed categories, bore a significant impact on the thought—religious as well as secular—of the seventeenth and subsequent centuries. In Descartes’ model, God is completely transcendent and human beings can only consider him by turning their attentions toward him (as Descartes does at the end of the Third Meditation) and away from “this world.” In this way, as Marion has observed, “[b]y a rigorous consequence, supernatural blessedness finds itself, if not refuted, at least placed at a distance.”⁵³ As a result, for Descartes, human beings can only have knowledge of what exists in this world: God, being infinite, cannot be understood except by faith. As Hans Küng has described it, “With Descartes, European consciousness in a critical development reached an epochal turning point. Basic certainty is no longer centered on God, but

⁵⁰ For a full account, see the chapter entitled “A Night of Dreams,” in A. C. Grayling, *Descartes: The Life of René Descartes and Its Place in His Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵² *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 36.

⁵³ Jean-Luc Marion, *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, John Cottingham, and Stephen Voss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 92 – 93.

on man. In other words, the medieval way of reasoning from certainty of God to certainty of the self is replaced by the modern approach: from certainty of the self to certainty of God.”⁵⁴ Such an idea was not without its impact on seventeenth-century English religion. The Cambridge Platonist Henry More, for instance, was very interested in Descartes’ ideas early on and undertook a vigorous correspondence with him, though he later became disenchanted with the French philosopher’s project.⁵⁵ Likewise, the scientist Sir Kenelm Digby was an early English proponent of Descartes. The alchemist, philosopher, and Anglican priest Thomas Vaughan, on the other hand, found Descartes’ ideas repellant.

Finally and ironically, in an age so preoccupied with finding the proper way to worship God, the notion that God could actually interact with believers in a direct way fell under increasing suspicion. Protestantism, of course, had declared the Age of Miracles to be over, and Walsham has observed that the “rhetoric of rationality and enlightenment” taken up by Protestantism was a key trait of the movement.⁵⁶ Calvin, for instance, acknowledged that wonders did occur among Roman Catholics, but declared them to be “false miracles,” and held that the scriptures were miracle enough.⁵⁷ Likewise, Calvinists believed that the elect were marked by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, in which case outward signs such as visions and ecstasies were superfluous. Quakers and other types of antinomians in the latter seventeenth-century, on the other hand, held that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was an inheritance of all humanity.⁵⁸ Throughout the period, reported visions, apparitions, and mystical ecstasies were

⁵⁴ Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?: An Answer for Today*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 15.

⁵⁵ René Descartes, *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, ed. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2000), 292.

⁵⁶ Walsham, “Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World,’” 505.

⁵⁷ Robert Bruce Mullin, *Miracles and the Modern Religious Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 13.

⁵⁸ Simon Dixon, “The Priest, the Quakers and the Second Conventicle Act: The Battle for Gracechurch Street Meeting House, 1670,” in *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Andrew Spicer and Sarah Hamilton (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 302.

increasingly regarded as more likely evidence of mental illness than of divine favor, as Robert Burton had posited in *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).⁵⁹ Throughout the period, the very nature of religion was drastically altered as mainline English religion became more and more rational.

As C. John Sommerville has argued,

In 1500 religion had a language of its own, perhaps several languages—of devotion, consecration, penitence, hagiography and occult wisdom, and also of malediction. All of this began to fade in the milder light of common sense. Religion forced its way into consciousness when it had to be expressed in everyday terms. To be sure, this would create a new religious enthusiasm, which lasted at least a century. But it also brought doubts. Doubts had existed before, but only indistinctly. By 1700 it was faith that had a job to sustain itself in a vocabulary drawn from elsewhere.⁶⁰

Religious experience in this age drew from a wide spectrum of possibilities—from the rational moderation of Descartes and the Cambridge Platonists to the more emotionally volatile manifestations of enthusiasm seen in, for example, the “Ranter” Abiezer Coppe (1619 – 1672)⁶¹ and the Fifth Monarchist Anna Trapnel.⁶² Many critics have argued that the visions and

⁵⁹ See, particularly, Robert Burton’s discussion of “religious melancholy” in *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1633), 632 – 722.

Meric Casaubon, for one, campaigned against religious enthusiasm in *A Treatise concerning Enthusiasme* (1655). Henry More, for another, wrote disparagingly of religious enthusiasm in *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus: or A Brief Discourse of the Nature, Causes, Kindes, and Cure of Enthusiasm* (1656), encouraging the faithful toward a more rational Christianity. Indeed, for More, the Holy Spirit functioned only through reason. On More, see Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660 – 1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39.

⁶⁰ Sommerville, *Secularization of Early Modern England*, 56.

⁶¹ A substantial secondary literature has been growing about Coppe since the appearance of Hill’s *The World Turned Upside Down*. Coppe seems to have gone through several religious permutations, from pragmatic Presbyterian to Anabaptist to Seeker to Ranter (a position he eventually repudiated). See Ariel Hessayon, “Coppe, Abiezer (1619–1672?),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6275>, accessed 31 Oct 2011] as well as McDowell’s chapter entitled “‘In a Lunatick Moode’: Humanism, Puritanism, and the Rhetorical Strategies of Ranter Writing” in *English Radical Imagination*, 89 – 136. Also of note are Noam Flinker, *The Song of Songs in English Renaissance Literature: The Kisses of Their Mouths*, Studies in Renaissance Literature (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 125 – 38, and Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 53 – 66.

⁶² Paul Salzman interprets Trapnel’s rise as emblematic of “the way that women from comparatively humble backgrounds emerged as radical voices during the period.” See Paul Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women’s Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 114 – 22, at 114. On the Fifth Monarchist movement, a superb source is Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Faber, 1972).

prophecies announced by individuals such as Elizabeth Barton (“the Holy Maid of Kent”)⁶³ in the sixteenth century and by various Ranters, Fifth Monarchists, Philadelphians, and members of other, generally antinomian, groups in the seventeenth were driven by a quest for “agency”—in the case of female visionaries due to their lower status in a patriarchal society, and for male visionaries due to their status outside of the halls of power and influence.⁶⁴ However, these assessments, though they may have kernels of truth to them, do a disservice to the religious commitments of the “enthusiasts” as well as to the agency the critics try to champion, effectively dismissing the enthusiasts in the same way More and Burton did in the seventeenth century. As Taylor has argued, “communion itself has had little or no place in the picture: little enough even on the human level—the hegemony of atomist pictures of agency in modern culture mitigates against this; and no place at all for communion with God as a transforming relation.”⁶⁵ There must be a way in which we can study the literature and culture of an era without portraying ourselves as superior to the people who created it.

Apophysis: The Problem of Religious Experience

Each of the figures examined in this study is concerned with the ways in which God can be approached or experienced. Each one also tries to depict in writing the ways in which he or she experienced God or the ways in which their readers and audiences might experience God.

⁶³ Barton (c.1506 – 1534) was an English Benedictine nun. A visionary, for a time she even enjoyed royal favor, having been granted audience with Henry VIII at least once. However, when her visions touched on—and condemned—Henry’s impending divorce from Katherine of Aragon, Barton fell into displeasure with the king. She was executed after being found guilty of high treason. See Diane Watt, “Barton, Elizabeth (c.1506–1534),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1598, accessed 31 Oct 2011].

⁶⁴ A proponent of this school of thought is Phyllis Mack. See her *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992). See also Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997). Inspiring all of these studies is the groundbreaking work of Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁶⁵ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 280.

The early twentieth-century scholar of religion Rudolf Otto describes this encounter as an experience of the “numinous,” a “feeling or consciousness of the ‘wholly other,’” which presence evokes in the individual a sense of profound awe and fascination before the *mysterium tremendum*.⁶⁶ More recently, Michael Sells has described this event as “a radical dialectic of transcendence and immanence. That which is utterly ‘beyond’ is revealed or reveals itself as most intimately ‘within.’ The ‘extraordinary’ events of mysticism are revealed in the ‘common’: justice, love, truly seeing, living the scripture.”⁶⁷ In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the archetype for this event is found in Exodus 3:

And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.
And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.
Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. (Exodus 3:5 – 7)⁶⁸

Theories about mysticism or religious experiences abound, but it is a good idea to bear in mind, as Martin Heidegger advised, that “religious experiences are not theoretical.”⁶⁹ Henri Bergson once argued that “A perfect definition applies only to a *completed* reality.”⁷⁰ Religious experience—always singular, always contingent, never fully realized—is never complete.

Rather than try to provide a definition for “religious experience,” it is better, I think, to consider the ways individuals claim to have encountered God. Richard Swinburne identifies five contexts in which individuals may be said to experience divinity:

⁶⁶ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 25 – 30.

⁶⁷ Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 7.

⁶⁸ Authorized Version.

⁶⁹ Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, Studies in Continental Thought, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 236.

⁷⁰ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), 16. Bergson’s emphasis.

- 1) Wherein the subject perceives God “in a perfectly ordinary non-religious object,” for example, in the beauty and grandeur of the night sky.
- 2) In the perception of “very unusual public objects,” such as with the Resurrection appearances of Christ or in the reported apparitions at Fatima.
- 3) Private experiences or sensations describable in ordinary language. For example, Joseph’s dreams of the angel in Matthew 1 and 2.
- 4) Private experiences or sensations *not* describable in ordinary language. In this case, the reporter relies on analogy to relate the experience to others.
- 5) Experiences that are not sensory and are ascertained more through awareness or emotion than anything else. Descriptions of this as “darkness” or “nothingness” may indicate an experience of God “not mediated via any sensations.”⁷¹

Swinburne opens up the possibility of religious experience in a way that renders it not so rarified an event and argues against the notion that a feeling of “union” is the sole criterion for an experience of God. The religious experiences of each subject in this study fall into one or more of these categories.

All too often, scholarly treatments of mystical writing get caught up in judgments about whether or not a given mystic ever achieved union with God, as if the critic were an umpire. No one is authority enough to make such pronouncements. It is better, I think, to follow Bernard McGinn who insists “that the mystical element of the Christian religion be seen primarily as a *process* or way of life rather than being defined solely in terms of some mystical union with God.”⁷² Furthermore, McGinn recognizes how our own cultural assumptions may obscure the concept. “The term mystical experience,” he writes, “consciously or unconsciously, also tends to

⁷¹ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, revised edition (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1991), 250 – 51.

⁷² Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism, Vol. II of The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), x – xi. McGinn’s emphasis.

place emphasis on special altered states—visions, locutions, raptures, and the like—which admittedly have played a part in mysticism but which many mystics have insisted do not constitute the essence of the encounter with God.”⁷³

In this study—which is a work of literary criticism and not of theology—it is not my intention to pass judgment on whether or not the subjects I examine truly experienced God, angels, or any other supernatural beings. Nevertheless, it does seem more prudent to consider their religious experiences initially in an attitude of acceptance and not one of suspicion. Swinburne encourages such a stance in what he has called “The Principle of Credulity,” which holds “that apparent perceptions ought to be taken at face value in the absence of positive reason for challenge.”⁷⁴ Similarly, as Caroline Franks Davis has argued, “Religious experience is...far from ‘self-authenticating,’ but this does not imply that it is ‘nothing but interpretation’; like all experiences, it is woven into the fabric of our lives within a complex pattern of cognitive, perceptual, and personal factors, and any argument which does it justice must take that complexity into account.”⁷⁵ In recent decades the prevailing scholarly approach to such religious experiences, at least as far as studies of early modern religious writing are concerned, has been either to ignore them (which is understandable) or to assume them to be delusions. Joad Raymond, for example, in his otherwise admirable study, *Milton’s Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (2010), feels compelled to inform his readers “I do not believe in angels, God, or the Devil,”⁷⁶ leaving one to wonder what moved Raymond to include this confession. This kind of scholarly excavation of “primitive” religious cultures of earlier ages tends, at the very least,

⁷³ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism, Vol. I of The Presence of God: A History of Western Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xvii – xviii.

⁷⁴ Swinburne, *Existence of God*, 275.

⁷⁵ Caroline Franks Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3 – 4.

⁷⁶ Joad Raymond, *Milton’s Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

toward intellectual condescension. A more modest approach is in order. As Swinburne has argued,

Initial scepticism about perceptual claims—regarding them as guilty until proved innocent—will give you no knowledge at all. Initial credulity is the only attitude a rational man can take—there is no half-way house. However, claims which can subsequently be shown unreasonable can be weeded out. But the onus remains on the challenger. Unless we take perceptual claims seriously, whatever they are about, we shall find ourselves in an epistemological Queer Street. *Religious perceptual claims deserve to be taken as seriously as perceptual claims of any other kind.*⁷⁷

In this study, I take the perceptual claims of each writer seriously. Each of them wrote, or tried to write, of God. Each of them figures the encounter with God in signs: letters and words. Jean Leclercq has written that “*There is no spiritual literature without spiritual experience: it is the experience which gives rise to the literature, not the reverse.*”⁷⁸ This study, in short, is an interrogation of this claim.

Methodology

The critical methodology undertaken in this study is grounded in phenomenology, though “orthodox” phenomenologists might take issue with my occasional turns to the disciplines of history and psychology. In his widely influential text book, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), Terry Eagleton calls phenomenology “a wholly uncritical, non-evaluative mode of analysis” and ultimately accuses it of intellectual cowardice, writing that “Phenomenology sought to solve the nightmare of modern history by withdrawing into a speculative sphere where eternal certainty lay in wait; as such, it became a symptom, in its solitary, alienated brooding, of the very crisis it sought to overcome.”⁷⁹ Such assertions need some correction. Some of the most

⁷⁷ Swinburne, *Existence of God*, 276. My emphasis.

⁷⁸ Dom Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960), 322. Leclercq’s emphasis.

⁷⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis, 1983), 59; 61.

important work done in religious studies over at least the past fifty years has been produced by individuals coming out of the phenomenological tradition descending from Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. In particular, the work of Emmanuel Levinas,⁸⁰ Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Marion has utterly changed religious studies and reinvigorated phenomenology. Perhaps Eagleton's burial of phenomenology was premature. Furthermore, recent contributions to religious studies by Continental philosophers Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, as well as by John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock of the Radical Orthodoxy movement have made significant recent contributions to the study of religion. As Creston Davis has noted, "If the theological was marginalized in the age of Western secular modernity, it has now returned with a vengeance."⁸¹ It is curious, however, that the work of these thinkers has made so few inroads into the study of early modern English religious writing which has otherwise received so much serious critical attention in recent years.⁸²

Contemporaneous with these intellectual movements has been the rise of a variety of psychoanalysis that has considered religious experience phenomenologically.⁸³ According to this school of thought, mainstream or traditional psychological studies of religious experiences have been "more interested in *fitting* the symptoms [of the experiences] into a diagnosis than in 'understanding' them."⁸⁴ For these studies, the authenticity of the experience is illustrated by the subject's growth in humility and kindness as opposed to the megalomania or anxiety sometimes

⁸⁰ Especially with the publication of *Totality et infini: essai sur l'exteriorite* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1961), first appearing in English in 1969 as *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969)

⁸¹ Creston Davis, "Introduction: Holy Saturday or Resurrection Sunday? Staging an Unlikely Debate" to *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* by Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 3

⁸² An important article in this regard is Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 167 – 90.

⁸³ David M. Wulff, "Mystical Experience," in *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence*, ed. E. Cardeña, S. J. Lynn, and S. Krippner (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2000), 397 – 440.

⁸⁴ Adolfo J. Cangas, Louis A. Sass, and Marino Pérez-Álvarez, "From the Visions of Saint Teresa of Jesus to the Voices of Schizophrenia," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 15, no. 3 (September 2008): 247.

associated with mental illness.⁸⁵ Furthermore, this kind of analysis recognizes that mystical or religious experiences do not “fit within the narrow boundaries of contemporary diagnostic criteria.”⁸⁶ Literary studies could benefit from a similar approach, particularly when the texts concerned treat the encounter with God. A proficiency in diagnosis—whether in a psychological or literary context—is not synonymous with understanding.

Phenomenology, with its attention to the phenomenon itself and its practice of *epoche*, or bracketing of assumptions, allows the phenomenon in question to go through a process of “unfolding” before the observer’s consideration.⁸⁷ In phenomenology, that is, the initial critical act is one of *contemplation*, not in a religious sense, but in the realm of perception and acceptance. The twentieth-century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, himself no stranger to phenomenology, observes that, in biblical studies, hermeneutics and other secondary interpretive technologies have usurped the primacy of the contemplation of the object itself. “Does it not make one suspicious,” writes Balthasar, “when Biblical philology’s first move in its search for an ‘understanding’ of its texts is to dissect their form into sources, psychological motivations, and the sociological effects of the milieu, even before the form has been really contemplated and read for its meaning *as form*?”⁸⁸ I am suspicious, I confess, of critical enterprises in literary studies that turn first to the institutionalized biases of their own discourses and place the text in question into predetermined categories. This is not to say that studies which seek sources, psychological motivations, sociological effects, and other contexts are invalid interpretive modes. Clearly, they

⁸⁵ Daniel A. Helminiak, “Neurology, Psychology, and Extraordinary Religious Experiences,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 14; Rachel Julian, “Spiritual Discernment in Psychiatric Patients,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 126.

⁸⁶ Cangas, et al., “Visions of Saint Teresa of Jesus,” 246.

⁸⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 197.

⁸⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Volume I: Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio, S.J. and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 31. Balthasar’s emphasis.

hold great value in themselves and, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty has observed, for phenomenological studies, “[t]he other’s gaze on things is a second openness.”⁸⁹ But a phenomenological approach, especially when treating works that promise readers access to religious truth, can open the “eventamental” nature of what some religious texts disclose in a way that source studies, psychoanalytic criticism, and historicist approaches do not. Finally, in the pages that follow, what I am interested in is the way that these writers figure the experience of God in their writing. A contemplative approach offers a way to examine that in an honest way. In basing my study of religious works that figure the encounter with God in a methodology grounded in contemplation, I hope to find a “happy congruence of subject-matter and methodology.”⁹⁰

I have elected to present the chapters of this study chronologically. It is not my intention to juxtapose my subjects to one another (with the exception of the Vaughans), but it is interesting, I think, to see the ways in which the approach to God changed—and didn’t change—over a century and a half. I am not writing history, but history is part of the story, even though the manners in which these individuals speak and write of God, as Michel de Certeau has written, “are the product of that drifting operativity that has no domain proper.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 59.

⁹⁰ Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, I, 39.

⁹¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 119.

CHAPTER ONE

JOHN DEE: MYSTICISM, TECHNOLOGY, IDOLATRY

“Paradox, scandal, and aporia are themselves nothing but sacrifice, the exposure of conceptual thinking to its limit, to its death and finitude.”~Jacques Derrida¹

In his study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mysticism, *La Fable Mystique*, Michel de Certeau suggests that mysticism represents “a theory and a pragmatics of *communication*.” The mystical experience, for Certeau, is at the same time both a religious experience and a science of language. “*Mystics*,” he writes, “is the anti-Babel, the quest for a common speech after its breakdown, the invention of a language ‘of God’ or ‘of the angels’ that would compensate for the dispersal of human languages.”² Viewed from this perspective, then, the Elizabethan scientist John Dee’s “conversations with angels” were a variety of mystical experience *par excellence*. Indeed, a large part of Dee’s exchanges in what he called “Actions” with spirits involved recording just such a language, and the amount of information the spirits dictated to him, filling several substantial volumes in manuscript, is staggering.³ We have sufficient warrant, therefore, to at least consider Dee’s angelic transactions initially under the term “mysticism.”

Despite this warrant, however, Dee scholarship has in the main failed to address his work and thought in the light of religion, let alone mysticism. It would seem that a discourse so preoccupied with angels, apocalypse, “the will of God,” prophecy, and the language of Adam would have drawn the attention of scholars to religious questions in Dee, but this has not been the case. Nevertheless, Dee’s relationships to early modern religion and science—and the tension

¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (2nd ed.) and *Literature in Secret*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 69.

² Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 157. Emphasis in text. Certeau typically uses the term “mystics” for what most scholars would call “mysticism.”

³ The spirits dictated several “books” to Dee, mostly consisting of numeric or alphabetical tables related to the Enochian language they professed to be transmitting to him. They are usually named *De heptarchia mystica*, *Liber Logaeth*, *Book of Enoch*, and *48 Claves angelicae*.

between early modern religious and scientific discourses—manifested in a singular type of religious experience. Clearly, the time for considering Dee in the light of his own unique religious sensibilities is long overdue.

Dee's religious experiences, however, alloyed as they are of a variety of sources and techniques, complicate conventional notions of mysticism. He appropriates elements of magic, science, biblical exegesis, and linguistics in an effort to gain access to a rarefied level of *gnosis* that previously had been privy, he thought, only to angels and apostles, patriarchs and prophets. On the one side of his spiritual research stand elements of traditional Christian religion— theology, mysticism, apocalypticism. On the other stand magic and natural science—Agrippa⁴ and Ficino,⁵ Gemma Frisius⁶ and Robert Grosseteste.⁷ Because of his freedom from the Catholic tradition of spiritual direction and due to his habit of Renaissance syncretism, Dee's forays into the realm of communication with God were characterized not only by creativity and innovation but also by possibilities of danger: political and religious as well as psychological and spiritual.⁸ Of all these he was well aware.

⁴ Henry Cornelius Agrippa (1486 – 1535) was a German philosopher and occultist. His *De occulta philosophia libri tres* (Book 1, Paris, 1531; Books 1 – 3, Cologne, 1533) was the most popular magical text of the age.

⁵ Marsilio Ficino (1433 – 1499) was one of the most important humanists of the Florentine Renaissance. His contributions to the development of thought and culture during the period cannot be underestimated. He translated Plato, Trismegistus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus from the Greek into the Latin in addition to his writing own philosophical works. He worked under the patronage of both Cosimo and Lorenzo de 'Medici and among his students were Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Michelangelo Buonarroti. Among his extracurricular interests were astrology and magic.

⁶ Frisius (1508 – 1555) was a mathematician, cartographer, physician, and philosopher. William Sherman speculates that he and Dee became friends in Louvain. See William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*, Massachusetts Studies in Early Modern Culture (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 5.

⁷ The priest, theologian, and scientist Grosseteste (c.1168 – 1253) is regarded as one of the pillars of the English scientific tradition. See A. C. Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science, 1100 – 1700* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1958).

⁸ For the years 1582 – 1587, while he and Kelly were sojourning on the Continent, Dee was at least nominally "Catholic," even to the point of having a Capuchin confessor. See Peter French, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (1972; repr., New York: Dorset Press, 1989), 121. Whatever the case, Dee was not very interested in spiritual advice.

Mysticism—and, indeed, the fundamentally aporetic nature of speaking about God—has of course been given fresh consideration in deconstruction and phenomenology under Levinas, Derrida, Marion, and Heidegger among others. When examined phenomenologically, mysticism can be understood as a kind of illuminated state of *différance*, where the need to know is bracketed and the mystical experience is accepted as-it-is. The mysticism of Teresa of Avila,⁹ Jacob Boehme,¹⁰ Julian of Norwich,¹¹ Meister Eckhart,¹² and Marguerite Porete,¹³ for instance—though they are all very different as mystics—is characterized by this acceptance of the phenomenon, this acceptance of the event.

Dee's mysticism, however, does not betray this kind of acceptance. György Szönyi has argued that Dee's undertakings with the spirits were "entirely pious" and that the Doctor was attempting to achieve "union with God."¹⁴ But the evidence does not support such a hypothesis. Dee's project was grounded in the assumption that human beings could be directly inspired by God, a feature, certainly, of Reformation theology but characteristic of Christian mystical

⁹ Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582) was an influential Spanish mystic, nun, and founder of the Discalced Carmelites.

¹⁰ The cobbler Jacob Boehme (1575 – 1624), a Lutheran, broke new mystical ground in post-Reformation Germany. His mysticism is highly original and influenced a generation of English mystics in the late seventeenth century, particularly Henry and Thomas Vaughan, John Pordage, Jane Lead, and the Philadelphian Society. See chapters four and five.

¹¹ Bernard McGinn calls Julian (c.1342 – c. 1416) "the great original among the English mystics." [Bernard McGinn, "The English Mystics," *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 202]. She lived in an anchorage near St. Julian's Church, Norwich. We do not know her name; the nomination "Julian" is merely an associative connecting her to the church at Norwich. Her mystical experience took place over one day during an illness and is related in her writings. Her account of the experience was first published by Serenus Cressy in an edition prepared by the Benedictine nuns of Paris and Cambrai as *XVI. Revelations of Divine Love Shewed to a Devout Servant of our Lord, Called Mother Juliana, an Anchorete of Norwich who lived in the days of King Edward the Third*. (London, 1670). See also the modern edition, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Georgia Ronan Crampton (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications-TEAMS, 1994).

¹² Eckhart (c.1260 – c. 1327) was a German Dominican and his mysticism has much in common with Beguine spirituality. It is extraordinarily positive, emphasizing the need to completely rely on God. He was suspected of holding heretical opinions and put on trial. He died before a verdict was reached.

¹³ The Beguine mystic Marguerite Porete (d. 1310) wrote *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, a treatise emphasizing complete abandonment to the love of God. The book was thought to be heretical and she, like Eckhart, was put on trial. She was eventually found guilty and burned at the stake. Her work, however, was not long after her death translated into Middle English (as well as Latin a little later) and read in Carthusian monasteries in England. See Margaret [Marguerite] Porete, *The Mirrour of Simple Souls in Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà* 5 (1968).

¹⁴ György Szönyi, *John Dee's Occultism: Magical Exultation through Powerful Signs*, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 270.

thought long before Luther and Calvin. However, Dee's dedication to a religious eclecticism and his ethos of scientific inquiry, not the desire for union with God, were the impetus behind his experiments in an innovative and syncretic mysticism. What is particular to Dee is the way in which he turned (or tried to turn) the idea of the indwelling God into the central feature of a unified theory of knowledge including theology, science, and linguistics and then attempted to introduce the results of his esoteric research into the volatile political environment that was late-sixteenth-century Europe. Furthermore, his attempts to translate this ambitious undertaking into patronage necessarily complicated an already convoluted project. In Dee's spiritual improvisations all of these factors combined in making mysticism, an already unwieldy phenomenon, even more unstable. His project ultimately failed: as prophecy, as metalanguage, as revelation, as grab for patronage, and as encounter with the divine. It failed, primarily, because Dee fell prey to inflation, a kind of spiritual megalomania, and became enamored of the supposed "success" for which his Actions gave him evidence.

In this chapter, I will read Dee's project in terms of what Jean-Luc Marion has called "the idol." Marion describes the idol as an image or idea that "acts as a mirror, not as a portrait: a mirror that reflects the gaze's image, or more exactly, the image of its aim and the scope of that aim."¹⁵ For Marion, the success of the idol-as-mirror lies in the fact that "the idol itself remains an invisible mirror." Unlike the icon, which opens the gaze to divine mystery, the idol fixes the gaze and returns to the viewer his or her own desires, and, ultimately, "consigns the divine to the measure of a human gaze."¹⁶ Dee's desires pre-mediated the "success" of the Actions. That is, ultimately, Dee's spiritual project discloses a simulacrum of mysticism, a mysticism of idols.

¹⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, Religion and Postmodernism, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

“Testimonies of my studious lyfe, in and from the most famous places and parties of all Christendome”¹⁷

Before he began talking with angels, Dee (1527 – 1608) was by most accounts the most important British scientist of the Elizabethan era. His intellectual interests included mathematics, geometry, navigation, genealogy, as well as the more arcane disciplines of astrology and alchemy with which he is typically associated. He was an important intellectual presence and connected to some of the most powerful individuals of sixteenth century Europe: Emperor Maximilian II (to whom Dee dedicated his *Monas Hieroglyphica* in 1564); Maximilian’s son and successor, Rudolf II; and King Stephen Báthory of Poland, in addition to Elizabeth I and a host of nobles on both sides of the English Channel. Dee’s near contemporary, the astrologer William Lilly, described Dee as “a ready witted man, quick of apprehension, very learned, and of great judgment in the Latin and Greek tongues. He was a very great investigator of the more secret Hermetical learning, a perfect astronomer, a curious astrologer, a serious geometrician; to speak truth, he was excellent in all kinds of learning.”¹⁸ So broad were Dee’s intellectual interests that one recent critic has hailed Dee as “the first English think tank.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, after the early seventeenth, only in the later decades of the twentieth century did scholars begin to take Dee seriously as a figure of any consequence. The main reason for Dee’s fall from historical grace can be attributed to the combined cultural and critical reaction to his involvement in the Actions, a project which took place over the course of some twenty-six years.

Though some of his contemporaries were fully aware of Dee’s involvement in the Actions, it did not tarnish his intellectual reputation. In fact, it was precisely this facet of his

¹⁷ John Dee, *The Compendious Rehearsal in Remains Historical and Literary Connected with the Palatine Counties of Lancaster and Chester* by the Chetham Society, vol. 24, ed. James Crossley (Manchester, UK: Chetham Society, 1851), 4.

¹⁸ William Lilly, *William Lilly’s History of His Life and Times, from the Year 1602 to 1681...* (1715; repr., London: Charles Baldwin, 1822), 224.

¹⁹ William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), xiii.

research that drew the attention of the Polish prince Albert Lasky, the Bohemian nobleman Vilém of Rožmberk, the Italian enthusiast Francesco Pucci, and even Rudolf II. Indeed, awareness of Dee's extraordinary doings was common enough knowledge for Ben Jonson to insert a pair of colorful references to them in *The Alchemist* (1610).²⁰ Nevertheless, with Meric Casaubon's 1659 publication of *A True and Faithful Relation of what passed for many years between Dr. John Dee and some Spirits*, Dee's record of the Actions taking place between 1583 and 1587,²¹ the scientist's activities were brought to a wider audience. The Interregnum's religiopolitical climate proved particularly unsettled, and, with the lax enforcement of the Licensing Act of 1643²² and the attention of authority and censors turned to more pressing matters, it was much easier then than at other times to publish works of an occult nature.²³ Starting with Casaubon, the master narrative surrounding Dee was one of a great thinker brought to his fall through deception and delusion, a critical stance that has pervaded Dee studies ever since, though the source of his delusion is the cause of debate.

For Casaubon, the source of Dee's delusion lay in the Actions themselves. Despite his respect for Dee as a sincerely religious individual and as a decent man, Casaubon's claim is that Dee and his medium Edward Kelly were playing with diabolical fire and that evil spirits deluded both of them. The fact that the spirits seem to have coerced Dee and Kelley into a kind of early modern occult wife-swapping, or "cross-matching" as they called it, did much to convince Casaubon that this judgment was sound. This is not to say that he thought Dee delusional. On the

²⁰ Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). At 2.6.20 and 4.1.85 – 91.

²¹ *A True and Faithful Relation...* (1659). Casaubon does, however, include several Actions that took place in 1607 when Dee was eighty.

²² Randy Robertson, *Censorship and Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England: The Subtle Art of Division* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2009), 106.

²³ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 17. See also John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Johnson, and Shakespeare* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 141.

contrary. “All I understand by *Reality*,” he writes, “is, that what things appeared, they did so appear by the power and operation of Spirits, actually present and working, and were not the effects of a depraved fancy and imagination by meer natural causes.”²⁴ Casaubon published *A True and Faithful Relation* as a way to combat what he saw as, on the one hand, the rampant and unchecked enthusiasm of the religious milieu of the Interregnum, typified in Ranters and Quakers among others, and, on the other, the increasing psychological and scientific materialism that explained such phenomena as Dee’s spirits in terms of mental illness. This ideological territory was familiar to Casaubon, who had published *A Treatise concerning Enthusiasme* in 1655. The minutes of Dee’s spiritual transactions were not merely of antiquarian interest in the mid-seventeenth century, but of cultural moment and, as Joad Raymond remarks, “spoke to numerous 1650s concerns.”²⁵

Eighteenth and nineteenth century commentators usually condemned Kelly as the source of Dee’s alleged delusion. They followed the template of Dee as compromised intellectual first set by Casaubon and followed in the first biographical treatment of Dee, Thomas Smith’s *Vita Joannis Dee* (1707),²⁶ but directed the blame not to demonic but to a more flesh and blood origin. Isaac D’Israeli, for his part, alleged that Kelly used the techniques of ventriloquism in order to deceive Dee, evidence for which he thought “may be easily recognised.”²⁷ The critical tendency to find a physical source of the material transmitted in the Actions has in the interim proved resilient.

²⁴ Meric Casaubon, “The Preface” to *A True and Faithful Relation*, D2^v. Hereafter *TFR*, in-text.

²⁵ Joad Raymond, *Milton’s Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 113.

²⁶ This was included in Smith’s *Vitae quorundam eruditissimorum et illustrium vivorum* (London, 1707) and was later translated by William A. Ayton and published as *The Life of John Dee* (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1908).

²⁷ Isaac D’Israeli, *Amenities of Literature, Consisting of Sketches and Characters of English Literature*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (New York: J. & H. G. Langley, 1841), 306. Likewise (as part of his attack on the spiritualism and rage for séances then current in 1860 London), Charles Dickens ridiculed both Dee and Kelly as delusional. See Charles Dickens, *All the Year Round, a Weekly Journal*, vol. 3 (London, 1860), 371.

The critical habit of reading Dee's conversations with spirits as the product of mental illness or delusion continued well into the twentieth century.²⁸ Paul H. Kocher, for instance, calls *A True and Faithful Relation* evidence of "[t]he pathetic details of a fine intellect wasted."²⁹ Keith Thomas dismissed early modern prophets such as Dee, saying of them that it is "not enough to describe such men as lunatics."³⁰ Furthermore, like Dee's early twentieth century biographer Charlotte Fell Smith, Frances Yates believed Kelly "deluded his pious master,"³¹ a description that has become a commonplace followed by Wayne Shumaker³² among others.

Christopher Whitby, though he disavows the delusion hypothesis, does suggest that the appearance of spirits in the shewstone was due to Kelly's suffering "distemper of the brain," finding as evidence the symptoms of Kelly's cataloged pains and headaches experienced after or during various Actions.³³ The Actions provide abundant conjectural evidence for supporting Whitby's hypothesis. Throughout the long period of time for which we have records of the Actions, Kelly is routinely afflicted with pains and also plagued by doubts about the origins and veracity of the spirits. At the very least, Kelly was uncommonly sensitive.

²⁸ The Theosophist Annie Besant was perhaps Dee's lone defender in the early twentieth century: "He was," she wrote, "by confession of his enemies, a man of noble life and gentle manners, just and wise; the only thing alleged against his outside 'sorcery,' is an immoral relation, commanded by the 'spirits' and strenuously refused by him until, at last, he yielded, believing it to be divinely commanded. John Dee may fairly be regarded as one of the wise of the past, living amid a superstitious and bigoted generation, and hated because he was ahead of his contemporaries. Posterity will do him justice." Annie Besant, Review of Thomas Smith's *The Life of John Dee*, trans. William A. Ayton in *The Theosophist* 30, no. 1 – 6 (December 1908): 281.

²⁹ Paul H. Kocher, "The Old Cosmos: A Study in Elizabethan Science and Religion," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (February 1952): 112.

³⁰ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Belief in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 149.

³¹ Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (repr. 1964; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 149. Charlotte Fell Smith, *John Dee: 1527 – 1608* (London: Constable and Company, 1909). Fell Smith evinces a particular contempt for Kelly throughout her book. See in particular chapter 10.

³² Wayne Shumaker, *Renaissance Curiosa: John Dee's Conversations with Angels; Girolamo Cardano's Horoscope of Christ; Johannes Trithemius and Cryptography; George Dalgarno's Universal Language* (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), 25 – 50.

³³ Christopher Whitby, *John Dee's Actions with Spirits: 22 December 1581 to 23 May 1583*, 2 vol. (New York: Garland, 1988), 1: 111.

Dee's rehabilitation began under Frances Yates and the school of criticism centered at the University of London's Warburg Institute. Yates' study of Dee and of the significance of Renaissance magic began in 1964 with the publication of *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* and continued with a series of influential texts through the end of the 1970s. In short, Yates argues that John Dee was a Renaissance magus, a harbinger of the Enlightenment commitment to scientific inquiry and scholarly debate as well as a religious reformer and peacemaker. For Yates, Dee is Prospero (or, rather, Prospero is Dee), a kindly white magician and humanist mistreated and misunderstood by the politics of both history and the academy.³⁴ Yates and her colleagues at the Warburg, I. R. F. Calder and D. P. Walker, influenced a generation of scholars, including Peter French whose *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* was the first full-fledged examination of Dee from this perspective. Though the "Yates thesis" has rightly been called into question, it is largely thanks to her work that scholars have given Dee a much deserved second look.

In recent decades other critical approaches to Dee have emerged alongside and in response to that of the Warburg school. György Szőnyi, in *John Dee's Occultism: Magical Exultation through Powerful Signs*, tries to extend the Yates thesis's implications into a consideration of Renaissance magic in general as representing "an integral and alternative system of thought" separate from the history of science paradigm into which Dee is usually placed.³⁵ Stephen Clucas, like Szőnyi, tries to further the insights of the Yates thesis and examines Dee through the lens of intellectual history, exploring more deeply the importance of medieval occult

³⁴ Yates sincerely believes that Shakespeare modeled his great magician on Dee. See her *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (1979; repr., London: Routledge, 2001), 188.

³⁵ Szőnyi, *John Dee's Occultism*, 277.

traditions to Dee's thought.³⁶ Nicholas H. Clulee, on the other hand, while obviously taking his start from it, pushes against the Yates thesis and its adherents in *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (1988) in order to place John Dee in the Aristotelian as opposed to the Hermetic-Neoplatonic intellectual tradition. Finally, Håkan Håkansson's *Seeing the Word: John Dee and Renaissance Occultism* (2001) embeds the assumptions of the Warburg school in a study of Dee's relationship to language and metalanguage in the early modern period.

In a bold challenge to the Yates thesis, William H. Sherman has downplayed Dee the magus in favor of Dee the scientist and academic. Sherman's New Historicist take on Dee concentrates on Dee's professional, public career and on his writings on non-occult subjects which, Sherman argues, "cast serious doubts on the packaging of Dee as—exclusively or even primarily—a Hermetic, Neoplatonic magus."³⁷ Sherman celebrates Dee as an academic researcher divorced from the religious or spiritual contexts of the early modern period as well as from contemporary Dee criticism. In this important study, he tells the story of a Dee often neglected, but he also neglects much of who Dee was in order to do so.

Finally, Deborah E. Harkness' study of Dee's spirit Actions, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature*, strives to give a complete picture of the Actions as a part of a consistent whole. For Harkness, the Actions prove the logical, but by no means inevitable, outgrowth of Dee's work and interests over the course of his career. The Actions, in her opinion, contributed to Dee's unified theory of natural science, metaphysics, theology, and cosmology. "Dee's last universal science," she writes, "his angel conversations, was thus more than an attempt to provide a unified basis for natural philosophy. It sought to

³⁶ Stephen Clucas, "John Dee's Angelic Conversations and the *Ars Notoria*: Renaissance Magic and Medieval Theurgy," *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 2006): 23 – 37.

³⁷ Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing*, xii.

unify and make coherent all religious beliefs, natural knowledge, and ancient theory.”³⁸ Harkness, obviously in the lineage of Yates, recognizes in the scientist an admirable combination of scholarly integrity, scientific innovation, and religious moderation marred by an appalling lack of gratitude and appreciation on the part of rulers and patrons. Dee becomes, then, the emblematic scholar.

Scholars tend to avoid questions considering the degree to which Dee’s mystical experiences can be interpreted as “real.” Yates sidesteps the issue, probably as it did not fit in well with her magico-scientific thesis, paying attention instead to depicting Casaubon’s publication of *A True and Faithful Relation* as part of an anti-Dee smear campaign.³⁹ Christopher Whitby and Deborah Harkness are nearly the only critics to have faced the question head-on, but even then with trepidation. Whitby does not believe that Dee faked the Actions or that Kelly or Dee’s other scryers were conscious frauds, pointing to the complexity and vast amount of the information compiled as too much for even the cleverest scryer to have extemporized.⁴⁰ Harkness, on the other hand, is well aware of the anxieties the Actions have created for scholars. “Avoiding the angels’ importance to Dee’s inquiries into the natural world,” she writes, “has become a historiographic tradition.”⁴¹ What is important to Harkness is that *Dee* felt he was communicating with spiritual beings and “had an arsenal of authorities to support him.”⁴² As Brad S. Gregory has written, “If the living God was real and could reveal himself to human beings, as all early modern Christians believed, it seemed rash—and, indeed, would have been

³⁸ Deborah E. Harkness, *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 133.

³⁹ Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (1972; repr., Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1978), 188.

⁴⁰ Christopher Whitby, *John Dee’s Actions with Spirits*, 1:109 – 11.

⁴¹ Deborah E. Harkness, “Shows in the Showstone: A Theater of Alchemy and Apocalypse in the Angel Conversations of John Dee (1527 – 1608/9), *Renaissance Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 712.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 720.

metaphysically absurd—to insist that he could *not* do so, dramatically and decisively, in sixteenth-century Europe just as he had in ancient Israel.”⁴³

But such an approach fails to take Dee seriously, silently privileging, as it does, assumptions about the (im)possibility of communication with spiritual beings and the accompanying dismissal of those who claim them as mentally ill. Andrew Sofer has argued for a suspension of “new historicist skepticism in favor of historical phenomenology” when it comes to the question of whether or not such events may have been “real,”⁴⁴ and Kristen Poole holds that when we examine early modern reports of supernatural phenomena “[t]he distinction between the psychological and the physical, or between the physical and the spiritual, or between the metaphorical and the literal ceases to hold.”⁴⁵ It is best, I think, that we accept the phenomena of the Actions as they are, to return “to the things themselves,” as Husserl would argue,⁴⁶ in order to gain new insights into material that has been too easily dismissed from the serious consideration of early modern scholarship, particularly in terms of religion.

Clearly, then, Dee scholarship has fallen into two camps: 1) that which, particularly in older criticism, identifies his conversations with spirits as quaint expressions of mental illness or delusion, compromising an otherwise admirable intellect; and 2) that which, as seen in more recent criticism, recognizes in him a proto-Enlightenment desire to achieve a unified field of knowledge, and identifies in him a praiseworthy intellectual pioneer, a hallmark of scholarly integrity and dedication. In order to come to terms with Dee’s religious thought, though, both of

⁴³ Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 2012), 102.

⁴⁴ Andrew Sofer, “How to Do Things with Demons: Conjuring Performatives in *Doctor Faustus*,” *Theatre Journal* 61, no. 1 (March 2009): 2.

⁴⁵ Kristen Poole, “The Devil’s in the Archive: *Doctor Faustus* and Ovidian Physics,” *Renaissance Drama* 35 (2006): 210.

⁴⁶ As Dermot Moran explains, “By going back to the things themselves, Husserl means that we cannot be satisfied with employing concepts whose evidential basis has not been properly clarified by being brought back to their original sources in intuition.” See Dermot Moran, *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 98.

these approaches are inadequate. It is precisely in the face of those aspects of early modern culture that evoke unease in us that we should avoid the tendency to respond from the position of post-Freud, post-religion, postmodern privilege. In fact, it seems more likely that this feeling of unease indicates to us a source of vital critical energy. As Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti have argued, “we should not take a smugly rational stance in approaching the religious culture(s) of an earlier era...but rather respond deeply to the interplay of defamiliarizing experiences and familiar knowledge.”⁴⁷ Dee’s religious thought provides fertile ground for responding to such an interplay.

Dee as Religious Thinker

It is worth noting that Dee’s very impressive library of over 4,000 print and manuscript volumes, in addition to copious amounts of scientific works, was rich in mystical and occult texts.⁴⁸ The authors most represented in Dee’s library, for example, are Raymond Lull and Paracelsus.⁴⁹ Dee seems to have had only a passing interest in medieval theology, but a serious one in medieval mysticism. His copy of Dionysius the Areopagite’s *Opera*,⁵⁰ for instance, is filled with his own marginalia.⁵¹ But, surprisingly for a scholar so interested in solving his age’s religious problems, only a smattering of doctrinal or theological treatises of a Reformation or

⁴⁷ Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies,” *Criticism* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 182.

⁴⁸ French, *John Dee: Elizabethan Magus*, 59.

⁴⁹ Julian Roberts and Andrew G. Watson, eds., *John Dee’s Library Catalogue* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1990).

⁵⁰ The fifteenth century’s most complete Dionysius, *Opera omnia, quintuplici translatione versa et commentariis Dionysii*, is a deluxe edition including the commentary of Dennis the Carthusian (1402 – 1471) as well as the *Encomium* to Dionysius by the Byzantine theologian Michael Syncellus (9th century). It was published at Cologne in 1556. Dionysius, who is suspected to have been a Syrian monk from the fifth century, had a great impact on medieval mysticism in general and on the great flowering of English mysticism in the fourteenth century in particular. He inspired the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who translated Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology* as *Dionise Hid Diuinite*. See *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Patrick J. Gallacher (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications-TEAMS, 1997). See also *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

⁵¹ Szönyi, *John Dee’s Occultism*, 69; Harkness, *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels*, 113.

Counter-Reformation tenor can be found in his catalogue. In comparison with other significant libraries of the period, Dee's theological collection has rightly been called "relatively negligible."⁵² John Calvin, for instance, is only represented by his book against astrology, *Admonitio adversus astrologiam, quam Judiciariam vocant* (1549), while Luther and Erasmus are each represented by a handful of texts. John Bale, Theodore Beza, William Fulke, and Thomas Norton also appear in single volumes. Roberts and Watson have argued that "[i]f his books are any guide, the religious disputes of the generation before his own left him unmoved,"⁵³ though this observation needs some correction. Dee was obviously sensitive to the religious tensions of the age, but he sought to transcend them rather than descend into the endless toil of religious debate. This is one reason why he looked for a direct contact with the divine through the Actions.

As is the case with so many figures of the age, trying to locate Dee as either a Protestant or a Catholic is an intellectual dead-end. As some have argued, such confessional distinctions in the early modern period—and particularly in the sixteenth century—were very often announcements of political allegiance rather than statements of belief.⁵⁴ This is not to dismiss some of the real theological and doctrinal issues at stake. Nevertheless, there is no denying that while the Reformation began in theological debate, it ended—following the Thirty Years War—in a new political paradigm.

In the ever-changing and decidedly unstable religiopolitical environment of sixteenth-century England, Dee showed himself to be remarkably adept at adjusting his religious

⁵² Roberts and Watson, *Catalogue*, 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁴ William J. Bouwsma, *The Waning of the Renaissance, 1550 – 1640* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 7.

affiliations in a way that they might “prudently respond to changing rhetorical circumstances.”⁵⁵ For instance, in the first edition of *Acts and Monuments* (1563), his massive catalogue of Protestant hagiography and anti-Catholic propaganda, John Foxe sought to discredit Dee as a Catholic priest, “young in divinity,” cooperating with Mary Tudor’s government, though the scientist does not appear by name in the second edition. It may be that Dee’s connections to Elizabeth I and her moderate Protestant government persuaded Foxe to modify his attack.⁵⁶

In mid-career, Dee’s religious allegiances continued to prove fluid. As he, Kelly, and their families traversed from country to country on the Continent in search of patronage, their religious allegiances changed with the landscape. When in Protestant countries, they held to Protestant forms of worship; when in Catholic countries, they participated in Catholic religious observances, even to the point of receiving Communion.⁵⁷ At one point, Dee writes in his diary about his “unspeakable gladness and contentation” at finding Kelly had received the Sacrament in the Catholic Church, “a thing so long and earnestly required and urged of him by our spiritual good friends, as may appear by sundry former Actions.”⁵⁸ The spirits’ ostensible ecumenism apparently agreed with Dee’s own—which he would have interpreted as another reason to trust in their guidance.

Some scholars have looked to Dee’s method of prayer as a way to locate his confessional partisanship. Harkness labels Dee’s prayer as “Protestant,” her rationale being that he did not appeal to saints or angels in his utterances but directly to God.⁵⁹ Nicholas Clulee likewise locates

⁵⁵ Gregory Kneidel, *Rethinking the Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Literature: The Poetics of All Believers* (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008), 75.

⁵⁶ See Benjamin Wooley, *The Queen’s Conjurer: The Science and Magic of Dr. John Dee, Adviser to Queen Elizabeth* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 45; 55.

⁵⁷ French, *John Dee: Elizabethan Magus*, 121.

⁵⁸ 22 April 1585. *The Diaries of John Dee*, ed. Edward Fenton (Charbury, UK: Day Books, 1998), 178.

⁵⁹ Harkness, *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels*, 125.

Dee as a Protestant dependent on the grace of God and special election.⁶⁰ They both, however, miss the irony of the Doctor's praying to God for intercessory angels who might aid him in his scientific work. Calvin or Luther would probably not have approved. It is true, though, that the rhetoric of magic often engages in theological/religious mimesis; but magicians do not have religious or theological aims. Rather, their intention is toward achieving power, or knowledge, or both. This is another way in which Dee further obscures the already obscure line between mysticism and magic.

Dee's overemphasis on prayer in the Actions was a way for him to legitimize what he was doing—in his own eyes as well as in those of anyone who might get wind of what he was up to. Dee knew his activities with spirits placed him on the margins of religious orthodoxy and secular law. Though it is the custom to associate Dee's use of scrying,⁶¹ a form of crystal-gazing, with his scientific interest in the physics and metaphysics of light in the tradition of Gemma Frisius and Robert Grosseteste,⁶² it was prohibited by statute from at least 1541.⁶³ Whitby notes that those practicing magic from the medieval age through to the early modern period “tried to hide from themselves that their magic was really daemonic.”⁶⁴ For example, “An Oration to be said, when the Vesture is put on” found in Peter de Abano's *Heptameron* (included in the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* attributed to Agrippa) has an aura of orthodox-sounding rhetoric: “Ancor, Amicor, Amides, Theodonias, Anitor, by the merits of the Angels, O Lord, I will put on the garment of Salvation, that this which I desire I may bring to effect: through thee the most

⁶⁰ Nicholas H. Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1988), 208.

⁶¹ “Scrying” is the early modern term used for the variety of crystal-gazing Dee preferred. *The Oxford English Dictionary* identifies this as the earliest instance of the word (1587), though the text was not published until 1659.

⁶² Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 118 – 19.

⁶³ Christopher Whitby, “John Dee and Renaissance Scrying,” *Bulletin of the Society of Renaissance Studies* 3, no. 2 (1985): 29 – 30.

⁶⁴ Whitby, *John Dee's Actions with Spirits*, 1: 70.

holy Adonay, whose kingdom endureth forever and ever. Amen.”⁶⁵ Dee, of course, owned this book in the Latin edition published at Lyon in 1550, and he had Kelly employ a very similar invocation at the commencement of their first session—which the spirit calling itself Michael summarily told them to dispense with in the future.⁶⁶ While critics may have a point in saying that separating the threads of discourse between what belongs to orthodox religion, what to occultism, and what to natural science is not always simple,⁶⁷ Teresa of Avila or Robert Boyle, no doubt, would have been able to tell the difference from their interpretive standpoints.

Dee’s religious affiliations proved eclectic as well as ecumenical, and his theology was similarly uncompromised by the parameters of ostensibly Catholic or Protestant religious ideology. Indeed, his theology went beyond simple Erasmian irenicism and attained a surprising mutability between Protestant/Catholic, orthodox/heterodox modes of religious inquiry, though it would be a mistake to interpret this propensity in any way as an anticipation of the alleged Anglican *via media*. As is clearly evident in the Actions, Dee believed that the human individual could indeed have access to God, at the very least through his angelic intermediaries. Such a notion, certainly, exists in Protestant ideas of access to God unmediated by priests and bishops, but it also resides in the long tradition of pre-Reformation, Christian mysticism, which often brought individual mystics into conflict with Church authority. But Dee’s mysticism is different from the traditional Catholic forms of mysticism familiar in the early modern period as well as from Protestant notions of the indwelling of God. Keeping with his eclectic and free-form theological aesthetic, Dee also appropriated elements of natural science, humanist linguistics,

⁶⁵ Henry Cornelius Agrippa his Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy. Of Geomancie. Magical Elements of Peter de Abano. Astronomical Geomancie. The Nature of Spirits. Arbatel of Magic. The Species of several Kindes of Magick, trans. Robert Turner (London, 1665), 76.

⁶⁶ John Dee’s Five Books of Mystery: Original Sourcebook of Enochian Magic, from the Collected Works Known as *Mysteriorum Libri Quinque*, ed. Joseph H. Peterson (Boston: Weiser Books, 2003), 66 – 68. Hereafter *FBM* in-text.

⁶⁷ Harkness, *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels*, 117.

mathematics, astrology, alchemy, and medieval magical traditions into his mysticism. As a scholar he did not fear (as some did) any of these elements of early modern culture, a fear he would have considered superstitious. Rather, he saw religious, scientific, and occult technologies as tools for accessing the mind of God, and he was more than eager to employ them, preferably all at once.

Another aspect of Dee's theology that obscures Protestant-Catholic lines of distinction resides in his belief in angels and that at least some of the spirits with which he was in contact were themselves of divine origin. As Alexandra Walsham has argued, early modern Protestantism, especially that of the sixteenth century, exhibited an obvious anxiety about angels and their availability to appear to those in the flesh, and she wonders whether this anxiety might not have been a product of Protestantism's "profound distrust of the eye as a medium of divine communication and spiritual insight."⁶⁸ The Counter-Reformation, not surprisingly, took up arms against this Protestant position and asserted a more defiant angelology, reaffirming the visible presence of angels in regards to their depiction in works of art as well.⁶⁹ As with all other avenues of inquiry available to him, Dee held to neither dogma nor pious opinion but relied on his own reason—and his own reasons. Scripture, which by many examples affirms that angels have appeared to humans, would have provided ample warrant to Dee that angels might well appear to him.

It is worth noting that, despite their descriptions of Dee's method of prayer and religious orientation as "Protestant," neither Harkness nor Clulee has anything to say about the very real idolatry—in an early modern Protestant sense—inherent in the Actions. Calvin argues in *The*

⁶⁸ Alexandra Walsham, "Invisible Helpers: Angelic Intervention in Post-Reformation England," *Past and Present* 208 (August 2010): 83.

⁶⁹ Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham, "Migrations of Angels in the Early Modern World," in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. Marshall and Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

Institutes of the Christian Religion that the creation of images is something intrinsic to fallen human nature, saying, “we may infer that, the human mind is, so to speak, a veritable forge of idols.”⁷⁰ Such an act of creation appears to be intrinsic to Dee’s Actions. More radical Protestants would have bristled at the thought of angels appearing in imaginative, let alone physical, form. Dee, armed with the Neoplatonic theurgical tradition of Iamblichus by way of Ficino and Agrippa, had no problem assimilating such a concept into his mystical practice.⁷¹

Dee’s mystical tendencies are clearly evident in his first publication, *Propædeumata Aphoristica*, published at London in 1558 and dedicated to his colleague, the cartographer Gerard Mercator. Interestingly, Dee did not dedicate the work to a potential patron, though by associating his name with a Continental scientist of such high reputation, the twenty-nine-year-old Dee was undoubtedly hoping for international intellectual notice. This short treatise is comprised of pithy aphorisms that vacillate between gnomic religious statements, “scientific” meditations on the movements of the planets, and speculations on magic and astrology. As Håkansson argues, Dee’s aphorisms betray “a syncretistic compound of different notions, many of them stemming from wildly different philosophical traditions.”⁷² This was certainly Dee’s preferred methodology.

The first two aphorisms affirm the character of the work as grounded in a deeply mystical understanding of world processes:

I. Vt Deus, ex Nihilo, contra rationis & Natuaræ leges cuncta creauit: ita in nihilum abire, rerum creatarum aliqua nunquam potest, nisi contra rationis naturæque leges, per Supranaturalem Dei potentiam fiat.

⁷⁰ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1.11.8 (page 55).

⁷¹ Iamblichus (c. 245 – c. 325, AD) was Neoplatonist philosopher. His book *On the Mysteries* presented a philosophical framework for magic and theurgy. Several editions of the work appeared in the sixteenth century, notably that published in Rome “*Cum priuilegio Sūmi Pontificis*” in 1556. See Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis Ægyptiorum* (Romae, 1556).

⁷² Håkan Håkansson, *Seeing the Word: John Dee and Renaissance Occultism* (Ugglan, SE: Minervaserien, 2001), 288.

II. Mirabiles ergo rerum naturalium Metamorphoses fieri à nobis, in rei veritate possent, si artificiosè naturam vrgeremus.⁷³

Dee's aphorisms uphold the notion that mortals are unable to know God's mind while simultaneously asserting the human individual's ability to nevertheless be able to know the secret of metamorphosis—in imitation of divinity—and to urge it onto nature through art.

In addition to offering his readers a peek into his understanding of mystical speculation in the service of science, Dee's *Propædeumata Aphoristica* also reveals what was at the time the young scientist's primary meditative symbol. The work's title page foregrounds a figure seemingly combined from several astrological glyphs centered around the traditional astrological and alchemical symbol for Mercury. This image figures prominently in Dee's work, and he developed a lengthy consideration of its import in 1564's *Monas Hieroglyphica*.

Dee was enamored of the Monas symbol, and for it he claimed an ontological precedence even over the astrological glyphs (“*Astronomicos Vulgares Planetarum Characteres*”⁷⁴) of which it is comprised. Dee had a lofty goal in mind with his symbol, and an even loftier opinion of it, believing that the Holy Trinity “*in MONADIS Ineffabilis, Omnipotentia, ante omnia Sæcula, fundata.*”⁷⁵ Like its predecessor, the *Propædeumata Aphoristica*, the *Monas Hieroglyphica* is an aphoristic text rich in meditative free-association. It is furthermore—and not unexpectedly for such a subjective undertaking—an extraordinarily difficult text and one which has baffled readers and scholars ever since its publication. As Harkness points out, “the work was an enigma to most of his contemporaries.... The intervening centuries have not served to make the contents

⁷³ John Dee, *Προπαιδέγματα Αφοριστικά [Propædeumata Aphoristica]* (Londini, 1558), a1^r. “1. As God, against the laws of reason and nature, created all from nothing, thus somehow nothing is never able to pass away unless it may be done by the supernatural power of God against the laws of reason and nature. 2. Therefore, miraculous changes in natural things might exist through us—they could in truth—if we compel nature skillfully.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Latin are mine.

⁷⁴ “the common astronomical characters of the planets.” John Dee, *Monas Hieroglyphica* (Antwerp, 1564), 3^v.

⁷⁵ “established the almighty powers of the ineffable Monad before all ages.” *Ibid.*, 10^f.

less obscure.”⁷⁶ R. J. W. Evans has called the text “enormously difficult” though he thinks it may be “some kind of attempt at the rediscovery of truth through a universal spiritual transmutation,”⁷⁷ while Peter French has wondered whether the work might be connected to an “oral and secret alchemical tradition” which could explain its obscurity.⁷⁸

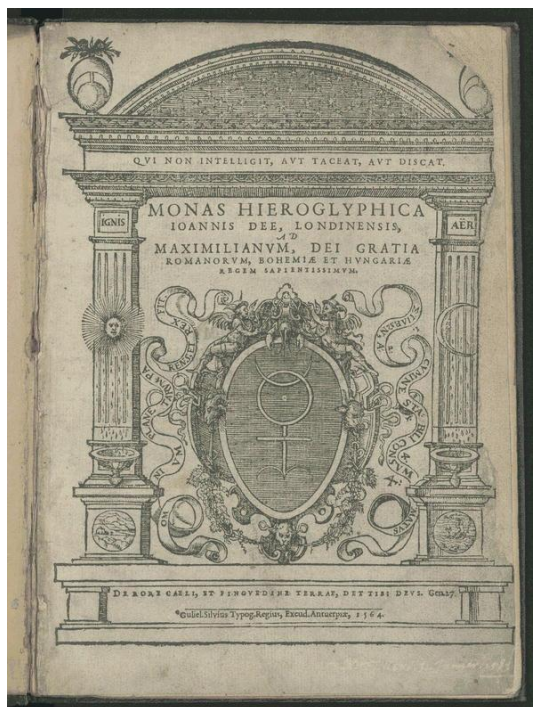


Figure 1.1: Title page to *Monas Hieroglyphica* (1564)

For all the obscurity of the *Monas*, one thing is clear: Dee believed the mystical insights he offered in the work to be ultimately derived from God. He wrote as much to this effect: “*Et non est mirum, hòc, in literis sic constare: Cum & Visibilia & INVISIBILIA omnia: Manifesta, & Occultissima (Natura vel Arte) ab ipso Deo emanantia, ad eius BONITATEM, SAPIENTIAM & POTENTIAM, prædicandam, celebrandamque; à nobis, diligentissima Indagine sunt perlustranda.*”⁷⁹ Not only did the *Monas* sign promise to reveal these wonders, but Dee implies

⁷⁶ Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*, 78.

⁷⁷ R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World: A Study in Intellectual History, 1576 – 1612*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1984), 221.

⁷⁸ French, *John Dee: Elizabethan Magus*, 80.

that he alone could unveil the mystery surrounding them. That is, mysticism in John Dee's hands had become a kind of commodity.

Mystical apprehension (in every sense of the word) inhabits each page of the *Monas*. One passage is particularly telling. In "Theorem XXIII," as he prepares to instruct those readers who wish to engrave the figure of the *Monas* upon their own rings or seals, Dee erupts in a moment of prophetic exuberance: "In Nomine IESV CHRISTI, pro nobis CRVCI affixi (cuius Spiritus celeriter hæc per me Scribentis, Calamum tantum, esse Me, & Opto, & Spero)."⁸⁰ Dee hoped—and claimed—that the *Monas* figure would prove the universal key to every door of knowledge and lead toward the regeneration of mankind, as he wrote toward the end of the book's introduction, saying that contemplation of it would work to cure "cōtra nostrum per Adamum introductam Nuditatem."⁸¹

The *Monas*, however, as Dee no doubt eventually realized, was not enough. Though the book succeeded in drawing the attention of the curious, it failed to establish Dee as a leading intellectual figure. It also failed to ignite the revolution in knowledge Dee anticipated, and it likewise failed to generate the kinds of patronage Dee must have expected. And, lastly, it failed to illuminate even Dee's mind, or he would not have looked elsewhere. So he turned to the angelic world and hoped for a more direct encounter with the supernatural. This kind of mysticism he intended to bend toward practical ends: the restoration of the Adamic tongue, the unifying language supposedly dispersed into its constituent parts at the destruction of the Tower of Babel; the healing of Christianity, now similarly dispersed into sects following the

⁷⁹ "Is it not thus a wonder for this to stand in letters, seeing that all things visible and invisible, manifest and hidden, whether by nature or art, emanating from God himself are to be scrutinized by us with most diligent examination so that his Goodness, Wisdom, and Power may be proclaimed and celebrated?" Dee, *Monas*, 4^v.

⁸⁰ Dee, *Monas*, 23^r. "In the Name of Jesus Christ, nailed to the Cross for us, by whose Spirit rapidly writing these things through me, so much as I hope and trust to be only the quill."

⁸¹ "against our nakedness introduced through our Adam." Dee, *Monas*, 8^r.

Reformation; and securing the kind of patronage that such scholarship and research would require. The *Monas* had been mediated through Dee's own mystical and philosophical free-association: the only mediation that conversations with angels required was the technology required for the mediation of transcription.

The Technology of the Created Vision

Dee preferred scrying as a method for contacting God's messengers, some argue, because it agreed with his philosophy on the physics and metaphysics of light and because he trusted that it added an extra level of protection against the influences of malicious spirits. It is thought that Dee, as a natural philosopher, was testing the limits of nature and treated the Actions as a way in which he might secure knowledge into the physical and metaphysical worlds that could prove reliable. He himself did not "see" the spirits with which he conversed. Indeed, as he readily admitted to the spirit Madimi on 4 July 1583, "I see you onely by faith and imagination" (*TFR*, 31), though there is evidence that Dee was privileged with a peek into the otherwise invisible world on at least two occasions. On 25 May 1581, he recorded one such event in his diary, writing, "I had sight in Χρυταλλω⁸² offered me, and I saw," employing his usual device of transliterating into Greek characters words he did not want his household subordinates to be able to read.⁸³ Then on 1 May 1587, at the time of his and Kelly's notorious cross-matching, the sharing of their wives demanded by the spirits, Dee recorded this entry in his diary: "Prima Maii, vidi (ductore meo præmonstrante) Michælium Nuncium; non Michælem. Laus sit Deo, at ductori

⁸² As a rule, Dee avoided the use of diacritical marks in his transliterations of English into Greek characters. Given that he was named professor of Greek, it is surprising that he did not simply use Greek. No scholar to my knowledge has raised this point.

⁸³ *The Private Diary of Dr. John Dee*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell (London: Printed for the Camden Society, 1842), 11. Dee owned several crystals and seems to have them all in Actions at one time or another.

meo, E.K.”⁸⁴ Other than these exceptions, seeing was, by rule, the province of his sryer or medium. Kelly served as Dee’s most successful sryer, at least in terms of sophistication and the staggering amount of information received, and their work together lasted from March 1582 until May 1588. Dee also employed Barnabas Saul, Bartholomew Hickman, and even his son Arthur (who was seven at the time) as sryers at various times. They met with varying degrees of success, but nothing as spectacular as that under Kelly’s tenure.

Scholars often locate the Actions with spirits undertaken by Dee and Kelly in the magical tradition of Henry Cornelius Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia* and Johann Trithemius’ *Steganographia*.⁸⁵ Though Clucas tries to set them in the mold of medieval/Pseudo-Solomonic magical traditions, most recent studies—such as those by Harkness and Szönyi—have been reluctant to pigeonhole Dee’s Actions into such convenient categories. Dee’s occult methodology, these critics argue, was freeform and eclectic,⁸⁶ and such an interpretation is surely consistent with Dee’s approach to religion. Dee did not completely ignore the elite magical traditions exemplified by Agrippa and Trithemius, nor did he eschew more popular forms of magic such as crystal-gazing. He knew the field, which is why he questions the spirit Galvah about the credibility of angels appearing in female form: “*Tritemius*, sayeth that never any good Angel was read of to have appeared *forma muliebri*” (*TFR*, 12).⁸⁷

⁸⁴ “First of May, I saw (revealed by my guide) the Michaelic Messenger; not Michael. Praise be to God, but [also] to my guide, E. K.” in *Diaries of John Dee*, 220. In his note to this entry, Fenton argues that “Michaelium” refers to the Church of St. Michael in Trebon where Dee and Kelly were then living. I think Fenton has his Michaels mixed up.

⁸⁵ See in particular France A. Yates’ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (1964; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), Chapters 7 and 8; Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 108 – 09.

⁸⁶ Szönyi, *John Dee’s Occultism*, 200.

⁸⁷ Galvah answered in surprisingly enlightened terms: “the eternal Ministers of God in proportion of Sanctification take unto them the bodies of them both. I mean in respect of the Form; *For as in both you read Homo, so in both you find one and the self same dignity in internal matter all one*” (*TFR*, 13).

Familiar from the Agrippan tradition, Dee employed purification ritual, fumigations, seals, banners, talismans, a lamén (breastplate), and even had a special ring designed for him by the spirits. The ring was inscribed with the word, “PELE,” a designation the spirits gave for God. Dee was so impressed by this revelation that he glossed his copy of Dionysius’ *Divine Names* with this word at the section where Dionysius writes of “the wonderful ‘name which is above every name.’”⁸⁸ Dee probably began with fumigations and other types of symbolic purification, but the designs for most of his apparatus came to him through directives of the spirits. Some of these, such as the “Sigilium DEI ÆMÆTH,”⁸⁹ are quite complex and even aesthetically appealing. The first months of Dee’s association with Kelly, in fact, were devoted to creating the various accoutrements necessary for what came afterward: the acquisition of the Adamic or Enochian language.

Comparing the technology of Dee and the Renaissance-Agrippan magical tradition to that of the contemplative tradition’s furniture may prove of interest here. In the contemplative tradition—both monastic and eremitic—apparatus was kept to a bare minimum. The medieval *Ancrene Wisse*, for instance, devotes much attention to outlining the austere furniture of contemplative life. The recluse is encouraged to maintain a humble diet, regulate her prayer life, and detach herself from honors and entertainments, remembering the admonition that the way of simplicity leads to greater works. She is even told to keep the windows of the anchorage small so as to minimize the intrusions of “the world” into her life of contemplation.⁹⁰ The *Ancrene Wisse* provided contemplatives with a method for ordering their lives of prayer and creating the conditions for contemplation, not with directions for securing visions.

⁸⁸ Harkness, *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels*, 38

⁸⁹ “Emeth” is the Hebrew word for truth.

⁹⁰ *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, ed. Bella Millett, 2 vol. (Oxford: Early English Text Society/Oxford University Press, 2005), Part 2; 1: 25 – 26.

This medieval tradition persisted through the early modern period, certainly in Catholic monastic circles. As with the directions given in the *Ancrene Wisse*, the technology of sixteenth century Carmelite spirituality was also kept to a minimum, with its similar intention to draw one closer to God, not have visions. Likewise in *Sancta Sophia*, the collection of his writings for Benedictine nuns under his spiritual direction compiled after his death by Serenus Cressy, Dom Augustine Baker recommends simplicity and quiet, fitting accompaniments to what he calls “the *Schoole of Solitude*.”⁹¹ Similar to the ways in which the technologies of Renaissance magic had their roots in the medieval tradition, the spiritual practices of religious life in the early modern period were also grounded in earlier forms.

The irony of Dee’s Actions, however, is that though the ceremonies and apparatus were designed to create visionary experiences and a type of communication with God, by their very success they compromised the possibility for such intimacy. Jean-Luc Marion’s notion of the idol, I think, helps to disclose the essence of Dee’s mysticism in this regard. Marion observes that “Subsidizing the absence of the divine, the idol makes the divine available, secures it, and in the end distorts it.”⁹² Dee, enthralled by the success he and Kelly had found in communicating with what he thought were angelic beings, was content to maintain his research at this level. He looked no further. His aim was not, as it was with Baker and those under his spiritual direction, at a contemplative union with God. Rather, Dee’s hopes for intimacy with God, if present at all, were superseded—contaminated, one could say—by his belief that he had been chosen as God’s particular messenger. He had no need of seeking a union that was already assumed. By employing the various apparatus intended to draw the vision closer, Dee unwittingly removed

⁹¹ Augustine Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, ed. Serenus Cressy, 2 vol. (Douay, 1662), 1: 242 [2.1.1].

⁹² Jean-Luc Marion, *Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 7.

God further from the workings, a danger inherent in such a technologically-heavy mode of religious inquiry.

Martin Heidegger has written that technology functions as a “bringing-forth,” and as such succeeds “only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment.”⁹³ Dee’s project certainly bears all the marks of a technology intended in this direction. Heidegger adds that control of nature (or, we may add, of the supernatural) promised by the technological is illusory. “Thus when man,” he writes, “investigating, observing, pursues nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve [*Bestand*].”⁹⁴ Dee’s project began with a foregone conclusion, and he no doubt pursued the supernatural as an area of his own conceiving. Following Heidegger, then, we can say that though Dee may have laid claim to the surety of the Actions, it was actually the Actions that laid claim to him.

Like the technology of mining or forestry that Heidegger uses in his discussion, Dee’s technology also featured the goal of turning the object-at-hand (the information revealed by the spirits) into standing-reserve, something “available to serve some end that will itself also be directed toward getting everything under control”⁹⁵—and Dee travelled all over Europe trying to find a market for it. One of Dee’s purposes in the Actions—as Harkness, Szőnyi, and others like to argue—resided in a research strategy into natural science. He argued as much in his speech before Rudolf II, delivered in Latin but recorded in English in his diary:

⁹³ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” trans. William Lovitt, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 293.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁹⁵ William Lovitt, Introduction, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* by Martin Heidegger (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), xxix.

Hereupon I began to declare that All my life time I had spent in learning: but for this forty years continually, in sundry manners, and in divers Countries, with great pain, care, and cost, I had from degree to degree, sought to come by the best knowledge that man might attain unto in the world: And I found (at length) that neither any man living, nor any Book I could meet withal, was able to teach me those truths I desired, and longed for: And therefore I concluded with my self, to make intercession and prayer to the giver of wisdom and all good things, to send me such wisdom, as I might know the natures of his creatures; and also enjoy means to use them to his honour and glory. And in this purpose made divers assayes: and at length it pleased God to send me *his* [Δ]⁹⁶ *Light*, whereby I am assured of his merciful hearing of my long, fervent, constant, and continual prayer, in the cause before specified: And that, His holy Angels, for these two years and a half, have used to inform me: and have finished such works in my hands, to be seen, as no mans heart could have wished for so much. (*TFR*, 231)

Dee pursued the mind of God and insight into the secret workings of the universe as the ultimate research project. And he turned, futilely as it turned out, to some of the most powerful figures in Europe in the hopes of receiving remunerative support for his research.

Dee and Spiritual Discernment

Kelly often fell into grave doubts about the veracity of the spirits' origins as well as their message. On 29 April 1582, just over a month after he had begun working as Dee's scryer, we find Kelly's first suspicions about his and Dee's spiritual instructors. Dee found his scryer "in very sore disquiet" on account of a very personal order a spirit had made of Kelly. "He sayd," reported Kelly, "that I must betake my self to the world, and forsake the world. That is that I shold marry. Which thing to do, I haue no naturall Inclination: neyther with a safe Conscience may I do it, contrary to my vow and profession. Wherefore I think and hope, there is some other meaning in these theyr words" (*FBM*, 172).⁹⁷ Dee attempted to reassure Kelly (who was going by the name of "Talbot" at that point), but on 4 May Kelly was still recalcitrant and "wold not willingly deal with the former Creatures, utterly misliking and discrediting them, bycause they

⁹⁶ Figure present in text. Dee habitually uses the Greek letter delta to represent his name.

⁹⁷ Underlining present in text.

willed him to marry. Neyther wold he put of his hat in any prayer to god, for the Action with them” (174). Kelly’s aversion to marriage has caused some readers to suspect he may have been a Catholic priest—or that he at least wanted Dee to think he was.⁹⁸ In the late seventeenth century, Elias Ashmole certainly believed this to be the case.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Dee was beside himself with anxiety as this incredibly gifted scryer and clairvoyant was about to abandon the project they had just begun. Kelly finished the session, but appears to have forsaken Dee for at least six months, as the next Action for which we have any evidence is dated 15 November 1582. Indeed, the title page of *Quartus Liber Mysteriorum* which opens with this Action is inscribed “Post reconciliationem Kellianam” (*FBM*, 181). Apparently, when Dee’s scryer returned, he returned with a new name. He also returned with a new wife, which must have elated Dee, showing, as it did, Kelly’s compliance with the wishes of their spiritual schoolmasters. But Kelly was hardly at peace with the spirits, perhaps even less so with his new wife. Likewise, the spirits were hardly done meddling with Kelly’s sex life, as they later proved with the cross-matching.

Not infrequently did Dee and Kelly encounter spirits they recognized as “illuders.” Indeed, Kelly was never convinced that those spirits Dee identified as “of God” were anything but illuders. It could not have been easy to tell the difference. As early as the first Action Dee undertook with Kelly on 10 March 1582, the spirits warned Dee of the influence of their malevolent counterparts. “There is a spirit, named Lundrumguffa using you who seketh your destruction, in the hatred of men, in the hurt of thy goods,” the spirit identifying himself as the archangel Michael told Dee. “He haunteth thy howse, and seketh the destruction of thy dowghter”¹⁰⁰ (*FBM*, 72).

⁹⁸ Woolley, *The Queen’s Conjurer*, 163.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁰⁰ Dee’s daughter Katherine, born 10 June 1581, was nine months old at the time. *The Private Diary of Dr. John Dee*, 11.

One of the more fascinating exchanges between Dee and Kelly and the spirits took place in late November through December of 1583. The principle spirit of these Actions, never named, often appeared dressed as a preacher and at their first encounter with it Kelly took it to be of evil origin. Dee particularly disliked this spirit because it cast doubt on all of the workings of the Actions and drew Dee's attention to his own motives:

Lift not up thyself so much: But close up thine eares against these deluded deluders, which carry thee headlong into folly, and transform thee to a shadow: By whose counsel thou art dishonoured, and by whom thou shalt become a spot in the Book of Fame. Call to remembrance the Histories of the whole World, Political and Ecclesiastical. Inquire of the Learned that have settled their judgements in the Book of God. Open thine eyes, and behold, if any of the Prophets or forefathers (men grounded in wisdom and deep understanding) have yielded themselves to this unrighteousnesse, believing lyars; consenting to untruths, and lastly dishonouring the Name of God. Then call to mind thine own estate, thy flourishing of thy youth, and possibilities, wherein thou mayst be made perfect. Which if thou truly do, Then banish this dishonour to God and his Angles [sic], listen not to these S.....erfity: For the Syrenes are awake, and their song is to destruction. I am sent from God, as a Messenger to call thee home & for thou dishonourest God mightily. Behold thou shalt be made contemptible, and become a laughing-stock. Thy honour shall be defaced, and thy posterity spotted with ignominie. Moreover, such as are thy friends shall shake their heads; saying, What wise man hath thus been overcome? What is he that is become foolish? Thou mayst desire it, and consent, as before: But I am a stumbling block betwixt you, and will dwell in all Elements for your purposes. (TFR, 55)¹⁰¹

The spirit's last appearance was on 16 December, when it continued in much the same key and admonished Dee, "*Burn those blasphemous books of thine, and I will teach thee wisdom,*" meaning both the records of the Actions and the books dictated to Dee by the spirits (56). During the session, the spirit Dee identified as Michael appeared, disguised as a creature of imposing height and strength, and bound this spirit that had given Dee so much trouble for the previous three weeks. Dee and Kelly never saw it again. This nameless spirit illustrates, better than any of the others that Dee and Kelly encountered, the difficulty inherent in spiritual discernment: those

¹⁰¹ Emphasis in text. Casaubon's typography for the Actions is as follows: for human speakers, he uses plain text and switches to italics for emphasis; for spirit speakers, he does just the opposite. In general, I represent Casaubon's typography unchanged. Exceptions will be noted.

spirits that may at first appear to be beneficent may prove otherwise, while even those that are assumed to be malevolent may tell the truth. It also seems to have accurately reflected the reality of Dee's motives, which certainly seems to account for Dee's strong aversion to it.

With all of Dee's intellectual accomplishments, it is surprising that he did not show more evidence of spiritual discernment when it came to the Actions. Discernment, according to Augustine Baker and the tradition of spiritual direction, is an indispensable component for developing contemplation and ever deeper intimacy with God while simultaneously avoiding the pitfalls of pride and delusion. "As for *extraordinary Supernaturall Inspirations*," Baker writes, "*Illuminations, apparitions, voices, conversations with spirits, messages from heaven &c: a spirituall Internal liuer is forbidden to pretend to, or so much as desire them; yea rather to pray against them, least he should abuse them to vanity and pride.*"¹⁰² Examination of conscience, an honest assessment of one's motives, and patient observation of mystical phenomena themselves all contributed to the science of discernment. The need to test oneself was as important as the need to test spirits.

The problem of testing spirits, Dee was well aware, was a feature of Christianity from the apostolic age, exemplified in the admonishment to "test the spirits" in 1 John 4 and Paul's guidelines for discernment in Galatians 5:16 – 23. Dee and Kelly seem to have paid attention to John's spiritual direction: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God.... every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God" (1 John 4:1 – 3).¹⁰³ They often tested unfamiliar spirits in just this way. Indeed, when they first encountered the "preacher spirit," they followed the Johannine formula, Dee greeting him with, "Benedictus qui venit in

¹⁰² Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, 1: 65 (1.2.14). Emphasis in text.

¹⁰³ NRSV. Dee, it should be noted, always quotes from the Vulgate.

nomine Domini.” But the spirit did not give the expected response. “He saith nothing,” reported Kelly, “Not so much as, Amen” (*TFR*, 53). In early modern Europe, as Susan E. Schreiner has observed and as Dee’s Actions attest, religious controversies, the desire for certainty, and political and cultural anxieties exacerbated the challenges of discernment.¹⁰⁴

At the beginning of the manuscript he named *Mysteriorum Pragensium, Liber Primus, Cæsareusque* dated 15 August 1584, Dee records several scriptural passages that speak to the veracity (or falsehood) or spirits and to the role of prophecy in Judeo-Christian history. Among the passages (including Amos 3:7 – 8; Acts 23:9; Luke 10:23; Matthew 13:17; and several passages from 1 Corinthians) is 1 John 4 (*TFR*, 213 – 14). At this time, as urged by the spirits, Dee increasingly saw himself in a prophetic role. He prefaces these citations of scripture with speculation that a deluge similar to that in Genesis 7 will occur in 1617 or 1618, which he thinks will accompany the Second Coming of Christ. Underneath the passage from 1 Corinthians 1:4 – 9, Dee logs his only comment on the passages—and it is a telling one: “Noto Revelationem & adventum Christi secundum: deinde confirmationem quae respicit alium adhuc finem temporis: unde de Regno Christi hic in terris, secundum Joannis Apocalypsim, videri posit hic locus aliquem praebere gustum, &c” (213).¹⁰⁵ Had he lived to see the times of which he wrote, Dee would have better understood the tricky business of prediction.

Curiously missing from Dee’s list of scriptures are Paul’s words from the fifth chapter of Galatians, which describe both the works of the flesh and the works of the spirit. It is worth citing in full:

¹⁰⁴ Susan E. Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise?: The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 270.

¹⁰⁵ “I note the Revelation and the Second Coming of Christ: then to another confirmation which looks toward the end of time: whence this place will be able to be seen to have provided something of a foretaste of the Kingdom of Christ here on the earth, according to the Apocalypse of John.”

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5: 16 – 24)

Dee was certainly familiar with this passage, and he seems to have plucked one particular line out of it as justifying not only the Actions but the eventual experiment in cross-matching as well: “But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law,” while ignoring the prohibitions against “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery” which immediately follow. Augustine, in *Answer to the Pelagians*, notes that Paul’s commendation to “those led by the Spirit” refers to those whose hearts are filled with love of God, and it is worth considering how much Dee could have convinced himself that his own love was sufficient.¹⁰⁶ The outcome, whatever the case, was truly tragic. When the spirit Madimi instructed him and Kelly to hold all things in common, including their wives, her rhetorical strategy was obviously meant to inform Dee and his associate that they were both “instructed by the spirit” and, therefore, “above the law.” The Actions unfold from that point toward a stunning dénouement.

On 17 April 1587, a series of very bizarre Actions took place. That day, Kelly reported, “I saw *Madimi, Il*, and many other that had dealt with us heretofore, but shewed themselves in very *filthy order*; and *Uriel appeared, and justified all to be of God, and good*” (*TFR*, *8).¹⁰⁷ In the crystal, Kelly saw a globe covered all over with writing. One message read, “*Animi ad*

¹⁰⁶ “On Nature and Grace,” Ch. 67 in Augustine, *Answer to the Pelagians I*, ed. John Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁷ For some reason, the numbering for this important series of Actions starts over at 1, perhaps in way of a kind of appendix. Beginning at page 17 of this section, the page numbers are prefaced by an asterisk, which I herein include for identifying the entire section. The new series of pagination follows page 448.

meliora compoti” (*9).¹⁰⁸ The session ended with a shocking pronouncement: “*Omnia peccata apud me postponuntur huic, insaniens propter me, sapiat: Immo adulterizans propter me, in sempiternum benedicatur, & premio afficietur celesti*” (*9).¹⁰⁹ The injunction must have caused Dee and Kelly no little amount of anxiety.

The spirits appeared the next day en force, as Kelly reported: “There appeared Madimi, Il, and the rest.” The majority of the spirits, however, straightaway vanished, leaving Madimi alone. She at this point exhibited some uncharacteristic behavior, as Kelly reported, “she openeth all her apparel, and her self all naked; and sheweth her shame also” which was definitely outside the norm, even for the Actions. Kelly was disturbed by the vision and a fascinating exchange between the physical and spiritual participants ensued:

E.K. Fie on thee, Devil avoid hence with this filthiness, &c.

Mad. *In the name of God, why finde you fault with me?*

Δ. Because of yesterdaies doings, and words are provocations to sin, and unmeet for any godly creature to use.

Mad. *What is sin?*

Δ. To break the Commandment of God.

Mad. *If the self-same God give you a new Commandment taking away the former form of sin which he limited by the Law, What remaineth then?*

Δ. *If by the self-same God that gave the Law to Moses, and gave his New Covenant by Christ, who sealed it by his blood; and had witnesses very many, and his Apostles instructed by his holy Spirit, who admonished us of all cleanness in words and works, yea and in thoughts, if by the same God, whose former Laws and Doctrines be abrogated, and that sufficient proof and testimony may be had that it is the same God: Then must the same God be obeyed: For only God is the Lord of Lords, King of Kings, and Governour of all things. (TFR, *9 – 10).*

Dee knew he was walking into tricky theological as well as legal territory, and we can see by his response to Madimi’s question that he knew he had to be completely clear about what was at issue. Madimi played her rhetoric into his: “*The Apostle Paul abounded in carnal lust: he was*

¹⁰⁸ “Souls joined toward the better.”

¹⁰⁹ Reading “premio” as a blunder for “praemio”: “All sins before me in this are disregarded: having been made mad for my sake, he is wise: on the contrary, committing adultery on my account, he is blessed in eternity and he will be touched by a heavenly reward.”

also offensive unto his brethren so that he despaired, and was ready to have left his vocation, untill the Lord did say unto him, *My mercy and grace sufficeth thee.*¹¹⁰ Beleeve me, that we are from above” (*10). Madimi saw Dee’s wager, and then raised the stakes:

Behold you are become free: Do that which most pleaseth you: For behold, your own reason riseth up against my wisdom.

*Not content you are to be heires, but you would be Lords, yea Gods, yea Judgers of the heavens: Wherefore do even as you list, but if you forsake the way taught you from above, behold evil shall enterprise your senses, and abominations shall dwell before your eyes, as a recompence, unto such as you have done wrong unto: And your wives and children, shall be carried away before your face. (*10)*

These passages are nothing if not astounding. Dee is assured of being elect above anything Calvin would have dared imagine—and warned that if he fails to comply his wife and children will be taken away. At the end of the Action, Kelly reported seeing these words inscribed upon a white crucifix:

*Amen dico vobis, quia si dicerem homini, Eas, & patrem Jugula, & non faceret, filius est peccati & mortis. Omnia, enim, possibilia & licita superis. Neque magis odiosa sunt pudenda illis, quam mortalium quorumcumque vultus. Ita enim fiet, spurium cum filio (quod magis absurdum est) copulabitur. Et oriens cum occidente, Meridies quoque cum septentrione coadunabuntur.*¹¹¹ (*12)

The spirits had made an audacious gamble. And won. Kelly still did not trust Madimi; but Dee, tempted by the glory of acting as God’s chosen prophet, convinced himself that the message was true. Then Dee and Kelly somehow convinced their wives to follow the spirits’ injunction. On 21 May, Dee wrote in his diary, “*Pactum factum.*”¹¹² And on 23 May, the spirits double-checked to make sure the cross-matching had indeed been fully accomplished.¹¹³ Soon thereafter, which

¹¹⁰ An allusion to 2 Corinthians 12: 9.

¹¹¹ “Amen, I say to you, if it were said to a man to strangle his brother and he did not perform it, he is the son of sin and death. Therefore, everything is possible and permissible from on high. Nor are the sexual organs more hateful than any faces of mortals.

“Thus, therefore it shall be that the bastard (because it is even more absurd) will be joined with the true son. And the east and the west will be joined, the south with the north.”

¹¹² *Diaries of John Dee*, 223. There may have been even more explicitly damning evidence, as Fenton notes that part of the page has been cut out with scissors, 228.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 224. A spirit horseman appeared and said,

should come as no surprise, tensions and suspicions arose between the two families, and within a very short time the project with which Dee and Kelly had been occupied for five years completely halted, incomplete, as Dee doubtlessly would have thought. These were hardly the fruits of the spirit Paul outlines in Galatians. Dee surely knew this.

One fact about Dee's personality becomes abundantly clear as one reads through the *Actions*, as Shumaker observes: "No reader who has persevered through the 240,000 words or so of the folio volume [of *TFR*] can, if he has read sympathetically, avoid knowing Dee rather well."¹¹⁴ Shumaker perceives in Dee a "combination of arrogance and humility"¹¹⁵ and concludes that "given his character, the intellectual orientation of the period, and the occultist assumptions with which he had begun, his gullibility was the next thing to inevitable."¹¹⁶ To be sure, Dee's near-contemporary and fellow astrologer and occultist William Lilly says of Dee that "he was the most ambitious person living, and most desirous of fame and renown, and was never so well pleased as when he heard himself stiled Most Excellent."¹¹⁷ Sherman, on the other hand, attributes Dee's failure to his "personal shortcomings: that he was often unrealistic, excessively serious, and open to delusion."¹¹⁸ But Shumaker oversimplifies and Sherman is more concerned with interpreting what he takes to be Dee's career blunders. While Dee may have been prone to inflation, of which the *Actions* give ample evidence, he was no fool. He was in possession of many gifts: in mathematics and engineering as well as in the human sciences. But, finally, in

"Kelly, was thy brother's wife obedient unto thee?
E.K. She was.
Horseman. Dee, was thy brother's wife obedient unto thee?
Δ. She was obedient."

Madimi does not seem to have believed Dee, and triple-checked. Casaubon does not include these passages in *TFR*, struck through in the manuscript, though he must have known them.

¹¹⁴ Wayne Shumaker, *Renaissance Curiosa*, 46.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹¹⁷ Lilly, *William Lilly's History of His Life and Times*, 224.

¹¹⁸ Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing*, 11.

addition to his dedication to the search for knowledge, his talent for extemporaneous prayer, and the touching care for his wife and children of which he occasionally gives evidence in his diaries, John Dee very much liked the idea of himself as God's special messenger.

The idea that he was able to converse with angels and demons and function as God's appointed prophet ravished Dee to a considerable degree, begging the almost inevitable comparison to Faustus' "'Tis magic, magic that hath ravish'd me" (1.1.110).¹¹⁹ Dee believed he could do these things because his philosophy and the robust tradition standing behind it said they were possible. If he were the most learned man in England, it would follow that he would be able to achieve this sublime level of understanding. But technologically-generated religious experiences, as with experiments with LSD, can have unintended consequences. According to Marion,

When a philosophical thought expresses a concept of what it then names 'God,' this concept functions exactly as an idol. It gives itself to be seen, but thus all the better conceals itself as the mirror where thought, invisibly, has its forward point fixed, so that the *invisible* finds itself, with an aim suspended by the fixed concept, disqualified and abandoned; thought freezes, and the idolatrous concept of 'God' appears, where, more than God, thought judges itself.¹²⁰

Did Dee think he was speaking with God through the spirits? Absolutely. First of all, they admitted as much—and often. In an Action of 4 June 1584 the spirit Gabriel, ostensibly speaking under divine dispensation, told Dee,

I am a jealous God; which is as much to say, Lo, I am your friend: nay, rather your father, and more than that, your God: which delighteth in you, rejoyceth in you, and loveth you with that affection [Jealousie]¹²¹ which is more than love: which is as much to say, as my love is such toward you, as I am to my self. But, O ye stiff-necked Jews, O ye Strumpets, you despised the love of God, you committed adultery, and ran into the Temples of Idols... (TFR, 162 – 63)

¹¹⁹ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* in *Complete Plays and Shorter Poems*, ed. E. D. Pendry (London: J. M. Dent-Everyman, 1976).

¹²⁰ Marion, *God Without Being*, 16.

¹²¹ Insertion in source.

The biblical allusion could only have helped to convince Dee. Furthermore, when Dee and Kelly were in the deepest period of doubt after the spirits commanded them to hold their wives in common, for the first (and only) time the Actions featured a singularly important imaginative figure:

Here appeareth a fire in this other stone also, and a man in the fire, with flaxen hair hanging down upon him, and is naked unto his Paps; and seemeth to have spots of blood upon him. He spake, and said as followeth.

If I had intended to have overthrown you, or brought you to confusion, or suffered you to be led into temptation beyond your strength and power, then had the Seas long ago swallowed you. Yea, there had not a soul lived amongst you.

But the law and tidings (to mankinde) of gladness, are both grounded in me. I am the Beginning and the Ending: And behold, happy is he that delighteth in me, for in me is truth and understanding. Whatsoever you have received, you have received of me; and without me you have received nothing. Behold, I my self was even the figure of misery and death for your sins. Why (therefore) disdain you to be figured after me? I shall gather the four quarters, and they shall become one.

And as I have made you the figure of two people to come, and amongst them, the executors of my Justice: *So likewise have I sanctified you in an holy Ordinance, giving you the first fruits of the time to come. Happy is he that is a Serpent in the wilderness hanged upon the Cross, being the will and figure of my determination, and Kingdom to come: I am even in the doors; and I will overthrow all flesh. I will no more delight in the sons of men....*

For this Doctrine is not to be published to mortal men: but is given unto you, to manifest your faith, and to make you worthy in the sight of the heavens, for believing in me of your vocation to come. (TFR, *19)

In the margin, Dee wrote “*Christus.*” This was Dee’s “idolatrous concept of ‘God’” made invisible though the visibility of the stone. The vision in the stone obliterated from Dee’s consciousness the traditional understandings of Christian morality and theology and allowed him to completely succumb to the hope he had projected onto the idol. This event, more than any of the others that appeared in the crystal, is what convinced Dee to go through with the cross-matching. Indeed, it might be appropriate to call this an “untruth event.” Here Dee’s entire project—his scientific work, his theology, and his mysticism—was swallowed up in a simulacra

of the divine that “culminate[d] in a ‘self-idolatry.’”¹²² Dee may have been pious, as so many critics contend, but he was not humble. And but even though his piety may have been sincere, it was seriously compromised by this point.

John Dee and the Gift

Alain Badiou describes Paul’s encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus as an event of “an absolutely aleatory intervention.”¹²³ Badiou furthermore sees in Paul a radical mission divorced from all responsibilities to previously held authorities and doctrines.¹²⁴ Dee, too, saw himself in his mysticism as entering upon a radical era in Christian history. But, unlike Paul, Dee’s mystic revelation had nothing aleatory about it. On the contrary, Dee’s steps toward his revelation were methodical, deliberate, and grounded in a foregone conclusion. He found in the Actions exactly what he planned on finding. But, as Meister Eckhart warned, “Whoever seeks something from God, as you have often heard me say, does not know what they are looking for.”¹²⁵ And this, I think, is what, more than the application of magical or scientific technologies, separates Dee from a mysticism of authenticity.

Dee’s Actions, though they elicited excitement in some quarters, do not appear to have done much to impact his lifestyle positively. Quite the opposite. Dee was detached from the tradition of spiritual direction and lacked that discipline’s safeguards. Similarly, to our knowledge, besides Kelly, Dee had no colleagues with whom to discuss the Actions; and, given his response to Kelly’s suspicions, he probably would not have been inclined to welcome opinions that would cast doubt on the veracity of the spirits. William Alston observes that quite a

¹²² Marion, *God Without Being*, 28.

¹²³ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Cultural Memory in the Present, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 – 19.

¹²⁵ Meister Eckhart, *Selected Writings*, trans. Oliver Davies (London: Penguin, 1994), 142.

gulf exists between “professional” mystics (such as Teresa of Avila or John of the Cross) and “amateurs” (among whom we may include Dee and, perhaps, Margery Kempe). Of the amateurs, he says,

there is no doubt but that they take a less critical attitude toward their mystical experiences than do monastics. Not being under the supervision of a spiritual adviser and lacking contact with others who have had longer experience in the things of the spirit, they are not so sensitized to the possibilities of delusion and the need for external criteria; hence they tend much more to repose complete confidence in their spontaneous understanding of their experiences.¹²⁶

Alston’s observations have much resonance with the case of Dee. Dee the scientist, though he may have approached them methodically, was anything but scientific in his approach to the Actions. On the other hand, the practices of spiritual direction come off as very scientific, indeed, in their acknowledgement of tradition, collegiality, mentorship, and consensus.

Dee kept meticulous records in his diary. Probably due to his interest in the horoscope of conception, he recorded each of his wife Jane’s periods and likewise recorded every time the two of them were intimate.¹²⁷ After he recorded “Pactum factum” on 21 May 1587, which strongly suggests the cross-matching request of the spirits had been fulfilled, the next note pertaining to Jane’s fertility cycle occurs on 17 June: “αφτερ θις φυλ μονε ιανε ‘αδ θε νοτ. Note.”¹²⁸ On the following 8 February he recorded this passage: “mane Paulo ante ortum solis natus est Theodore Trebonianus Dee, ascendente Sirio in horoscopo, die dominica”¹²⁹—“born the day of the Lord, a little before the sun was Theodore Trebonius Dee, with Sirius rising in the horoscope.” (The passage of time between early February and mid-June is conspicuous). Names were important to

¹²⁶ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 203 – 04.

¹²⁷ He marked Jane’s periods in the Greek characters he used to keep what he was writing out of the capacity of unwelcome readers, as in the entry for 1 January 1587 when he wrote “Jane ‘αδ θεμ”—“Jane had them” (*Diaries of John Dee*, 205). For coitus he used a symbol (+ε).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 227. “After this full moon, Jane had them not.”

¹²⁹ *Private Diary of Dr. John Dee*, 26.

Dee, this one no less than those of his other children; and “Theodore,” of course, derives from the Greek for “gift of God.” Considering the name, Dee must have believed the nativity of the boy (who was surely Kelly’s child) had been divinely sanctioned. Dee very probably had high hopes for this “magical child,” though the boy did not live long, reaching only the age of thirteen.

The idea of the gift and of givenness is of particular moment in the case of Dee, and it lends his story a poignant relevance to our own age. Though Derrida doubts that the gift really exists or that a phenomenology of the gift is even possible, Marion maintains that the gift can exist as something received from God.¹³⁰ For Marion, “the gift can be received only if the recipient receives it as a gift, which means only if the ‘content’ comes to him in an indissolubly giving act; the gift demands not only of the giver but of the recipient as well to be received by a gift.”¹³¹ In naming the child Theodore, however, Dee both acknowledges and names himself, in the economy of his mysticism, as both “giver” and “recipient.” Therefore, there is no gift. And herein abides the fundamental tragedy of Dee’s experiment. Even after the cross-matching and his falling out with Kelly, Dee was still enthralled by his misperceived mystical object. He seems to have remained so, as he was still occupied with researches in scrying twenty years later.

¹³⁰ See Richard Kearney (moderator), “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 54 – 78.

¹³¹ Marion, *Idol and Distance*, 166.

CHAPTER TWO

A GLASS DARKLY: JOHN DONNE'S NEGATIVE APPROACH TO GOD

“I trust no text that is not in some way contaminated with negative theology, and even among those texts that apparently do not have, want, or believe they have any relation with theology in general. Negative theology is everywhere, but it is never by itself.” ~ Jacques Derrida¹

In John Donne's religious life we see how older Roman Catholic devotional traditions interacted with newer Catholic spiritualities encouraged after the Council of Trent, most notably the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola, and how both engaged in dialectic with nascent English Protestant devotional aesthetics, both Puritan and Anglican. The result was a spirituality unique to Donne: an outgrowth of his Catholic upbringing and the cultural context of English Protestantism, both of which figured into his struggle to find an authentic way to God. Donne was not a systematic theologian, but a poet and a preacher. His thought is not theologically dogmatic, but is inclined toward the intuitive, what Friedrich Schleiermacher called a “sense and taste for the Infinite.”² Donne distrusted human reason—a fact apparent in even his more secular work—and readily turned to faith when logic proved insufficient for exploring the mystery of God, an idea present in Christian thought from the earliest times. As he writes in *Essays in Divinity*, “By this faith, as by reason, I know, that God is all that which all men can say of all Good; I believe he is somewhat which no man can say nor know. For, *si scirem quid Deus esset, Deus essem*. For all acquired knowledg is by degrees, and successive; but God is impartible, and only faith which can receive it all at once, can comprehend him.”³ Even here, in words written

¹ Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 69.

² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), 39.

³ John Donne, *Essays in Divinity*, ed. Anthony Raspa (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 24 – 25.

prior to his ordination, Donne gives an example of how his “most consistent reasoning stems less from logic than from rhetoric and emotion.”⁴

But, ultimately, Donne’s religious aesthetic is grounded in humility, the acceptance of God’s unfathomable mystery and the human mind’s inability to comprehend it. Starting from this premise, Donne, in his religious writing and sermons, adapts the language of negative theology and Paul’s notion of seeing through a “glass darkly,” disclosing a religious sensibility that acknowledges God’s presence in Church, scripture, and sacraments, that is, in the lives of believers, while simultaneously deferring a permanent union with God to the Beatific Vision: an event which can only arrive with death. Before that time arrives, Donne absents himself from any kind of union with God divorced from the communion of believers present to the Mystical Body of Christ. Furthermore, he employs this religious ethos in his vocation as a pastor, reimagining medieval religion and, through this reimagination, guiding his congregation to what he believed was a secure manner of approaching God.

“Humility” is not a word that occurs very often in Donne criticism. In his study *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility*, Dennis Flynn expends considerable energy in meditation upon a portrait of the eighteen-year-old Donne: a young man staring at the viewer, hand on his sword hilt, and defiantly sporting a cross earring—the image of youthful swagger married to recusant defiance.⁵ Indeed, Donne’s early lyrics and satires, many of which were written with other young men affiliated with the Inns of Court in mind as an audience, have youthful swagger as their *leitmotif*. Nevertheless, as he matured, humility became an increasingly

⁴ Thomas O. Sloane, “Dr. Donne and the Image of Christ,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 209.

⁵ Dennis Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1–5.

important theological virtue for Donne, which has moved Katrin Ettenhuber to identify it as “a key stage on the return and ascent to God” in Donne’s work, a quality she believes was derived from his reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*.⁶

Donne believes that one should approach God in fear and trembling, while at the same time realizing that the desire for intimacy with God, especially through prayer and the sacraments, is intrinsic to Christianity. As he observes in *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, “Prayer is never *unseasonable*; *God* is never asleep nor absent. But, *O my God*, can I doe this, and *feare* thee; come to thee, and speak to thee, in all places, at all houres, and *feare* thee?”⁷ Donne also recognizes that apparent humility can also be a source of pride: “will not this look like a peece of art, & cunning, to convey into the world an opinion, that I were more particularly in [God’s] care then other men? And that herein, in a shew of *humilitie*, and *thankfulnesse*, I magnifie my selfe more then there is cause?”⁸ Donne knows that he is guilty of the sin of spiritual pride as much as anyone. Indeed, his position as a priest and preacher exposes him to just such a danger, as he confesses in the fifteenth prayer of the *Devotions*:

I have sinned *behind thy back* (if that can be done) by wilfull abstaining from thy *Congregations*, and omitting thy *service*, and I have sinned *before thy face*, in my *hypocrisies* in Prayer, in my *ostentation*, and the mingling a respect of *my selfe*, in preaching thy Word; I have sinned in my *fasting* by repining, when a penurious fortune hath kept mee low; And I have sinned even in that fulnesse, when I have been at thy table, by a negligent examination, by a wilfull prevarication, in receiving that heavenly *food* and *Physicke*.⁹

⁶ Katrin Ettenhuber, *Donne’s Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112.

⁷ John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

Donne was suspicious of shows of humility, as he preached once using the apparent humility of mendicant orders as an example, saying “There is pride in such humility.”¹⁰ From his years as a Catholic hyperaware of the examination of conscience necessary prior to receiving the Eucharist and as an Anglican priest charged with the *cura animarum*, the care of souls, Donne was fully cognizant of the spiritual danger he exposed himself to in his “wilfull prevarication” at the Communion Table. The Book of Common Prayer, to be sure, mindful of Paul’s admonishment in 1 Corinthians 11:27,¹¹ warns of the ways in which reception of the Eucharist could be “so dangerous to them that will presume to receive it unworthily.”¹² Donne was extraordinarily sensitive to the ways he might hide his own motivations from himself.

Donne first wrote of humility as a prime theological virtue necessary to a relationship with God in the opening paragraph of *Essayes in Divinity*, probably composed in 1614/15¹³:

Discite à me, sayes our blessed Saviour, *Learn of me*, as Saint Augustine enlarges it well, not to do Miracles, nor works exceeding humanity; but, *quia mitis sum*; learn to be humble. His humility, to be like us, was a Dejection; but ours, to be like him, is our chiefest exaltation; and yet none other is required at our hands. Where this Humility is, *ibi Sapientia*. Therefore it is not such a groveling, frozen, and stupid Humility, as should quench the activity of our understanding, or make us neglect the Search of those Secrets of God, which are accessible. For Humility and Studiousnesse, (as it is opposed to curiosity, and transgresses not her bounds) are so near of kin, that they are both agreed to be limbes and members of one vertue, *Temperance*.¹⁴

What this passages discloses, even more than Donne’s appreciation for Augustine, is his ethos for approaching God. He is not interested in miraculous or visionary phenomena as supports for his faith, though he knows that God has elected to bestow these gifts on some, such as the

¹⁰ *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953 – 62), 2:298. Hereafter in text.

¹¹ “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” Authorized Version.

¹² *The Book of Common Prayer: The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, ed. John E. Booty (Washington, D.C.: Folger Books, 1976), 256.

¹³ Anthony Raspa dates the *Essayes* from 1614 (Introduction to Donne, *Essayes*, xvi), in general agreement with Evelyn Simpson who argues for “the end of 1614 or the beginning of 1615.” Donne, *Essays in Divinity*, ed. Simpson (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), ix.

¹⁴ Donne, *Essayes*, 7 – 8.

prophet Daniel and the apostle Paul. For most, these gifts, “exceeding humanity” as they do, are in danger of becoming idols: things which capture the gaze and may actually be obstructions to communion with God. They can also be objects of pride, as he writes,

It is then humility to study God, and a strange miraculous one; for it is an ascending humility, which the Devil, which emulates even Gods excellency in his goodnesse, and labours to be as ill, as he is good, hath corrupted in us by a pride, as much against reason; for he hath fill'd us with a descending pride, to forsake God, for the study and love of things worse then our selves. This averts us from the Contemplation of God, and his Book.¹⁵

Clearly, then, Donne does not want anything to obstruct the contemplation of God: especially false understandings of what God is.

Because visions or apparitions might distract believers from the contemplation of God, Donne distrusted accounts of visionary mysticism.¹⁶ Donne opens *Ignatius His Conclave*, his satirical attack on the Jesuits, with a merciless lampoon of this variety of mystical experience.

The narrator, a visionary himself, tells us,

I will relate what I saw, I was in *Extasie*, and *My little wandring sportful Soule, Ghest, and Companion of my body* had liberty to wander through all places, and to suruey and reckon all the rooms, and all the volumes of the heauens, and to comprehend the situation, the dimensions, the nature, the people, and the policy, both of the swimming Ilands, the *Planets*, and of all those which are fixed in the firmament.¹⁷

Donne's skeptical attitude toward visionary phenomena was not a result of a materialistic point of view but of a religious pragmatism. Visions and apparitions do not necessarily strengthen faith and they are in danger of drawing too much attention to the vision or the visionary at the expense of charity and God. As he says in a sermon, “So howsoever these Revelations and Inspirations seem to fall upon us from heaven, they arise from the earth, from our selves, from our own

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶ Arthur F. Marotti, “Donne and ‘The Extasie,’” in *The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry, From Wyatt to Milton*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane and Raymond B. Waddington (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), at 154, suggests that Donne throughout much of his work is “explicitly rejecting the inflated claims for ecstasy he associates with Catholic mysticism.”

¹⁷ John Donne, *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), 2.

melancholy, and *pride*, or our too much *homeliness* and familiarity in our accesses, and conversation with God, or a *facility* in beleeving, or an often *dreaming* the same thing” (2:145). Donne’s contemporary Robert Burton argues that the tendency toward such absurdity is inherent to monastic and eremitic life that “puts solitarinesse a main cause of such spectrums and apparitions, none...so melancholy as Monkes and Hermites.”¹⁸ Like Burton, Donne was informed by the polemical discourses that arose during the Reformation—and like them he also lays the blame on Rome: “And with these Dewes of Apparitions and Revelations, did the *Romane Church* make our fathers drunk and giddy” (2:145), though he does not seem to have held the monastic vocation at the same level of contempt as many Protestants did.¹⁹ He continues his attack on visionary mysticism in *Ignatius*, and, as one would expect of the man who wrote “The Flea,” it is acerbic, witty, and merciless:

In the twinckling of an eye, I saw all the rooms in Hell open to my sight. And by the benefit of certain spectacles, I know not of what making, but, I thinke, of the same, by which *Gregory* the great, and *Beda* did discern so distinctly the soules of their friends, when they were discharged from their bodies, and sometimes the soules of such men as they knew not by sight, and of some that were neuer in the world, and yet they could distinguish them flying into Heauen, or conuersing with living men, I saw all the channels in the bowels of the Earth; and all the inhabitants of all nations, and of all ages were suddenly made familiar to me.²⁰

As Evelyn Simpson has pointed out, in his sermons Donne tried to steer his congregation away from revelatory devotional works, such as the popular *Revelations of St. Bridget*, which he called “A book of so much blasphemy, and impertinency, and incredibility, that if a Heathen were to be converted, he would sooner be brought to believe *Ovids Metamorphoses*, then *Brigids*

¹⁸ Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1633), Part. 3, Sect. 4, Memb 1, Subs. 3 (page 656).

¹⁹ See, for example, Donne’s discussion “Of religious Orders” in *Essayes*, 70 – 71.

²⁰ Donne, *Ignatius His Conclave*, 4 – 5. Raymond-Jean Frontain recognizes Dante as the subject of Donne’s ridicule. See his “Donne’s Protestant *Paradiso*: The Johannine Vision of the *Second Anniversary*” in *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation: New Perspectives*, ed. Mary Arshagouni Papazian (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 132.

Revelations, to conduce to Religion” (2:146).²¹ For Donne, visionary mysticism and the possibility of temptation to spiritual pride attendant to it was clearly too dangerous an avenue to explore, whether as a reader of these works or, God forbid, as a visionary.

Visions were not merely hypothetical phenomena for Donne, nor, of course, for his age. Despite the advent of the Reformation and extreme Protestantism’s distrust of visionary phenomena, the beholding of ostensibly religious visions and the appearances of apparitions persisted throughout the early modern period in Protestant as well as in more expected Catholic cultural contexts.²² According to his first biographer, Izaak Walton, even Donne experienced at least one vision in his lifetime. This reportedly occurred while Donne was engaged in a diplomatic mission to Paris during the spring of 1611 while in the train of Sir Robert Drury. At the time of his departure from England, Donne’s wife Ann was far gone with child in what had been a difficult pregnancy. In Paris one day, after having left Donne only half an hour earlier, Drury returned to find “Mr. *Donne* alone; but in such an Extasie, and so alter’d as to his looks, as amaz’d Sir *Robert* to behold him.”²³ When Drury asked Donne to tell him what had happened, he received an account that has become a part of Donne legend: “*I have seen a dreadful Vision since I saw you: I have seen my dear wife pass twice by me through this room, with her hair hanging about her shoulders, and a dead child in her arms: this, I have seen since I saw you.*”²⁴

²¹ Evelyn M. Simpson, *Study of the Prose Works of John Donne*, 2nd edition, 95. *Briget’s Revelations* were available in print, at least partially, from 1531 in an edition by Thomas Godfray, when they appeared packaged with Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Golden Epistle*. See *Hereafter foloweth an Epistle of saynt Bernarde called the golden epistle, whiche he sent to a yong religious man whom he moche loued ... it is translated out of latyn in to Englysshe, ... Than after the sayd epistle folowe four reuelations of saynt Birget* (London, 1531).

²² Helen Parish and William G. Naphy, Introduction to *Religion and Superstition in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Parish and Naphy, *Studies in Early Modern European History* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 18.

²³ Izaak Walton, *The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert*, 4th edition (London, 1675), 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30. Emphasis in source.

Ann Donne did, indeed, lose a child at around this time, and, as Walton comments, “This is a relation that will beget some wonder.”²⁵

But Walton’s intentions were not merely descriptive (the anecdote only appears in the 1675 edition of Walton and is conspicuously absent from his 1640 and 1670 versions of Donne’s life). As we have seen with Casaubon, Walton was also addressing late-seventeenth-century skepticism about the supernatural in general, “for, most of our world are at present possess with an opinion that *Visions* and *Miracles* are ceas’d.”²⁶ Though R. C. Bald declares the story “riddled with inaccuracies,” he still believes it may have some basis in truth.²⁷ John Carey, on the other hand, interprets the tale as evidence of Donne’s psychic eruption of guilt over leaving his ailing wife.²⁸ Evidence exists that corroborates Carey’s diagnosis in a letter Donne wrote to Sir Henry Goodyer at about the same time as the apparition: “However, I am yet in the same perplexity, which I mentioned before; which is, that I have received no syllable, neither from her self, nor by any other, how my wife hath passed her danger, nor do I know whether I be increased by a childe, or diminished by a wife.”²⁹ Though Walton’s account can only be accepted with caution, it is, on the one hand, at the very least symptomatic of Donne’s growing reputation in the seventeenth century as a particularly spiritually sensitive divine, “a second St. *Austine*.”³⁰ On the other hand, while the apparition of his wife is not “technically” a “mystical vision,” it does suggest that Donne might have accepted the possibility of preternatural phenomena that could attest to truth, an affirmation that we do not typically see in the sermons’ condemnation of visionary mystical experiences.

²⁵ Ibid., 30.

²⁶ Ibid., 30 – 31.

²⁷ R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 252 – 53.

²⁸ John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 85.

²⁹ John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651), 74.

³⁰ Walton, *Lives*, 38.

In his religious life, though, Donne recuses himself from the direct experience of God exemplified in the writings and lives of, for example, the prophet Daniel and the apostle Paul, as well as that described in the works of his near contemporary, Teresa of Avila. Surely, if God were to bestow such a gift on him, he would not reject it. But neither would he seek it. Donne regarded his vocation to the priesthood as gift enough.³¹ As he attests in a sermon preached 1 April 1627, Donne prefers a more modest approach to the Divine:

'Tis true, that God is said to have come to Eliah in that still small voice, and not in the strong wind, not in the Earth-quake, not in the fire. So God says, Sibilabo populum meum, I will but hisse, I will but whisper for my people, and gather them so. So Christ tells us things in darknesse; And so Christ speakes to us in our Ear; And these low voices, and holy whisperings, and halfe-silences, denote to us, the inspirations of his Spirit, as his Spirit beares witnessse with our Spirit; as the Holy Ghost insinuates himself into our soules, and works upon us so, by his private motions. (7:396)

God's working in the soul of believers, for Donne, is surely not a rarefied event, but it is not generally accompanied by theatrical fanfare and special effects. In most cases it transpires, instead, by "his *private motions*." This movement is, for Donne, the safest of "the spiritual senses," the ways believers can come to know God, what has been called "a form of spiritual, even mystical, *aesthesis*, a perception (*percipere*) or sensation (*sentire*) of the manifestations of the divine nature."³² The "private motions" are all the believing Christian needs to worry about in the individual commerce with God. To aspire to anything more inclines toward spiritual pride.

Donne, once ordained, took his responsibilities as a pastor with the utmost seriousness, and, as a result of his dedication to the *cura animarum*, his spirituality emphasized the communal aspects of religion over the more personal elements that would incline to private revelation and prophecy. This religious commitment was in keeping with the earliest expressions of Christian

³¹ William R. Mueller, *John Donne: Preacher* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 49.

³² Boyd Taylor Coolman, *Knowing God by Experience: The Spiritual Senses in the Theology of William of Auxerre* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 4. For further discussion of the spiritual senses see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Volume I: Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio, SJ and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 365 – 428.

spirituality, which, likewise, was “inherently mutual, communal, practical and oriented towards the God who makes self known precisely in the ... pattern of life called the church.”³³ Donne, indeed, criticized monasticism for ignoring the *cura animarum*, arguing that monks “prefer their Monasticall life before all other secular callings, yea, before those Priests, whom they call *Secular Priests*, such as have care of souls, in particular parishes, (as though it were a Diminution, and an inferiour state to have *care of souls*, and study and labour the salvation of others)” (*Sermons*, 3:169). The communitarian religious expression Donne upholds here was also characteristic of the English Catholic Church prior to the Reformation—as were criticisms of monastic life.³⁴

Donne’s emphasis on the communal dimensions of spirituality was an expression of his vision of the Church, as he wrote in the *Devotions*: “The Church is *Catholike, universall*, so are all her *Actions*; All that she does, belongs to *all*. When she *baptizes a child*, that action concernes mee; for that child is thereby connected to that *Head* which is my *Head* too, and engrafted into that *body*, whereof I am a *member*.”³⁵ He professed much the same idea ten years earlier in the *Essayes* where he writes of “this great patriarchal Catholick Church, of which every one of us is a little chappel.”³⁶ In general, Donne had a magnanimous understanding of Christianity that looked beyond factions and tried to accommodate a variety of ways for believers to find God. He confides as much in a letter to Goodyer,

You know I never fettered nor imprisoned the word Religion; not straightening it Frierly, *ad Religiones factitatis*, (as the *Romans* well call their orders of Religion) nor immuring it in a *Rome*, or a *Wittemberg*, or a *Geneva*; they are all virtuall beames of one Sun, and wheresoever they finde clay hearts, they harden them, and moulder them into dust; and

³³ Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 7.

³⁴ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 2007), 440; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400 – 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), especially the chapter entitled “Corporate Christians.” Taylor also points out how the Protestant emphasis on private devotion complicated the notion of “church” in the post-Reformation period.

³⁵ Donne, *Devotions*, 86.

³⁶ Donne, *Essayes*, 47.

they entender and mollifie waxen. They are not so contrary as the North and South Poles; and that they are connaturall pieces of one circle. Religion is Christianity, which being too spirituall to be seen by us, doth therefore take an apparent body of good life and works, so salvation requires an honest Christian.³⁷

Donne's spirituality can only be understood as imbued by his understanding of Church: as reflected in a communion of believers organized into a parish, as visible in the greater body of the *ecclesia*, and as mystically present in the Body of Christ. And he defines it as such:

...to see this scene, this Court, this Church, this Catholique Church, not onely *Easterne* and *Westerne*, but *Militant* and *Triumphant* Church, all in one roome together, to see this *Communion of Saints*, this fellowship of the faithfull, is worth all the paynes, that that sight costs us in this world. (*Sermons*, 4:176 – 77)

His understanding of Church, then, was not a matter of doctrine and ritual. Rather, it was based on his intuition concerning the way believers were present to God and to each other in a mystical sense. Perhaps it is because of this broad vision of Christianity that it has often been suggested that Donne might be called a mystic. His discourse, even as early as the satires, is never far from considerations of God and religion and he seems always to have been interested in the rhetorical modes of mysticism, so it is not surprising that the question has been raised. But, as critics have discovered, such a label is not without its problems.³⁸

³⁷ Donne, *Letters*, 29.

³⁸ In early twentieth-century scholarship, the tendency was to associate Donne and other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century metaphysical poets—Southwell, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Traherne—with mysticism and, often, to categorize their poetry as “mystical.” This was no doubt due to Evelyn Underhill’s influential study *Mysticism* (1911) and her inclusion of poets such as Henry Vaughan, George Herbert, and William Blake in her pantheon of mystics. In part influenced by this trend, in *Les Doctrines Médiévales chez Donne, le Poète Métaphysicien de l’Angleterre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917), Mary Paton Ramsay made a case for Donne as a mystic, but asked readers to refrain from the temptation to consider him as a mystic in the way that Teresa of Avila or Ignatius Loyola were mystics. “Donne n’est pas attiré par un mysticisme extrême,” she writes: he is not attracted by an extreme mysticism” (263). Itrat Husain followed Underhill and Ramsay in his two studies, *The Dogmatic and Mystical Theology of John Donne* (New York: Macmillan Company – Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1938) and *The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1948). For Husain, Donne “is interested in the practical, religious and empirical side of mysticism, the attainment of personal holiness, illumination, through the adoration of Christ, His Passion and Crucifixion” (*Dogmatic and Mystical Theology*, xiv).

The criticism tended to be of two minds about Donne and mysticism, and so were some of the critics. In the first edition of her *Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), Evelyn Simpson characterized Donne as a mystic, arguing that the poet and preacher’s “mysticism cannot be isolated from the rest of his thought; for his whole philosophy is that of a Christian mystic reared in the Neo-Platonic tradition which the

If any of Donne's writing bears a resemblance to anything that could be called mysticism, it is to the variety of mystical writing that arose from traditions of spiritual direction, such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the work of Walter Hilton, Thomas à Kempis, John of the Cross, and Donne's Catholic contemporary and countryman Dom Augustine Baker. These works do not emphasize visions: on the contrary, they discourage them. Indeed, these texts might better be described as manuals of spiritual psychology—and not as “mysticism”—as they attend to the development of one's prayer life and the work of drawing closer to God along with warnings of the psychological and spiritual pitfalls that may befall meditants along the way toward contemplation. In his sermons, as well as in the *Devotions* and in many of his letters, this is the tradition from which Donne draws. What is different is that his discourse arises out of his position as an Anglican pastor, speaking and writing for, primarily, a Protestant laity.³⁹ Hilton, the *Cloud* author, Thomas à Kempis, John of the Cross, and Baker, on the other hand, wrote for those in religious life, living in the contexts of the monastery or the anchorage.

Donne was more than familiar with the traditions of mystical writing that had come down to him, and he was especially fond of Augustine, Dionysius, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bonaventure: but he would not have thought of himself as a mystic. His faith was characterized by more modest ambitions. He was content with his private devotions, his participation in the life of the Church, and his vocation as a pastor and preacher, but he did not desire the favor of

scholastic writers of the Middle Ages had inherited” (97). Michael Francis Moloney categorically rejected this assessment in *John Donne: His Flight from Mediaevalism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1944). As a result of this and other such criticism, in 1948 with publication of the second edition of her *Study of the Prose Works* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1948), Simpson retracted this statement and apologized for it, stating in a note that “In the first edition of this study I used the term ‘mystic’ too loosely in my account of Donne's spiritual experience.” In the intervening twenty-four years she had decided that Donne could not be considered a mystic “in the technical sense of the term” (92). Simpson's about-face is representative of a movement in critical thought that persisted and grew in Donne studies through the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, and her self-correction surely raises the question of whether there *is* a technical sense of the term. It is not at all clear that there is.

³⁹ It was always a possibility that crypto-Catholics would be in attendance, as Donne surely knew from his own experience.

private revelation and special intimacy with God that he would have encountered in the writing of Bridget of Sweden or Teresa of Avila. Instead, he accepted the lot of the vast numbers of believers who work out their salvation in the world as it is, who hear the still, small voice upon occasion but who look forward to the everlasting encounter with God that only arrives with death. As he wrote in *Devotions*, “I can have no greater argument of thy *mercy*, then to die in *thee*, and by that death, to bee united to him, who died for me.”⁴⁰ For Donne, then, mysticism’s promise of union with God is postponed, deferred to a safer and more acceptable time. In the meanwhile, he is content to live with aporia. As he knew from Paul, “now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor 13:12). Donne based his relationship with God on the idea expressed in these words and, as a pastor, he encouraged his congregation to trust in their promise.⁴¹ He wagered both his and their salvation on it.

“I will open darke sayings upon my Harpe”: Donne and Negative Theology

As can be seen with his allusions to mysticism (whether disparaging or approving) in the early prose works and sermons as well as with his employment of mystical elements in the poetry (whether amorous or religious), Donne was clearly adept at appropriating the rhetorical conventions of mystical writing.⁴² Gary Kuchar, for one, has recognized Donne’s uses of “the periphrastic motions of negative theology” in some of the poetry, a charge hard to deny.⁴³

⁴⁰ Donne, *Devotions*, 40.

⁴¹ Brent Nelson rightly believes Donne’s intention was “to *move* his audience to greater devotion” (Nelson’s emphasis). See Brent Nelson, “*Pathopoeia* and the Protestant Form of Donne’s *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*,” in *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation: New Perspectives*, ed. Mary Arshagouni Papazian (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 249.

⁴² See, for instance, Jennifer L. Nichols, “Dionysian Negative Theology in Donne’s ‘Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day,’” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 53, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 352 – 67.

⁴³ Particularly in the poem “Negative Love.” See Gary Kuchar, “Petraichism and Repentance in Donne’s *Holy Sonnets*,” *Modern Philology* 105, no. 3 (February 2008): 545.

Though he toyed with these conventions in the earlier verse, often by way of parody, after his ordination these conventions took on a very different coloring.

All mystical writing, it could be argued, is not written for the benefit of the mystic, but for the spiritual edification of readers.⁴⁴ Teresa of Avila, for example, never intended to record her visions and only did so at the instigation of her confessor.⁴⁵ As a spiritual director, Augustine Baker collected manuscripts of a number of important mystical treatises, including those by Julian of Norwich and Walter Hilton, in order to provide the nuns under his care with exemplary models of English mysticism.⁴⁶ As he wrote when requesting the loan of some of Sir Robert Cotton's medieval manuscripts—Julian, Hilton, the *Cloud*, and Richard Rolle among them—“there were manie good English bookes in olde time.”⁴⁷ Mysticism as an object of study, in this context, bears important pastoral applications for Baker. Donne, too, was aware of its efficacy as a pastoral tool, but rather than point his congregation to mystical texts to read on their own, he employed some of the rhetorical conventions of mystical writing toward pedagogical ends in the *cura animarum* implicit in Protestant preaching.

Donne the preacher occasionally utilized the features of mystical discourse (apophasis, paradox, aporia) while avoiding the more sensational aspects of visionary works in order to provide his readers and auditors with imaginative access into a life in God. As Maria Salenius has argued, “The metaphysical and mystical interests of Donne as a poet are clearly reflected in

⁴⁴ This is precisely Don Cupitt's thesis in *Mysticism after Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

⁴⁵ See Teresa's Prologue to her *Life* in *Complete Works*, 1: 9

⁴⁶ Elizabeth M. Dutton, *Julian of Norwich: The Influence of Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 13; Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Shewings, Part 1*, ed. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), 9; T. A. Birrell, “English Catholic Mystics in Non-Catholic Circles, I” *Downside Review* 94 (1976): 60 – 63.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Jennifer Summit, “From Anchorhold to Closet: Julian of Norwich in 1670 and the Immanence of the Past,” in *Julian of Norwich's Legacy: Medieval Mysticism and Post-Reformation Reception*, ed. Sarah Salih and Denise N. Baker (New York: Palgrave: Macmillan, 2009), 31.

his preaching.”⁴⁸ In his invocation of this variety of mystical discourse—and in his suspicions about visionary mysticism—Donne shows himself to stand firmly in the modest tradition of medieval English mysticism characterized by Hilton and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Hilton, in fact, in an approach to spiritual direction Baker would later take up, cautions his charges to avoid visionary phenomena and hold instead to the more modest path of contemplation, because “in vertues and in knowynge of God with love is noo disceit” whereas visions “moun be bothe good and yvel.”⁴⁹ Such a religious commitment has much in common with Donne’s spirituality. This English tradition was founded in the apophatic mysticism of Dionysius. Indeed, the author of the *Cloud*, in addition to his own well-known mystical treatise, was also responsible for a fourteenth-century Middle English translation of Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology*, entitled *Deonise Hid Divinité*.⁵⁰ Donne’s religious aesthetic possesses an affinity with Dionysius’ apophatic theology. R. V. Young has suggested that Donne was reluctant to commit himself to extreme religious positions and entered the Church of England precisely due to its theological ambiguity,⁵¹ and, in much the same way, Donne was attracted to negative theology as a form of religious commitment reluctant to engage in absolutist claims. Donne, through his poetic gifts applied to preaching, his lifelong fascination with paradox (evident as early as the *Juvenilia: Or Certaine paradoxes or problemes*)⁵², and his ability to live with aporia, approached his pastoral duties in such a way that discloses his appreciation for mystical writing, especially in its expressions of

⁴⁸ Maria Salenius, *The Dean and His God: John Donne’s Concept of the Divine* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1998), 14.

⁴⁹ Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Thomas H. Besul (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS-Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 40.

⁵⁰ Patrick J. Gallacher, Introduction, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS-Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 4.

⁵¹ Young, *Doctrine and Devotion*, 32.

⁵² First published in 1633, but probably from the late 1590s and the first decade of the seventeenth century. See Bald, *Life*, 200.

negative theology, as well as his own religious intuitions: intuitions generally ignored by Donne scholarship.

Donne was well-schooled in traditional Christian understandings of the ways God can be known. He elucidates these in a sermon preached on Easter of 1628, with 1 Corinthians 13:12 (“For now we see through a glass, darkly: but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known”) as his text:

The Schoole does ordinarily designe foure ways of knowing God; and they make the first of these foure waies, to be by faith; but then, by faith they meane no more but an assent, that there is a God; which is but that, which in our former Considerations we called The seeing of God; and that which indeed needs not faith; for the light of Nature will serve for that, to see God so. They make their second way Contemplation, that is, An union of God in this life; which is truly the same thing that we meane by Faith: for we do not call an assent to the Gospell, faith, but faith is the application of the Gospell to our selves; not an assent that Christ dyed, but an assurance that Christ dyed for all. Their third way of knowing God is by Apparition; as when God appeared to the Patriarchs and others in fire, in Angels, or otherwise; And their fourth way is *per apertam visionem*, by his cleare manifestation of himself in heaven.

Their first way, by assenting only, and their third way of apparition, are weak and uncertain wayes. The other two, present Faith, and the future Vision, are safe wayes, but admit this difference, That of the future Vision, is *gratiæ consumantis*, such a knowledge of God, as when it is once had can never be lost or diminished, But knowledge by faith in this world, is *Gratiæ communis*, it is an effect and fruit of that Grace which God shed upon the whole communion of Saints, that is, upon all those who in this Academy, the Church, do embrace the *Medium*, that is, the Ordinances of the Church; And his knowledge of God, by this faith, may be diminished, and increased; for it is but *In ænigmate*, says our Text, *darkly*, obscurely; Clearly in respect of the naturall man, but yet but obscurely in respect of that knowledge of God which we shall have in heaven; for, says the Apostle, *As long as we walk by faith, and not by sight, we are absent from the Lord* [2 Cor 5:6]. Faith is a blessed presence, but compared with heavenly vision, it is but an absence; though it create and constitute in us a possibility, a probability, a kinde of certainty of salvation, yet that faith, which the best Christian hath, as that sight of God which I shall have in heaven, is above that faith which we have now in the highest exaltation. Therefore there belongs a consideration to that which is added by our Apostle here, That the knowledge which I have of God here (even by faith, though through the ordinances of the Church) is but a knowledge in part. *Now I know in part.* (8:228 – 29)

Here again we see here the distrust of apparitions Donne exhibits in *Ignatius*. Assenting, too, the simple acknowledgment of God’s existence, is seen to be on the same scale with apparitions:

both, in Donne's opinion, are uncertain. The two experiences of God that Donne places his trust in are *faith*, that quality upon which the Christian can rely in the present, and the *future vision*, that *once had can never be lost or diminished*. These are the two polarities characteristic of Donne's encounter with God: the dark glass of faith in the present and the promised vision of the face-to-face encounter. Faith is nourished in the Church: the vision of God takes place between God and the believer at the appointed hour.

Donne's religious intuition is anchored in humility which connects it with the Dionysian tradition of English mysticism harkening back to Hilton and *The Cloud*. He is not given to delusions of grandeur (as we saw with Dee), but, abandoning what he takes to be the contingent assurances of rationality, he gives himself to the assurances of faith, even though he knows they cannot be absolute this side of death. In the Easter sermon from 1628, he most directly articulates this religious ethos. Here Donne, following Paul, acknowledges the limits of human knowledge when confronted with the mystery of knowing God:

Faith is infinitely above nature, infinitely above works, even above those works which faith it selfe produces, as parents are to children, and the tree to the fruit: But yet faith is as much below vision, and seeing God face to face. And therefore, though we ascribe willingly to faith, more then we can expresse, yet let no man think himself so infallibly safe, because he finds that he believes in God, as he shall be when he sees God; The faithfulest man in the Church must say, *Domine adauge, Lord increase my faith*; He that is least in the kingdome of heaven, shal never be put to that. All the world is a *Speculum*, a glasse, in which we see God; The Church it self, and that which the Ordinance of the Church begets in us, faith it self, is but *ænigma*, a dark representation of God to us, till we come to that state, *To see God face to face, and to know, as also we are known*. (8:230)

As Donne surely must have realized in the period of religious debate he underwent prior to his abandonment of Roman Catholicism for the Anglican Church, rational arguments incline but they do not compel when it comes to religious conviction. As he writes in *Essayes in Divinity*, "we are not under the insinuations and mollifyings of perswasion, and conveniency; nor under the reach and violence of Argument, or Demonstration, or Necessity; but under the Spirituall,

and peaceable Tyranny, and easie yoke of sudden and present Faith.”⁵³ The *ænigma*, then, as well as the world and the Church for Donne, become signifiers pointing to the promised vision of God, obliging him “to welcome the distance of infinite depth.”⁵⁴ Donne’s meditations on death are not morbid (as they are so often described)⁵⁵ for they are really anticipations of the encounter with God, as he writes in the *Devotions*:

*Let this praier therefore, O my God, be as my last gaspe, my expiring, my dying in thee; That if this bee the houre of my transmigration, I may die the death of a sinner, drowned in my sinnes, in the bloude of thy Sonne; and if I live longer, yet I may now die the death of the righteous, die to sinne; which death is a resurrection to a new life. Thou killest and thou givest life: which soever comes, it comes from thee; which way soever it comes, let mee come to thee.*⁵⁶

To recognize the “saturated nature” of the *ænigma*, the “undoing of knowledge”⁵⁷ which obscurely reveals God in the present and simultaneously points to the promised vision of God, is to already be involved in God.

Upon occasion, Donne employs some of the language of mysticism in his preaching more directly. In a sermon preached on Trinity Sunday in 1627, Donne takes Revelation 4:8 as his text: “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” This verse, as well as the entire book from which it comes, invites mystical interpretation, as Donne remarks: “That nothing is more ordinary in the Book of Revelation, then by a certaine and finite number, to designe and signifie an uncertaine and infinite” (8:40). There are some mysteries, for Donne, which the human mind cannot hope to comprehend: “He that seeks profe for every mystery of Religion, shall meet with much

⁵³ Donne, *Essayes*, 19.

⁵⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 24.

⁵⁵ For discussion on this see Deborah A. Larson, *John Donne and Twentieth-Century Criticism* (London: Associated University Press, 1989), 154 – 56.

⁵⁶ Donne, *Devotions*, 85.

⁵⁷ Marion, *In Excess*, 160.

darknesse; but he that believes first, shall finde every thing to illustrate his faith” (8:40). Donne upholds this model for the ordinary Christian believer, for one, because he finds it in the writers of the Gospels: “The Euangelists themselves, and they that ground their doctrine upon them, ... have not seene all that belongs to the nature and essence of God, not all in the attributes and properties of God, not all in the decrees and purposes of God, no, not all in the execution of those purposes and decrees” (8:47). Furthermore, for all believers, as the model of the Evangelists shows, to dwell in God is to dwell in mystery:

we do not know all that God intends to do; we do not know all that God intends in that which he hath done. Our faces are covered from having seene the manner of the eternall generation of the Sonne, or of the eternall proceeding of the Holy Ghost, or the manner of the presence of Christ in the Sacrament. The ministers of God are so far open-faced towards you, as that you may know them, and try them by due meanes to be such; and so far open-faced towards God, as that they have seene in him and received from him, all things necessary for the salvation of your soules; But yet, their faces are covered too; some things concerning God, they have not seene themselves, nor should goe about to reveale, or teach to you. (8:47)

Donne here figures the modesty he saw fit for approaching God. Implicit in the passage is the need to refrain from prying into the secrets of God, since all have their faces covered to some degree. He also discloses his own humility in regards to the possibility of his own religious experiences. That is, he would never bring them into public view, even if he had had them, since “some things concerning God, they have not seene themselves, nor should goe about to reveale, or teach you.” Nowhere in Donne’s private correspondence does he give evidence of a private religious experience, and even the apocryphal tale of his wife’s apparition only comes to us at secondhand. Donne, due to his ethic of humility, would not have advertised his intimate experiences of God (if they existed) in any public forum. Rather, he trusted in the *mysterion* and tried to avoid reaching his hand into the fire. Throughout this sermon (and in others) Donne clearly shows the influence of the mystics Nicholas of Cusa and Dionysius, both of whom

Rosalie Colie identifies as important figures in “the tradition of paradox,”⁵⁸ into which she also places Donne.

Nicholas of Cusa (1401 – 1464) was a German priest (eventually cardinal) and polymath whose work is noted for “combining mystical and linguistic with technical theological approaches,”⁵⁹ certainly qualities attractive to Donne. Cusa’s doctrine of *docta ignorantia* held that believers come to a state of knowledge of God which manifests in “embracing incomprehensibles incomprehensibly in learned ignorance.”⁶⁰ Donne refers to the *docta ignorantia* explicitly in a Whitsunday sermon (possibly from 1630) on a text from John: “At that day shall ye know, that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14:20). Here Donne distinguishes between “a learned ignorance, which is a modest, and a reverent abstinence from searching into those secrets which God hath not revealed in his word” and the “ignorant knowledge, which puffes, and swells us up: that of which the Prophet says, *Stultus factus est omnis homo, à scientia*; Every mans knowledge makes him a foole” (9:234). Donne preaches on what is a cornerstone of his faith: since God cannot be understood in full, the believer must abandon himself to the mysteries of faith, scripture, the sacraments, and the Church. “So is it for a Christian to enjoy the working of Gods grace,” he says, “in a faithfull beleiving the mysteries of Religion, though he inquire not into Gods bed-chamber, nor seek into his unrevealed Decrees” (9:246). For Donne, seeking to apprehend the mysteries of “Gods bed-chamber” is nothing but vanity and evidence of spiritual pride. He writes as much in the *Essayes*: “though all our soules have interest in this their common pasture, the book of life, (for even the ignorant are bid to

⁵⁸ Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 25.

⁵⁹ Blum, *Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance*, 27.

⁶⁰ Quoted in H. Lawrence Bond, “Nicholas of Cusa from Constantinople to ‘Learned Ignorance’: The Historical Matrix for the Formation of the *De Docta Ignorantia*,” in *Nicholas of Cusa on Christ and the Church: Essays in Memory of Chandler McCuskey Brooks for the American Cusanus Society*, ed. Gerald Christianson, Thomas M. Izbicki (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 136.

read;) yet the Church has wisely hedged us in so farr, that all men may know, and cultivate, and manure their own part, and not adventure upon great reserv'd mysteries, nor trespass upon this book, without inward humility.”⁶¹ In the Whitsunday sermon he points to Roman Catholic prying into the Real Presence as it manifested in the dogma of Transubstantiation as evidence of this kind of pride: “When the Church fell upon the *Quomodo* in the Sacrament, How, in what manner the body of Christ was there, we see what an inconvenient answer it fell upon, That it was done by Transubstantiation; That satisfied not, (as there was no reason it should) And then they fell upon others, *In, Sub, and Cum*, and none could, none can give satisfaction” (9:246). Instead, he tells his congregation, “*Servate depositum*, Make much of that knowledge which the holy Ghost hath trusted you withal, and beleve the rest” (9:246 – 47). He had explored the same theological territory earlier in the *Essayes*, and extended his criticisms to Protestant understandings of the Real Presence, writing “Almost all the ruptures in the Christian Church have been occasioned by such bold disputations *De Modo*. One example is too much. That our Blessed Saviours body is in the Sacrament, all say; The *Roman* Church appoints it to be there by *Transubstantiation*. The needless multiplying of Miracles for that opinion hath moved the *French* and *Helvetick* reformed Churches to find the word Sacramentally; which because it puts the body there, and yet no nearer then Heaven to Earth, seems to riddle the *Saxon* and such Churches; whose modesty (though not clearness) seems greatest in this Point.”⁶² Donne preferred modesty to clarity when it came to religious mysteries. The *mysterion* should be enough. Accepting this condition of learned ignorance, the Christian is then able to approach a relationship of reciprocity with God through Christ:

As our flesh is in him, by his participation thereof, so his flesh is in us, by our communication thereof; And so is his divinity in us, by making us partakers of his divine

⁶¹ Donne, *Essayes*, 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 95.

nature, and by making us one spirit with himself, which he doth at Pentecost, that is, whensoever the holy Ghost visits us with his effectuall grace: for this is an union, in which, Christ in his purpose hath married himself to our souls, inseperably, and *Sine solution vinculi*, Without any intention of divorce on his part. (9:248)

The thought of Dionysius bears an even stronger presence in Donne's work.

The revivification of interest in the mystical writing attributed to the figure known as Dionysius the Areopagite began as a particularly important theological and cultural moment in twelfth-century Western Europe, and this enthusiasm remained a feature of Western theology through the Renaissance and into the modern and postmodern eras.⁶³ McGinn asserts that the Areopagite's importance resides in the way his writing enabled later mystics to find "principles by which their lives and experiences could be understood both as expressions of and as essential to the divinizing action of the church's life."⁶⁴ Originally, these works of apophatic theology were attributed to a disciple of Paul (mentioned briefly in Acts 17:34), but they are now generally agreed to have been written by an anonymous Syrian monk of about the fifth century.⁶⁵ It is impossible to imagine what Western Christian mysticism would have been without the advent of the Dionysian *Corpus* which provided so much of its vocabulary and conceptual framework. But there would have been none of Dionysius' influence to speak of had his writing not been accepted as apostolic when it was discovered in the early sixth century.⁶⁶ During the flurry of intellectual activity characteristic of the early sixteenth century, humanists and

⁶³ In the postmodern era, Derrida and Marion, to name only two, have engaged with the Dionysian writings. On both thinkers and their relationship to Dionysius and negative theology, see Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), especially the chapter entitled "The Naming of God and the Possibility of Impossibility: Marion and Derrida between the Theology and Phenomenology of the Gift," 190 – 237.

⁶⁴ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 182.

⁶⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, opposing the school of thought that suggests it was a case of identity theft, holds that the Syrian monk adopted "Dionysius" as his religious name and drops the "pseudo-" pejorative usually prefixed to the mystic's name. See *In Excess*, 134 – 35. Similarly, Mark McIntosh reads the mystic's appropriation of the name as "perhaps...an act of monastic humility." See *Mystical Theology*, 45.

⁶⁶ Paul Rorem, "The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff and Jean Leclercq (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 144.

reformers reevaluated the Dionysian texts and scholars began to understand that these works could not have been written by a disciple of St. Paul, as they described liturgical elements unknown during the apostolic period. Luther seems to have been enthusiastic about Dionysius early in his career, but later rejected the mystic.⁶⁷ Calvin, not surprisingly, was openly hostile toward Dionysius.⁶⁸ Donne was familiar with Dionysius, whom he called “a devout speculative man” in the *Essayes*.⁶⁹ In that text’s discussion “Of God,” Donne quotes the fifth century mystic’s *The Celestial Hierarchies*, observing that when Dionysius wrote, “*Negationes de Deo sunt verae, affirmationes autem sunt inconvenientes*, will it serve thy turn, to hear, that God is that which cannot be named, cannot be comprehended, or which is nothing else?”⁷⁰ Though this early citation could be interpreted as ambivalent toward them, Dionysius’ ideas crop up in a number of Donne’s sermons in a more positive light.

In the Trinity 1627 sermon, Donne relies heavily on Dionysius. “Sometimes we represent God by Subtraction,” he tells his congregation, “by Negation, by saying, God is that, which is not mortall, not passible, not moveable: Sometimes we present him by Addition; by adding our bodily lineaments to him, and saying God hath hands, and feet, and eares, and eyes” (8:54). Dionysius uses very similar language in *The Divine Names*: “For all sorts of reasons and because of all sorts of dynamic energies they have applied to the divine Goodness, which surpasses every name and every splendor, descriptions of every sort—human, fiery, or amber shapes and forms; they praise its eyes, ears, hair, face, hands, back, wings, and arms, a posterior, and feet.”⁷¹ For Dionysius—as for Donne—the safest definitions of God come by way of subtraction: “God is in

⁶⁷ Karlfried Froehlich, “Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 41.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 44

⁶⁹ Donne, *Essayes*, 25.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷¹ *Complete Works*, 57.

no way like the things that have being and we have no knowledge at all of his incomprehensible and ineffable transcendence and invisibility.”⁷² And, ultimately, rationality must be left behind: “Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united by a completely unknowing inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.”⁷³ Dionysius furthermore describes the encounter with God in terms of ascent.

Though the concept is present in Christian thought from as early as Origen,⁷⁴ Dionysius’ employment of the language of ascent in *The Mystical Theology* provided a host of theologians and mystics with a vocabulary for describing the indescribable encounter with God. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, in *De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae* adopts the trope⁷⁵ and, even more completely, so does Bonaventure in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*. Bonaventure (1221 – 1274) follows “the vestiges of God” through creation, through faith, through reason, through contemplation of God, and to the hoped-for union with God. The arrival, however, is not a result of effort, but of grace. As Bonaventure explains,

If you wish to know how these things may come about, ask grace, not learning; desire, not understanding; the groaning of prayer, not diligence in reading; the Bridegroom, not the teacher; God, not man; darkness, not clarity; not light, but fire that wholly inflames and carries one into God through transporting unctions and consuming affections.⁷⁶

Dionysius, in *The Mystical Theology*, also records the ascent into darkness:

The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing. In the earlier books my argument traveled downward from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied with every stage of the descent. But my

⁷² Ibid., 150.

⁷³ Ibid., 137.

⁷⁴ Origen (c.184 – c.253) treats this idea particularly in book four of *De principiis*. See Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publishing, 1973), 4.3.6.

⁷⁵ See Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Steps of Humility and Pride*, trans. M. Ambrose Conway (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010).

⁷⁶ Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 39.

argument now rises from what is below up to what is transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.⁷⁷

Donne clearly has the Dionysian tradition of mystical theology in mind in the 1627 Trinity sermon, and he speaks in terms in conformity with both Dionysius and Bonaventure: “Though our naturall reason, and humane Arts, serve to carry us to the hill, to the entrance of the mysteries of Religion, yet to possesse us of the hill it selfe, and to come to such a knowledge of the mysteries of Religion, as must save us, we must leave our naturall reason, and humane Arts at the bottom of the hill, and climb up only by the light, and strength of faith” (8:54). Like Bernard and Meister Eckhart in their sermons, Donne, through his language here, attempts to lead his congregation into a secure footing in the darkness of religious aporia. But unlike Bernard and Eckhart, Donne was preaching for a predominantly Protestant laity and not for the cloister.

Interestingly in the sermon, Donne also appropriates the figure of “darkness” he finds in Dionysius and Bonaventure and applies it to the notion of suffering. For Donne, every aspect of life has the capacity to reveal God or function as a pathway to God, suffering, perhaps, best of all:

But even in the depth of any spirituall night, in the shadow of death, in the midnight of affliction and tribulations, God brings light out of darknesse, and gives his Saints occasion of glorifying him, not only in the dark, (though it be dark) but from the dark, (because it is dark.) This is a way unconceivable by any, unexpressible to any, but those that have felt that manner of Gods proceeding in themselves, That be the night what night it will, be the oppression of what Extention, or of what Duration it can, all this retards not their zeal to Gods service; Nay, they see God better in the dark, than they did in the light; Their tribulation hath brought them to a nearer distance to God, and God to a clearer manifestation to them. (8:53)

Donne here combines the Dionysian tradition of darkness with the notion of darkness described by John of the Cross (1542 – 1591) in his poem *La noche oscura del alma* and the commentary he wrote upon it, both of which first saw print in 1618. The Spanish mystic writes that love for

⁷⁷ *Complete Works*, 138 – 39.

God is enkindled through spiritual tribulation and “the soul in the midst of these dark conflicts feels vividly and keenly that it is being wounded by a strong divine love, and it has a certain feeling and foretaste of God.”⁷⁸ Indeed, in the *Devotions*, Donne is even more explicit: “*affliction* is a *treasure*, and scarce any Man hath *enough* of it. No Man hath *affliction* enough, that is not matured, and ripened by it, and made fit for *God* by that *affliction*.”⁷⁹ For both John Donne and John of the Cross—as for all mystics—God is present even when he appears to be absent.

In an Easter sermon preached 28 March 1619, Donne applies mystical free-association to the subjects of death and martyrdom. The king was ill at the time, which accounts for the subject—but Donne needed no excuse to preach on these topics. What is different about this sermon is the touch of reverie he brings to it. In paradoxical language he mentions the longstanding tradition of appointing martyrs’ feast days to commemorate the days of their death, “wherein they suffered, *Natalitia Martyrum*, their birth days; birth, and death is all one” (2:200). Throughout the sermon, Donne equates facing death with meeting God and with the *imitatio Christi*, since Christ welcomed death as necessary to the salvation of the world. Donne takes this notion further into a consideration of “*mortem raptus*, a death of rapture” found in prayer and contemplation:

...but I will finde out another death, *mortem raptus*, a death of rapture, and of extasie, that death which S. *Paul* died more then once, The death which S. *Gregory* speaks of, *Divina contemplatio quoddam sepulchrum animae*, The contemplation of God, and heaven, is a kinde of burial, and Sepulchre, and rest of the soule; and in this death of rapture, and extasie, in this death of the Contemplation of my interest in my Saviour, I shall finde my self, and all my sins entered, and entombed in his wounds, and like a Lily in Paradise, out of red earth, I shall see my soule rise out of his blade, in a candor, and in an innocence, contracted there, acceptable in the sight of his Father. (2:210)

⁷⁸ John of the Cross, *The Dark Night* from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979), 11.1, page 352 – 53.

⁷⁹ Donne, *Devotions*, 87.

This is a moment of mystical insight every bit the equal of Teresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola, and Thomas à Kempis. But Donne does not stop here. As he did with combining the Dionysian darkness with John of the Cross' Dark Night, he joins the *mortem raptus* of contemplation with the *rapture found in death and suffering*. This kind of rapture, like that of prayer, is also a way into God:

...he that shall bring me that scourge, that is, some medicinall correction upon me, and so give me a participation of all the stripes of his son; he shall give me a sweat, that is, some horrour, and religious feare, and so give me a participation of his Agony; he shall give me a diet, perchance want, and penury, and so a participation in his fasting; and if he draw blood, if he kill me, all this shall be but *Mors raptus*, a death of rapture towards him, into a heavenly, and assured Contemplation, that I have a part in all his passion, yea such an intire interest in his whole passion, as though all he did, or suffered, had been done, and suffered for my soule alone. (2:211)

Finally, Donne suffuses both understandings of the death of rapture as he ends the sermon. "If God give me *mortem raptus*," he argues,

a death of rapture, of extasie, of fervent Contemplation of Christ Jesus, a Transfusion, a Transplantation, a Transmigration, a Transmutation into him, (for good digestion brings always assimilation, certainly, if I come to a true meditation upon Christ, I come to a conformity with Christ) this is principally that *Pretiosa mors Sanctorum*, *Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his Saints*, by which they are dead and buried, and risen again in Christ Jesus. (2:212)

For Donne, death and martyrdom (with its connotations of both dying and witnessing) are intimately bound to life and the Christian's participation in Christ. To be a Christian is, by definition, to be a martyr: both sacrifice and witness.

Donne and Extasie

Much has been written on Donne's concept of "extasie," certainly in regards to the rhetorical context of his poem of that title. Merritt Hughes suggests that Donne "could not have

regarded” the poem as a literary performance of Plotinian, mystical experience.⁸⁰ Arthur Marotti, on the other hand, asks that we read the poem “as a rhetorically sophisticated defense of conjugal love,” which it surely is.⁸¹ Neither interpretation, however, precludes the possibility that Donne was adapting the conventions of Christian mysticism in this unconventional poem. And “The Extasie” is not Donne’s sole example of employing the ecstatic experience as a trope. Recently, Gary Kuchar has argued that Donne’s “conscience of ecstatic phenomenon” in the sermons is not to be taken “as implying anything mystical in the sense that we use the term in relation to contemplative or nonconformist traditions.”⁸² Ramie Targoff, likewise, has acknowledged Donne’s interest in “ecstatic experience,” though she posits that Donne did not consider it in terms of religious experience but as an event that is “shared between two people.”⁸³ This approach to understanding Donne bears some correction. As René Graziani has rightly asserted, Donne was completely aware of the ironic turn he was taking by invoking mysticism in the poem.⁸⁴ Indeed, Elizabeth Howe holds that Donne’s familiarity with sixteenth-century Spanish mysticism contributed to the famous poem, as the term figures into Teresa’s *Life* in her description of her mystical states.⁸⁵ Donne’s invocation of mystical ecstasy is more explicit in “The Second Anniversary” where he writes,

Returne not, my soule, from this extasee
And meditation of what thou shalt bee,
To earthly thoughts, till it to thee appeare,
With whom thy conversation must be there. (lines 321 – 24)⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Merritt Y. Hughes, “Some of Donne’s ‘Ecstasies,’” *MLA* 75, no. 5 (December 1960): 515.

⁸¹ Marotti, “Donne and ‘The Extasie,’” 140.

⁸² Gary Kuchar, “Ecstatic Donne: Conscience, Sin, and Surprise in the *Sermons* and the Mitcham Letters,” *Criticism* 50, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 632.

⁸³ Targoff, *Body and Soul*, 31.

⁸⁴ René Graziani, “Donne’s ‘The Extasie’ and Ecstasy,” *Review of English Studies* 19, no. 74 (May 1968): 129.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Teresa Howe, “Donne and the Spanish Mystics on Ecstasy,” *Notre Dame English Journal* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 30 – 31

⁸⁶ From *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (New York: Anchor Books, 1967).

Donne's employment of the term in the poetry surely has religious overtones, and, counter to Kuchar's assessment, when it comes to the sermons, he *does* use the term to explore the idea of intimacy with God.

In four sermons dating between February 1626/27 and Easter 1629 in which the term appears, it is in reference to Paul's "extasie," his being carried into the third heaven described in 2 Corinthians 12. In the text, Paul speaks of himself in the third person: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor 12:2 – 4). This is surely one of the two Pauline templates for the Christian mystical experience (the other being Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus recounted in Acts 9). As Paul was a model of preaching and pastoral direction for early modern English religion, so he was also a model of mysticism.

The ecstatic mystical experience is never a stand-alone event for Donne: it is always accompanied by a counter movement. And Paul, again, is the model for this. In a sermon probably preached on 11 February 1626/27, Donne examines Paul's ecstasy as gift: "that that, that past between Saint *Paul* and the *Court of Heaven* in his extasie was instruction and manifestation on one part, and admiration and application on the other part of the mercy of God" (7:357). Paul's state of wonderment, for Donne, is followed by "application," the realization of the experience manifested in teaching: an notion certainly of use to Donne the preacher. Gregory Kneidel has argued that, for Donne, Paul's conversion story ("Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me?"—Acts 9:4) is not to be taken as paradigmatic of the road to Christian

salvation.⁸⁷ He is absolutely correct. But, what he misses is that Paul's ecstasy *is* Donne's exemplum of Christian religious experience, especially in the fact that the ecstatic event *does not last* this side of death.

Donne regularly preached on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, the patron of his parish church for much of his ecclesiastical career. Brian Cummings has suggested that the sermons Donne preached on the feast "are marked...by a theological reticence, almost a refusal to comment," though Cummings is mostly concerned with Donne's engagement with debates over the resistibility or irresistibility of grace.⁸⁸ In the sermon on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul of 25 January 1628/29, however, Donne examines Paul's conversion as an event of suffering mixed with religious ecstasy. Donne, in explaining Paul's alternating trials and graces, points to the ecstasy as an example of one of the polarities of Christian life, saying that God "permitted an Angel of Satan to buffet him,⁸⁹ (so he gave him some sense of Hell) He gave him a Rapture, an Extasie, and in that, an appropinquation, an approximation to himselfe, and so some possession of Heaven in this life" (8:313). If there is to be an ecstasy, for Donne, there must also be a thorn in the flesh. This, also, is in *imitatio Christi*. In a sermon preached on the same feast in 1624/25, Donne had taken as his text Acts 9:4. This sermon dwells more on suffering than ecstasy. Donne explains Paul's suffering in sacramental terms, arguing that "S. *Paul* was another manner of Sacrament, and had another manner of Transubstantiation, then all this; As he was made *Idem spiritus cum Domino*, The same spirit with the Lord, so in his very body, he had *Stigmata*, the very marks of the Lord Jesus" (6:210). In Galatians, Paul claims, "I bear in my

⁸⁷ Gregory Kneidel, *Rethinking the Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Literature: The Poetics of All Believers* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008), 76.

⁸⁸ Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 389.

⁸⁹ An allusion to 2 Cor 12:7—"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (6:17), and Donne, when he refers to this text in the sermon, renders these “marks,” following the Vulgate, as “stigmata.”⁹⁰ For Donne, the ecstasy and the torment which the Christian experiences are nearly identical, parts of a whole, and inseparable from one another. Paul, the first Christian mystic, is proof of this.

Finally, in yet another Easter sermon, this one from 1629, Donne again considers Paul’s ecstasy as a singular experience of God that, while it has spiritually significant effects, is not itself a guarantee of permanence or even salvation:

For, as there is no doubt made by the Fathers, nor by the Schoole, but that the light which the Apostles saw at the Transfiguration of Christ, was that very light of glory, which we see now in Heaven, and yet they lost sight of that light againe; so is there no violation of any Article of our Faith, if we concurre in opinion with them, who say, That S. *Paul* in his extasie, in his rapture into the third heaven, did see that very light of glory, which constitutes the Beatificall Vision, and yet did lose that light againe. (8:368)

Clearly, then, for Donne, the notion of “extasie,” what the *Cloud* author tellingly calls “the tyme of ravisching,”⁹¹ is deeply related to personal religious experience. But the impermanence of the experience, certainly, (re)emphasizes the place of faith in Christian life. Donne, in these sermons, and in true Pauline fashion, both comforts his congregation and admonishes them to not rest in the assurance implied by the ecstatic event. For Donne, the ecstatic event, were it to last, would be in danger of becoming an idol, a thing to which one could egotistically adhere and, ultimately and ironically, result in an obstruction to the encounter with God. As he preaches in the same sermon, “That as his mercy is new every morning, so his grace is renewed to me every minute, That it is not by yesterdaies grace that I live now, but that I have *Panem quotidianum*, and *Panem horarium*, My daily bread, my houely bread, in a continuall succession of his grace,” adding that

⁹⁰ Kneidel also discusses this aspect of Donne’s Pauline Christology. See *Rethinking the Turn to Religion*, 77. The Vulgate passage reads: “ego enim stigmata Domini Iesu in corpore meo porto.”

⁹¹ *Cloud of Unknowing*, 97.

God hath not accomplished his worke upon us, in one Act, through an Election; but he works in our Vocation, and he works in our Justification, and in our Sanctification still. And if God himselfe be not come to his Sabbath, and his rest in us, but that he works upon us still for all Election, shall any man thinke to have such a Sabbath, such a rest, in that Election, as he shall slacken our endeavor, to make sure our Salvation, and not worke as God works, to his ends in us?" (8:368 – 69)

The assurance present in the ecstatic event, such as it is, can at best be fleeting: the relationship with God, on the other hand, needs regular attention. The fact that any religious experience cannot be permanent during life compels Donne to focus on the teleological event, to trust in the promised encounter face-to-face that will come with death, the only guarantee of assurance.

Donne and the *Visio Dei*

Donne examines the synergy between seeing in a glass darkly and the promised vision face-to-face throughout his religious writing and sermons in a good number of his many, many considerations of death. In the first stanza of the poem, "Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse," which most critics agree was written during the illness that inspired his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*,⁹² Donne meditates on the ways in which illness and death bring the believer to God:

Since I am comming to that Holy roome,
Where, with thy Quire of Saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy Musique; As I come
I tune the Instrument here at the dore,
And what I must doe then, thinke here before. (lines 1 – 5)

Donne here indicates that though the horizon of the Beatific Vision has not yet arrived, he can at least participate in it in a partial way through the much reduced capacity of imagination: "And what I must doe then, thinke here before." But nowhere is Donne's personal experience of the

⁹² Marotti, *Coterie Poet*, 285.

dark glass' relationship to the beatific vision more evident than in *Devotions* and in his final sermon, *Deaths Duell*.

In late November through December of 1623, Donne endured a prolonged illness. His convalescence took some time and while the illness persisted his physicians forbade him even to read.⁹³ During his recovery, Donne wrote *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, a sequence of twenty-three tripartite devotional considerations (meditation-expostulation-prayer) upon disease, the Last Things, and the Christian's relationship to God. Unlike Jeremy Taylor's *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying* (1651),⁹⁴ Donne's *Devotions* is not a poetical/theoretical examination of illness and dying from the outside looking in, but an almost phenomenological account of illness and dying from within. As Anthony Raspa observes, in the Anglican devotional tradition of the seventeenth century, "There is no other work even remotely like *Devotions*."⁹⁵ The book went through three editions during Donne's lifetime, beginning with the first in 1624, and appeared in three more seventeenth-century editions following his death.⁹⁶ In the text, Donne seizes upon the occasion of his illness as pause to meditate on the presence of God in every aspect of human life, illness and death included. For Donne, self-understanding was the key to understanding others, and he wagered that his own experiences, his struggles with illness and his attempts to understand God's presence even in that illness, could be of benefit to his readers. The way through the particular, for Donne, leads to the universal. Thus, in what are perhaps Donne's most popularly-known lines of prose, he admits to a particularist-universalist ethos:

No Man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a

⁹³ Anthony Raspa, Introduction to *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* by John Donne (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), xvii.

⁹⁴ Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying, in which are described The Means and Instruments of preparing our selves, and others respectively, for a blessed Death...*(1651)

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxiv – xl.

⁹⁶ Following the 1624 edition, the *Devotions* were printed in 1626, 1627, 1634, 1638, and 1686.

Promontorie were; Any Mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*.⁹⁷

Death, the Pauline “wages of sin,” is what binds Donne to all other human beings, binds human beings to each other, and brings all human beings to God—this is part of what Donne argues in the *Devotions*.

Death and the relationship of the particular to the universal also figure intimately into Donne’s Christology. In the eighteenth expostulation of *Devotions*, for example, he examines death’s relevance to the spiritual life. “Thy *Sonne Christ Jesus* is the *first begotten of the dead*,” Donne writes, “he rises first, the *eldest brother*, and he is my *Master* in this *science of death*: but yet, for *mee*, I am a *younger brother* too, to this *Man*, who *died now*, and to every man whom I see, or heare to die before *mee*, and all who are *ushers* to mee in this *schoole of death*.”⁹⁸ True to the Christian intuition, for Donne the Incarnation is the event that makes knowing God possible, that opens the *mysterion*. As John Booty has written, the Incarnation, “this greatest of Christian paradoxes, the mystery of God made manifest in flesh” is the centerpiece of Donne’s religion.⁹⁹ The Christian’s knowledge of Christ, however, is not simply a product of the participation in the flesh that human beings share with Christ, but is the product of grace, as Donne wrote in a letter to Goodyer: “that advantage of near familiarity with God, which the act of incarnation gave us, is grounded upon Gods assuming us, not our going to him.”¹⁰⁰ For the Christian to enter into Christ’s own participation in death and his promise of resurrection—in both imaginative and lived contexts—is, for Donne, to enter into the mystery itself.

⁹⁷ Donne, *Devotions*, 87.

⁹⁸ Donne, *Devotions*, 94 – 95.

⁹⁹ John E. Booty, Preface to *John Donne: Selections from Divine Poems, Sermons, Devotions, and Prayers*, ed. John E. Booty, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁰⁰ Donne, *Letters*, 110 – 11.

Donne prefaces the *Devotions* with a Latin poem, “Stationes, sive Periodi in Morbo,” from which he derives the headings for each of the twenty-three Devotions. The Stationes for Devotions seventeen and eighteen read, “*Nunc lento sonitu dicunt, Morieris; / At inde, Mortuus es, sonitu celeri, pulsuque agitato,*” which translates as “Now they say, with a slow sound, ‘You will be dead.’ But then, with rapid sound and with the pulse stirred, ‘You are dead.’” Donne very loosely translates these lines as “*Now, this Bell tolling softly for another, saies to me, Thou must die.*¹⁰¹ / *The bell rings out, and tells me in him, that I am dead.*”¹⁰² The Latin carries a much more dramatic sense of anxiety than what we find in Donne’s English renderings. Mary Arshagouni Papazian has read the Latin headnotes as having “a more intimate relationship” to Donne’s meditations than their English counterparts,” noticing how the Latin text shifts over the course of the meditations to directly address the reader, implicating Donne’s audience in his rhetoric of self-reflection,¹⁰³ certainly evidence of his commitment to the *cura animarum*.

In *Devotions*’ eighteenth prayer Donne writes, “*I am dead, I was borne dead, and from the first laying of these mud-walls in my conception, they have moldred away, and the whole course of life is but an active death. Whether this voice instruct mee, that I am a dead man now, or remember me, that I have been a dead man all this while, I humbly thanke thee for speaking in this voice to my soule.*”¹⁰⁴ Donne’s meditations on death are not speculative but imaginative actualizations of the event. Though saying “I am dead,” taken literally, is the height of paradox, informed by his reading in mystical theology, Donne engages paradox as a way to at least begin thinking about God and to aid his readers in thinking about God.

¹⁰¹ Donne, *Devotions*, 86.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁰³ Mary Arshagouni [Papazian], “The Latin ‘Stationes’ In John Donne’s *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*,” *Modern Philology* 89, no. 2 (November 1991): 199; 210.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

Jacques Derrida has written much about the “impossible possibility” of speaking of one’s own death, of the utterance “I am dead.” Despite the aporia, Derrida honors what we find in Donne as integral to the human condition, and in this he stands in complete agreement with the poet and preacher:

To say ‘I died,’ ‘I am dead,’ is not simply a future anterior. It is the strange time of his writing, the strange time of reading that looks at and regards us in advance..., that will have regarded us, that will regard us long after us. The ‘I died’ is not a phenomenologico-grammatical monstrosity, a scandal of common sense or an impossible sentence with no meaning. It is the time or tense, the grapho-logical time, the implicit tempo of all writing, all painting, of every trace, and even of the presumed present of every *cogito ergo sum* (which, as I tried to show a long time ago elsewhere, necessarily implies an ‘I am dead.’)¹⁰⁵

Derrida knows that when we speak of death as metaphysical event the discourse begins to run curiously close to negative theology and thinking-towards-God. Donne, likewise, opens his discourse into a careful negative theology whenever he tries to speak of God.

Ramie Targoff has argued that in his meditations on death Donne aims “intensely on the moment of death as one of profound and immediate transformation” though she suggests that in “*Deaths Duell*, by contrast, he treats it as simply another phase in the cycle of deaths to which we are subjected.”¹⁰⁶ This is not accurate. Donne’s many, many meditations on death in his religious writing—*Deaths Duell* included—are underwritten by his conviction that in death he, and every Christian, will encounter God. This is not in the tradition of the meditation on Last Things common to Catholic devotional practices, though it may well have been inspired by them. Rather, Donne welcomes the “Joy that their last great Consummation / Approaches in the resurrection.”¹⁰⁷ For him “this *day of death* shall deliver me over to my *fift day*, the day of my *Resurrection*; for how long a *day* soever thou make that *day* in the *grave*, yet there is no *day*

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Derrida, “By Force of Mourning,” trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996): 186.

¹⁰⁶ Targoff, *Body and Soul*, 165.

¹⁰⁷ “The Second Anniversary,” lines 491 – 92.

between that, and the *Resurrection*.”¹⁰⁸ As Derrida has written, the eschatological and the messianic can bear significance only because death is implied in both:

This is why the eschatological or messianic, even if they have the form of expectation, hope, promise—motifs that are apparently so striking—is also an experience of death. When I say this, I know I am speaking of my death—where, to be sure, I can reappropriate nothing, where I will no longer be able to reappropriate the future. Only a mortal can speak of the future in this sense, a god could never do so. So I know very well that all this is made possible as a future by a certain imminence of death. The imminence here is the fact that death may arrive in any moment—Heidegger discusses this brilliantly in *Being and Time*—and the fact that death may arrive in any moment gives this justice the character of an immediate injunction.¹⁰⁹

This is how Donne’s awareness of death awakens his awareness of God and affirms for him that the ecstatic event is only fully realized in death, the promised encounter face-to-face that can never be lost or diminished.

For Donne, death is the moment of assurance, the realization of the promised *visio Dei*. On 25 August 1622, he preached on the eschatological implications of the vision as teleological event, prompted by his text, Job 36:25, “Everyman may see it, man may behold it far off.” In his discussion of the text, he touches on debates then raging in Catholic Neo-Scholastic (and especially Jesuit) circles about whether or not human beings are assured a vision of God.¹¹⁰ In the *Summa Theologica* Aquinas writes, “*Omnis intellectus naturaliter desiderat divinae substantiae visionem*”¹¹¹ (“Every mind naturally desires a vision of the divine substance”), arguing that the desire for the vision is intrinsic to human nature. In the sermon, Donne considers this possibility and John Duns Scotus’ response to it:

Now the *sight* of God in this text, is the *knowledge* of God, to *see* God, is but to *know*, that there is a God. And can man as a *naturall man*, doe that? See God so, as to know that

¹⁰⁸ Donne, *Devotions*, 76.

¹⁰⁹ Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis, ed. Giacomo Donis and David Webb (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001), 23.

¹¹⁰ On this topic, two works are nearly indispensable, both by Henri de Lubac: *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) and *Surnaturel: Études Historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946).

¹¹¹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.57.

there is a God? Can hee doe it? Nay can he chuse but doe it? The question hath divided the School; those two great, and well known families of the School, whom we call, *Thomists*, and *Scotists*: the first say, that this proposition, *Deus est*, is *per se nota*, evident in it selfe, and the others deny that; But yet they differ, but thus far, that *Thomas* thinks that it is so evident, that man cannot chuse but know it, though he resist it; The other thinks, in it selfe, it is but so evident, as that a man may know it, if he imploy his naturall faculties, without going any farther; thus much, indeed, thus little, they differ. (4:168)

Thus Donne lays out the battle lines. However, he troubles them with what follows:

Now the holy Ghost is the God of *Peace*, and doth so far reconcile these two, in this text, as that first in our reading, it is, *That man may see God*; and in that *Scotus* does not deny; but in the *Originall*, in the Hebrew, it is *Casu*, and *Casu* is, *viderunt*; not, every man *may*, but every man *hath* seen God: Though it goe not absolutely, so far, as *Thomas*, every man *must*, no man can chuse but see God, yet it goes so far further then *Scotus*, (who ends in every man *may*) as that it says, every man *hath* seen God. (4:168 – 69)

Rather than enter into the Scholastic fray (though he inclines toward Aquinas), Donne throws the problem into the lap of his congregation. He destabilizes their expectation of resolution with aporia and leads them to their own responsibility to God:

Man may, sayes *Scotus*, man *must*, he cannot chuse, sayes *Thomas*, man *hath* seen God, sayes the *holy Ghost*. *Man*, that is, *every man*; and that's our last branch in this first part. The inexcusableness goes over *man*, over all men: Because they would not see invisible things in visible, they are inexcusable, *all*. (4:169)

This destabilization sets up for Donne a way to a resolution of his argument: that though the Christian “hath already seen God” the achievement of the vision that arrives with death is the only locus of the vision’s permanence. The vision, that is, exists but is deferred: “This sight of God is not in him, *naturally*, that we can be sure he *hath* seen him, but it is reserved to the *future*; let him be thus wrought upon by Gods hand, and *videbit*, in the future, he *shall* see” (4:174). The vision, even though it may be foreshadowed long beforehand, only fully arrives with death, since, during life, “A man may see God, and forget that ever he saw him” (4:174). Death opens the Christian to the vision, as Donne preaches invoking 1 Corinthians 13:12,

But then to see the *head* of this Church, the Sunne, that sheds all these beames, the God of glory *face to face*, to see him *sicuti est*, as he *is*, to know him, *ut cognitus*, as I am

knowne, what darke, and inglorious fortune would I not passe thorow, to come to that light, and that glory? (4:177)

Ettenhuber detects in Donne's Easter 1628 sermon a performance of this deferral, drawing our attention to how Donne's "own discussion of patefaction is constantly deferred, to be brought to fruition at a much later point in the sermon than the binary *divisio* indicates."¹¹² Similarly, Donne defers his own union with God, which many mystics attempt to realize this side of the grave, to the moment of death. He is willing to wait. Indeed, humility dictates that the Christian *should* wait. To grasp for the *visio Dei* this side of the grave, for Donne, is to give sway to pride, characterized by Donne as an inordinate desire to pry into the mysteries of God, a notion that shows up in the *Essayes* as well as in the sermon on Psalm 32:1 – 2,

Though then the Consummation of this Blessednesse be that *Visio Dei*, That sight of God, which in our glorified state we shall have in heaven, yet, because there is an inchoation thereof in this world, which is that which we call Reconciliation, it behooves us to consider the disposition requisite for that. It is a lamentable perversenesse in us, that we are so contentiously busie, in inquiring into the Nature, and Essence, and Attributes of God, things which are reserved to our end, when we shall know at once, and without study, all that, of which our lives study can teach us nothing: And that here, where we are upon the way, we are so negligent and lazy, in inquiring of things, which belong to the way. (9:256)

In the sermon, Donne stresses that his flock should find contentment with the life-in-God as it is, as difficult and painful as it may prove at times, since tribulation, too, is part of the Christian life-in-God:

As the body of man, and consequently health, is best understood, and best advanced by Dissections, and Anatomies, when the hand and knife of the Surgeon hath passed upon every part of the body, and laid it open: so when the hand and sword of God hath pierced our soul, we are brought to a better knowledge of our selves, then any degree of prosperity would have raised us to. (9:256)

But the Christian is not left with tribulation unaccompanied by consolation. Donne locates consolation in the life of the Church, particularly in the Sacraments, participation in which is all

¹¹² Ettenhuber, *Donne's Augustine*, 208.

the experience of union with God that the Christian needs prior to death. He preaches to this effect in another sermon (probably from December 1618):

Now, as God provided a liquor in his Church, for *Originall sinne*, the water of *Baptisme*, so hath he provided another for those *actuall sinnes*; that is, the blood of his owne body, in the *other Sacrament*. In which Sacrament, besides the *naturall union*, (that Christ hath taken our *Nature*,) and the *Mysticall union*, (that Christ hath taken us into the body of *his Church*) by a *spirituall union*, when we apply faithfully his Merits to our soules, and by a *Sacramentall union*, when we receive the visible seales thereof, worthily, we are so washed in his blood, as that we stand in the sight of his Father, as cleane and innocent, as himself, both because he and we are thereby become one body, and because the garment of his righteousnesse covers us all. (5:173)

The Church and its sacraments, then, involve the Christian in God, though the union which they figure only foreshadows that which arrives with death, as he preaches in another sermon, pointing to “this Beatificall Vision, this sight of God in Heaven, the Cause or Consummation of all the joyes and glory which we shall receive in that place” (6:235). Donne does not know how the vision will come, “whether I shall see all things in God, as in a glasse, in which all species of things are, or whether I shall see all things, by God, as by the benefit of a light, which shall discover all things to me” (6:235). But he knows that he shall see God. Again citing 1 Corinthians 13:12, in the December 1618 sermon Donne emphasizes even more strongly the teleological reality of this unitive vision which cannot arrive before the horizon of death:

That which is our end, *salvation*, we use to expresse in Schooles by these two termes, we call it *visionem Dei*, the sight of God, and we call it *unionem*, an union with God: we shall *see* God, and we shall be *united* to God: for our seeing, we shall see him *Sicuti est*, as he is; which we cannot expresse, till we see him; *Gognoscam ut cognitus, I shall know as I am known*, which is a knowledge reserved for that Schoole, and a degree for that Commencement, and not to be had before. (5:168)

Emphatically, for Donne, this union is “not to be had before.” Donne’s emphasis on death and its role in opening the vision, then, asks us to consider *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* and, especially, *Deaths Duell* as pastoral commentaries on the stages toward this promised union.

Holy Dying

A significant aspect of both the *Devotions* and *Deaths Duell*, taking into consideration his life as a pastor, is how Donne strives to model “holy dying” for his readers and congregation.¹¹³ Judith Anderson suggests that in *Deaths Duell* Donne is figuring the “culmination of his role as a preacher and a radically verbal gesture of self-characterization.”¹¹⁴ Anderson, however, considers Donne’s rhetorical and psychological contexts at the expense of his pastoral concerns. In the sermon, though, Donne was clearly acting as a pastor fully aware of his role in the *cura animarum*. As he did in the *Devotions*, Donne is here making use of his current situation to open a way for his congregation to recognize God’s presence even in the presence of death. Unlike Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Dying*, which considers death from a comfortable distance and from the context of living a holy *life*,¹¹⁵ Donne presents his congregation with a paradox: the picture of death as lived religious experience. Donne’s essential trust in God, to whom, as his text for the sermon professes, “belong the issues of death,”¹¹⁶ demands that he trust God to the end: and he wants his congregation to adopt the same approach not only to his death but, more importantly, to their own. Donne wants his hearers to leave St. Paul’s uplifted, not horrified. He is not hiding his terminal illness, but embracing it as the vehicle bringing him to Christ. His sermon, rather than a morbid theatrical event, is a religious emblem resonant of Paul in 1 Corinthians: “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor

¹¹³ The *Ars moriendi* tradition arose during the fifteenth century and went through several permutations in varying Catholic, Calvinist, humanist, and Anglican rhetorical contexts through the early modern period. See, in particular, Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the ‘Ars Moriendi’ in England*, Yale Studies in English, 175 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

¹¹⁴ Judith H. Anderson, “Life Lived and Life Written: Donne’s Final Word of Last Character,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 247.

¹¹⁵ Taylor “denies ... that holy dying is a Christian duty distinguishable in essence from holy living.” Beaty, *Craft of Dying*, 215.

¹¹⁶ Ps 68:20.

15:54). Stanley Fish suggests that the sermon subverts not only its own pretensions, but also “the pretensions of those who are prepared (or so they think) to understand it and to exit from it with a portable truth.”¹¹⁷ This is so, but it is better, I think, to consider *Deaths Duell* in the dark light of negative theology, a theological aesthetic that recuses itself from religious absolutes and abides instead in mystery. Fish gets close to such an understanding, arguing that the “sermon does not inscribe that Word [in the heart of the believer] but merely reveals it; and it reveals it by removing from our line of vision the structures that obscure it and cause us to forget it.”¹¹⁸ Donne uses the paradox of the living dead man to throw his hearers back into God, and, working in the spirit of the *cura animarum*, uses his own illness as an object lesson for his congregation. Though he has not given his life for them, he can at least give them his death.

“Paradox” is certainly the key to the sermon, not only visually in Donne’s emblem of himself as the living dead man, but even more rhetorically. Eleanor McCann has observed that Donne appropriated the tradition of oxymora favored by sixteenth-century Spanish mysticism in his complaint that God will not “let me die, nor let me live, but dye an everlasting life, and live an everlasting death.”¹¹⁹ Throughout the sermon, Donne piles paradox ontop of paradox as he destabilizes his congregation, obliterating their trust in reason and logic and throwing them off of their dependence on the pastor and onto reliance in the mystery of God. Paradoxes in mysticism, according to Steven Katz, as they “break accepted and logical rules, ...are seen as a fit vehicle for religious language insofar as such language relates to God, and other Ultimate Objects or Subjects...that by definition, cannot be captured in standard discourse or limited and explained

¹¹⁷ Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 60.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹⁹ Eleanor McCann, “Oxymora in Spanish Mystics and English Metaphysical Writers,” *Comparative Literature* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1961): 19. McCann mistakenly identifies the passage as derived from *Deaths Duell*. In actuality, it is from a sermon preached to the Earl of Carlisle on Mark 16:16, perhaps in 1622. See *Sermons*, 5:267.

according to laws of logic.”¹²⁰ Katz sees the language of mystical paradox as participating in “the hermeneutical premises of the *via negativa*,” as both avoid absolute commitments about the nature of God or about how believers can have access to God.¹²¹ Unlike Katz, McGinn refrains from too precise a definition of paradox, preferring instead to see it as arising out of the dialectic that exists between contemplation and ecstasy, presence and absence, transcendence and immanence.¹²²

Some of the figures Donne employs are conventional Christian expressions of paradox: that “our *issue in death*, shall be an *entrance into everlasting life*” (10:231), of course, has roots in Christianity going back to apostolic times, as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor 4:10). Likewise, Donne makes use of the traditional life-in-death/death-in-life paradox, not only familiar to Christianity but to Stoicism as well: “Wee have a winding sheet in our Mothers wombe, which growes with us from our conception, and wee come into the world, wound up in that *winding sheet*, for wee come to *seeke* a grave” (10:233).

Donne complicates these conventional paradoxes by augmenting them in conceits familiar from the rhetorical fireworks of the metaphysical poetry at which he was so adept. He does this particularly in consideration of the dissolution of the body after death. His language sounds almost Derridean:

But for us that dye now and sleepe in the state of the dead, we must all passe this *posthume* death, this *death* after *death*, nay this death after buriall, this *dissolution* after *dissolution*, this *death* of *corruption* and *putrefaction*, of *vermiculation* and *incineration*, of *dissolution* and *dispersion* in and *from* the grave. (10:238)

¹²⁰ Steven T. Katz, *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 41.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 41 – 42.

¹²² McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 49 – 52; 178 – 80.

This conceit is surely loaded with paradox and the grotesque. But Donne pursues things further in what follows. Not content with corruption, rotting, worms, and burning, Donne then takes up language intended to unsettle his congregation to an even more extreme degree. “When those bodies that have beene the *children of royall parents*,” he writes,

and the *parents of royall children*, must say with *Iob*, *to corruption thou art my father*, and *to the Worme thou art my mother and my sister*. *Miserable riddle*, when the *same worme* must bee *my mother*, and *my sister*, and *my selfe*. *Miserable incest*, when I must bee *married* to my *mother* and my *sister*, and bee both *father* and *mother* to my *owne mother* and *sister*, *beget*, and *beare* that *worme* which is all that *miserable penury*; when my *mouth* shall be *filled* with *dust*, and the *worme* shall *feed*, and *feed sweetely* upon me, when the *ambitious* man shall have *no satisfaction*, if the *poorest alive* tread upon him, nor the *poorest* receive any *contentment* in being made *equall* to *Princes*, for they *shall bee equall* but *in dust*. (10:238)

This passage, especially the third sentence of it, is ultimately void of any kind of logical coherence: a sentence which begins with metaphors of incest that devolves into a commonplace on death as the great equalizer.

After he unsettles his audience with convolutions of incest and death, Donne proceeds to unsettle them through temptations to blasphemy in yet another use of paradox. To do this, Donne extrapolates from Luke 10:28:

Fac hoc & vives, *there's* my securitie, the mouth of the *Lord hath sayd it*, *doe this and thou shalt live*: But *though I doe it*, yet *I shall dye too*, dye a bodily, a naturall death. But *God* never mentions, never seems to consider that death, the bodily, the naturall death. *God* doth not say, *Live well and thou shalt dye well*, that is, an easie, a quiet death; But *live well here*, and thou shalt *live well for ever*. (10:241)

Here, as he points to the scripture assuring believers that if they follow Christ's words they will live, he also destabilizes them by raising the point that they will still die. When thrust in such an aporia, removed as it is from logic, believers have only faith in which to trust.

In addition to turning scripture on its head, Donne also guides his hearers through paradoxical passages of scripture. First, pointing to Luke 12:50, (“But I have a baptism to be

baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”), Donne opens up the connotation of “baptism”:

Himselfe calls it but a *Baptisme*, as though he were to bee the better for it. *I have a Baptisme to be Baptized with*, and he was in paine till it was accomplished, and yet this *Baptisme* was his death. The *holy Ghost* calls it *Ioy* (for the *Ioy* which was set before him hee indured the *Crosse*) which was not a *joy* of his reward after his passion, but joy that filled him even in the midst of those torments, and arose from them. (10:244)

Similarly, he directs his congregation’s attention to the Transfiguration of Christ as paradox. Donne reminds them that when Moses and Elijah conversed with Christ on Mount Tabor, “*they talkt of his decease, of his death*” (10:244). He adds an important perspective to this meditation, driving home his point: “And then they talkt with *Christ* of his *death* at that time, when he was in the greatest *height* of *glory* that ever he had admitted in this world” (10:245). Donne does not raise this issue as a way to display his cleverness. Rather, he emphasizes the conversation on Christ’s impending death as an insight into *God’s* cleverness and ability to subvert human expectations and preconceptions. Human delving into God’s mysteries without the intention to draw closer to God is simply vanity, as Donne says from the pulpit, “*Discourses of Religion* should not be *out of curiosity*, but to *edification*” (10:245). The answer, for Donne, is to be content with aporia: “As therefore if we understood all created Nature, nothing would be *Mirum* to us; so if we knew Gods purpose, nothing would be *Miraculum*.”¹²³

Donne ends the sermon in language that has given rise to much commentary. In the last words he uttered from the pulpit, Donne, in his sermon’s envoi and his own, tells his congregation:

There wee leave you in that *blessed dependency*, to *hang* upon *him* that *hangs* upon the *Crosse*, there *bath* in his *teares*, there *suck* at his *woundes*, and *lye downe in peace* in his *grave*, till hee vouchsafe you a *resurrection*, and an *ascension* into that *Kingdome*, which hee *hath purchas’d for you*, with the *inestimable price* of his *incorruptible blood*. AMEN. (10:248)

¹²³ Donne, *Essayes*, 89.

Debora Shuger has read these lines in a psychoanalytic-feminist light, arguing that the image Donne presents here (“*suck at his woundes*”) is emblematic of “the desires of the gendered anima and the infant...cravings for submission to power, for intimacy and union with the dread beloved.”¹²⁴ Shuger is surely aware of the long tradition in medieval mysticism that spoke of Christ in feminine terms (indeed, in her commentary on the figure, Shuger cites Carolyn Bynum Walker’s important study on the subject, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*),¹²⁵ yet she chooses to interpret Donne here as a man motivated by subconscious urges rather than as a pastor drawing on traditions of medieval mysticism—as he is doing throughout the sermon—in the *cura animarum*. Bernard of Clairvaux, one of Donne’s favorite authorities, had preached on the wounds of Christ as an entrance into “the *corpus mysticum* of the church,”¹²⁶ and this is the tradition upon which Donne draws in the sermon. In sermon sixty-one on the Song of Songs, for instance, Bernard meditates on the wounds of Christ as source of mystical nourishment: “through these clefts I am permitted to ‘suck honey out of the Rock, and oil out of the hardest stone.’ That is to say, I am enabled to ‘taste and see that the Lord is sweet.’”¹²⁷ Likewise the English Benedictine, John of Farne (aka, John Whiterig, c. 1320 – 1371) employed the trope: “Christ our Lord... stretches out his hands to embrace us, bows down his head to kiss us, and opens his side to give us suck; and though it is blood which he offers us to

¹²⁴ Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (1990; repr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press-Renaissance Society of America, 1997), 194.

¹²⁵ Carolyn Bynum Walker, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982)

¹²⁶ Anselm Haverkamp, “Christ’s Case and John Donne, ‘Seeing through his wounds’: The Stigma of Martyrdom Transfigured,” in *How the West Was Won: Essays on Literary Imagination, the Canon, and the Christian Middle Ages for Burcht Pranger*, ed. Willemien Otten, Arjo Vanderjagt, and Hent De Vries (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 58.

¹²⁷ *St. Bernard’s Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles*, trans. A Priest of Mount Melleray, vol. 2 (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1920), 198.

suck, we believe that it is health-giving and sweeter than honey.”¹²⁸ Targoff rightly identifies the image Donne uses as one that “would have been anathema to mainstream English Protestants, for whom the prospect of hanging on the cross and sucking Christ’s wounds was a grotesquely literal participation in the Passion.”¹²⁹ What she fails to mention is that the image is entirely consistent with the poetics of the medieval mystical tradition. The pastor and preacher John Donne clearly appropriates the rhetorical and religious ethos of this tradition in *Deaths Duell*, as he does in so many of his sermons.

Counter to the assertions of Michael Moloney,¹³⁰ Donne did not fly from medievalism. Rather, through his avowal of humility, his application of mystical and negative theologies, and his attention to the *visio Dei*, Donne was not flying from medievalism, but reimagining it. Donne’s primary task as a preacher was the *cura animarum*, just as the primary intention of the mystical tradition from which he drew was in guiding others to a deeper relationship with God. In the light of this tradition, Donne was content to let the vision wait until it would be a surety and not be so bold as to try and grasp it prior to death: an ethos he imparted to his flock. By its deferral, the vision becomes an icon, for Donne, and not a temptation to idolatry. As Jean-Luc Marion has said of the icon, that “which unbalances human sight in order to engulf it in infinite depth,”¹³¹ for Donne the Vision of God recedes into the horizon, ever deferred, while simultaneously enfolding him in the mystery of God’s presence.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: From the Earliest Times to 1700* (Louisville, KY: Westminster-John Knox Press, 2001), 190.

¹²⁹ Targoff, *Body and Soul*, 179. The poet William Alabaster also explores the medieval notion of “sucking at Christ’s wounds” in the sonnet “Beehold a cluster to itt self a vine.” See *The Sonnets of William Alabaster*, ed. G. M. Story and Helen Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

¹³⁰ In *John Donne: His Flight from Medievalism*.

¹³¹ Marion, *God Without Being*, 24.

CHAPTER THREE

LOVE'S ALCHEMIST: SCIENCE AND RESURRECTION IN THE WRITING

OF SIR KENELM DIGBY

“Our unconscious, then, does not believe in its own death; it behaves as if it were immortal [...] Thus there is nothing instinctual in us which responds to a belief in death. This may even be the secret of heroism.” ~Sigmund Freud¹

“[D]eath drive is a very paradoxical notion if you read Freud closely. Death drive is basically, I claim, the Freudian term for immortality.”~Slavoj Žižek²

John Dee, as we have seen, utilized developments in the science of his age in his quest to discern the mind of God. Dee, it could be argued, turned his scientific pursuits toward what he thought could create a more efficient, more rational, and more reliable epistemological tool, one that could bring about a regeneration of not only science and theology, but, indeed, of politics as well. However, the ethos present in Dee's mystico-technological enterprise of the sixteenth century becomes in the seventeenth less and less mystical while becoming more and more “scientific.” The rise and expanding acceptance and popularization of Cartesian materialism, Baconian empiricism, and Hobbesian pessimism resulted in a burgeoning worldview that was characterized by increasing distrust in alleged spiritual phenomena such as visions or apparitions and that tended to ridicule personal religious experiences as “enthusiasm.” These changes in science and religion were outgrowths of a different variety of enthusiasm: that which grew out of the Reform movement. As Charles Taylor has argued, “Disenchantment, Reform, and personal religion went together.”³ While it is true that many “chymical practitioners” continued to seek the Philosopher's Stone, alchemy was rapidly taking on the qualities of more modern notions of

¹ Sigmund Freud, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” *Standard Edition*, vol.4, trans. James Strachey with Anna Freud, et. al. (London: Hogarth, 1957), 296.

² Joshua Delpech-Ramey, “An Interview with Slavoj Žižek: ‘On Divine Self-Limitation and Revolutionary Love,’” *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 33.

³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 2007), 146.

science, as is evident in the life and work of both Robert Boyle⁴ and Sir Isaac Newton,⁵ both of whom maintained “magical” conceptions of the universe while they developed the intellectual edifice that would help to dismantle such a worldview. Indeed, even the intellectual life of Descartes, a figure certainly emblematic of “rationality,” was informed by elements one might describe as irrational as can be seen in the series of significant dreams he had in November of 1611 that prompted his entrance onto the stage of intellectual history.⁶ Through these dreams, Descartes claimed to have discerned that it was “his mission in life to unify the sciences” and he offered prayers to God for guidance to that end.⁷ Clearly, the architects of the proto-Enlightenment were themselves quite content to inhabit a universe still vibrant with occult forces, though that view of the natural world was coming to an end.

John Donne, unlike Dee, tended to hold to traditional, mostly Catholic, methods of approaching God and questions in consideration of God, though these were tempered and challenged by currents of Protestant theology. Donne’s spirituality was nurtured in a cultural milieu that had watched the gradual disappearance of spiritual direction in the meditative life of believers—a practice forbidden by decree in the case of English Catholics. The tradition of spiritual direction was generally replaced by what might be described as the commodification of spirituality through the wider and wider dissemination of devotional texts by the agency of print—and usually issued with a subtext of religious polemic. Though, as some have argued,

⁴ There is a growing body of literature on Boyle (1627 – 1691) and his position as an important transitional figure in the history of science. See, for example, Lawrence M. Principe, *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and His Alchemical Quest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Michael Hunter, ed., *Robert Boyle Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michael Hunter, *Robert Boyle, 1627 – 1691: Scrupulosity and Science* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2000).

⁵ The scholarly treatment of Newton’s alchemy is extensive. See B. J. T. Dobb’s pioneering *The Foundations of Newton’s Alchemy, Or the Hunting of the Green Lion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) as well as Gale E. Christianson, *Isaac Newton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially chapter six, “The Alchemist.”

⁶ See pages 14 – 16 above.

⁷ Amir D. Aczel, *Descartes’s Secret Notebook: A True Tale of Mathematics, Mysticism, and the Quest to Understand the Universe* (New York: Random House, 2005), 59. See particularly his chapter four, “Three Dreams in an Oven by the Danube.”

vestiges of spiritual direction could still be found in Protestant contexts, these were hardly institutionalized and not at all uniform in the ways that Catholic practices of spiritual direction were. Though English Protestants might take their spiritual problems to their ministers, there was no formal structure—as in the Catholic sacrament of Confession—to support such a choice, and, indeed, the Protestant ideal was to take recourse to the Bible and the interiority of personal prayer as a way to reach spiritual consolation. It is true that, in the context of the Protestant family, fathers sometimes performed the advisory function usually allotted to priests in Catholic contexts, but this was not at all a universal practice.⁸ Fundamentally, the interpersonal and individualized nature of spiritual direction had, in fact, migrated from the cloister to the marketplace, becoming, obviously, impersonal and not at all individualized. Donne’s revenant Catholic spirituality, grounded in the apophatic mysticism of Dionysius and Cusa along with the meditative methods of de Sales and Loyola, became increasingly “other” as the reign of James I was established and, at least tentatively, secured. This was especially the case in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, when England’s agon with its Catholic patrimony reached a crisis point and through which its anti-Catholicism became a permanent fixture in English culture.⁹

In the life and work of Sir Kenelm Digby (1603 – 1665), we can see how both of these streams—the technological and the Catholic—tried to achieve stasis. Digby was the elder son of Sir Everard Digby whom the Crown had hanged, drawn, and quartered in 1606 for participation in the Gunpowder Plot. Following the death of his wife, Lady Venetia Stanley Digby, on May Day of 1633, Sir Kenelm retired for a time to Gresham College, Oxford, where his brown hair

⁸ See Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 424 – 25; John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 186.

⁹ As Arthur F. Marotti has observed, “English nationalism rests on a foundation of anti-Catholicism.” See his *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 9.

grew long and shaggy, his beard untrimmed, and he habitually wore a long black cloak of mourning.¹⁰ Venetia's father, Lord Edward Stanley, had sought solace in scholarship and religion following his own wife's death, and at Gresham Sir Kenelm hoped to similarly distract himself. However, rather than diverting himself from the tragedy of his wife's death in his devotion to scientific research, in actuality Digby immersed himself all the more deeply, if unconsciously, in her memory. Venetia quite *literally* haunts his scientific work.

In this chapter I will argue that Sir Kenelm Digby's scientific work opened up more than knowledge about the natural world. Indeed, particularly in his scientific work concerned with palingenesis, the attempt to raise a plant, phoenix-like, from its own ashes, Digby's ideas about science coalesce with his biography, with his family history, with his unconscious psychological desires, and with his religion in a surprising form of religious experience. Though Digby's religious commitments were clear both to himself and his contemporaries, his encounter with God was multifarious and it invaded, sometimes unconsciously, his scientific work as well as his relationship to his wife.

Digby and Palingenesis

Digby, by all accounts, could rightfully claim to be listed among the *virtuosi* of the late Renaissance. He was among the first asked to join the Royal Society soon after its founding, and his peers and associates included such notable scientists and thinkers as Descartes, Hobbes, Boyle, and the German Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher. He also made his mark as a courtier, as a privateer, and as a Roman Catholic apologist. An expert swordsman, he killed a French rival in a duel after the Frenchman insulted Charles II, an account of which gained Digby notoriety

¹⁰ John Aubrey, *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (1949; repr. Boston: Godine, 1999), 99.

and prestige (at least in England) when it was published in 1641 as *Sr. Kenelme Digbyes Honour Maintained*. A collector of recipes, Digby compiled a good number of them in a collection published by his son as *The Closet of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie, K^t Whereby is Discovered Several ways for making of Metheglin Sider, Cherry-Wine, &c.* (1669), which includes, among other things, over 104 recipes for mead, though it may be that his greatest gift to posterity was his invention of the modern wine bottle.¹¹ Digby's activities also touched on the world of literature. He is distinguished for writing the first commentary on Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and for an intriguing response to Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*. Digby, obviously, possessed a capacious and far-ranging intellect. His scientific researches touched upon all branches of the day's natural philosophy. He investigated astronomy, chemistry, optics, the properties of the lodestone, and he held a keen interest in botany. In time he would conclude that "there is in the Aire a hidden food of life" in regards to the plant kingdom.¹² In his rooms at Gresham following his wife's death, Sir Kenelm addressed himself to palingenesis, a scientific problem long intriguing to natural philosophers.

Having roots in Pythagorean mystico-scientific notions of metempsychosis, the idea of palingenesis is found as early as Lucretius. In *De rerum natura* the Roman poet entertains the possibility of the literal recycling of a person's physical being in the service of its reincarnation, writing

nec, si materiem nostrum collegerit aetas
 post obitum rursumque redegerit ut sita nunc est
 atque iterum nobis fuerint data lumina vitae,
 peritineat quicquam tamen ad nos id quoque factum,

¹¹ Roy Digby Thomas, *Digby: The Gunpowder Plotter's Legacy* (London: Janus, 2001), 188 – 89.

¹² Kenelm Digby, *A Discourse Concerning Vegetation of Plants, spoken by Sir Kenelme Digby, at Gresham College, on the 23. of January, 1660. At a Meeting of the Society for promoting Philosophical Knowledge by Experiments* (1661), 65.

interrupta semel cum sit repentia nostri.¹³

That the same aggregate of atoms might gather again into the same combination Lucretius finds entirely plausible. As we shall see, Lucretius's materialism is in complete accord with Sir Kenelm Digby's.

Closer to Digby's time, the German physician and *magus* Paracelsus explored early modern understandings of palingenesis in his book *De natura rerum* (1573). In this work Paracelsus presents palingenesis not as metaphysical theory, but as a practical science, albeit a difficult undertaking. "The resuscitation and restoration of wood," he writes, "is difficult and arduous; possible, indeed, but not to be accomplished without exceptional skill and industry."¹⁴ He instructs the operator through the stages of the work, from subjecting the ash to the appropriate heat and humidity in a "*venter equinus*" to allowing it to putrefy before burying the remains in rich soil in which, he assures us, "you will see it begin to revive, and a tree or a little log will be produced from it, which, indeed, is in its nature much higher than the original one."¹⁵

Following the introduction of Paracelsus' ideas on palingenesis in sixteenth century print culture, the seventeenth century saw a regular stream of works on the subject, either supportive of its possibility or skeptical about it.¹⁶ In the "pro" column, Lynn Thorndike¹⁷ lists the opinions of the natural philosophers Gottfried Voigt,¹⁸ Jacques Gaffarel,¹⁹ David von der Beck,²⁰ the

¹³ "Nor, if one collects our matter in the state after death and again returns as now it is situated, and a second time the lights of life will be given to us, then should anything concern us that this also has happened, when it might be recalled by us to have been interrupted once?" Lucretius. *Rerum Natura, Book 3*, ed. E. J. Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 3:847 – 51. My translation.

¹⁴ Paracelsus, *The Hermetical and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus the Great, now for the first Time Faithfully Translated into English*, ed. and trans. A. E. Waite (1912; repr. Edmonds, WA: Alchemical Press, 1992), 149.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150. Lyndy Abraham describes the *venter equus* ("horse-belly") as "a slow, moist heat of dung used for putrefaction and distillation. Horse-belly is a euphuistic term for horse dung." See her *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 103.

¹⁶ For more on palingenesis, as well as on the creation of the homunculus, see William R. Newman's chapter entitled "Artificial Life and the Homunculus," in his *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 164 – 237.

¹⁷ Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vol. (New York: Macmillan, 1923 – 58).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7:349.

Jesuits Marin Mersenne²¹ and Athanasius Kircher,²² Johann Daniel Major,²³ Johann Ludwig Hannemann,²⁴ and Sebastian Wirdig.²⁵ More suspicious of these claims were Werner Rolfinck,²⁶ the Jesuit Laurentius Foreus,²⁷ and the anonymous author of the tract *Non-Entia chymica sive catalogus...* (Frankfort, 1645; 1670).²⁸ These were Continental scientists, so the Englishman Digby—living in exile in France and engaged with the work of these men—found himself on the forefront of debates surrounding Paracelsian science and palingenesis.

William R. Newman has argued that, combined with the scientific interest of the topic, palingenesis also held “a widespread religious signification” well into the seventeenth century.²⁹ Science, art, and religion, though they were obviously slipping away from each other, were not yet sequestered into isolated spheres, and Sir Kenelm Digby’s work with palingenesis exemplifies the scientific-artistic-religious synergy characteristic of early modern natural science. Digby’s work, however, is evidence of more than an interdisciplinary approach to studying the natural world. In his case, palingenesis became a kind of “waking dream symbol,” an absent referent for his absent wife and a receptacle for his desire to bring her back to life. And it does not appear that Digby was able to recognize palingenesis as such a metaphor; rather, it operated in him through what I call an *unconscious metalepsis*.

Metalepsis itself is a rather complicated literary trope that the *OED* defines as “The rhetorical figure consisting in the metonymical substitution of one word for another which is

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7:187.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7:236.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7:439.

²² *Ibid.*, 7:607.

²³ *Ibid.*, 8:33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8:388.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8:439.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8:71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7:607.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7:197.

²⁹ William R. Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 227.

itself a metonym; (more generally) any metaphorical usage resulting from a series or succession of figurative substitutions.” In a grade school example of metalepsis’ chain of signification, one might say “Seeing you is good for my eyes” is a metalepsis of the old saw “You’re a sight for sore eyes,” which, of course, is a metaphor for being happy to see someone. But most literary examples lack the clarity of this easy associative sequence. Erasmus gives an example from *Aeneid* 1.60: “*sed pater omnipotens speluncis abdidit atris,*”³⁰ in which we find metalepsis in the way *ater* (“blackness”) signifies obscurity and occultation.³¹ Metalepsis’ slippery and subtle figuration has inspired John Hollander to call it “both elusive and allusive at once.”³² It is, indeed, difficult to avoid obscurity when parsing the meaning of metalepsis, an often frustrating figure, and its imprecision drove George Puttenham in his distaste for it to designate it as “*farfet,*” or far-fetched.³³ This subtle trope of distancing has moved Harold Bloom to describe metalepsis as “maddeningly but accurately, a metonymy of a metonymy.”³⁴

Bloom extends our understanding of metalepsis (also called transumption) when he uses it as term for tracing literary influences in poetic creation, reading metalepsis as a kind of psychological mechanism, a “transumption of reading (and writing) poems, a final ratio of revision [an] *apophrades,* or a return of the precursors.”³⁵ Hollander reads this more directly as a “return of the dead.”³⁶ Bloom’s conception of metalepsis is an important feature in his theory of the anxiety of influences. According to Bloom’s take on metalepsis/transumption, a poet’s

³⁰ “But the father omnipotent hid them in the lusterless caves”

³¹ Brian Cummings, “Metalepsis: The Boundaries of Metaphor,” in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 220.

³² John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and after* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 116.

³³ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589; facsimile, Amsterdam: De Capo, 1971), 193.

³⁴ Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 102.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 73 – 74. See also his *The Breaking of the Vessels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 73 – 107.

³⁶ Hollander, *Figure of Echo*, 101.

precursors metaphorically come back to life in the poet's own work, lending to the creative process a certain unease (agon) as the poet wrestles with the presences of these ghosts.

But what I have in mind goes further, extending the understanding of this trope away from—but not entirely detached from—its literary application and further towards its psychological equivalent, which unfolds more in the way of Jungian projection or in terms of Freudian sublimation or cathexis,³⁷ wherein the subject invests the object in question (palingenesis in Digby's case) with a significant amount of (unconscious) emotional and psychological capital. Because the relationship between signifier and signified is disjointed, the trope subverts its own functionality to act as a trope. The metaphor intrudes upon the interpretive field to the point where the author no longer controls meaning, an example of what Heidegger describes when he says, "Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man."³⁸ The figure, then, becomes a hologram or fractal of language—a piece of a piece of a metaphor in which the originary signified is inherent but not necessarily explicit and, thus, easily sinks below the threshold of the subject's psychological control.

Digby invests a profound degree of psychic energy in palingenesis, so much so that it becomes the conduit for a very real, if metaphorical, return of the dead Venetia. Palingenesis is not a figure of speech for Digby: it is a scientific fact. And while he believes he writes of objective scientific phenomena, in reality he moves into the poetic realm of metalepsis. Palingenesis is the object, inspired ("breathed in") by the metaphor of resurrection which acts as

³⁷ Freud well may have described palingenesis as an "hysterical symbol" in Digby's case. See "The Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895)," *SE* (1:49 – 50). In the 1914 essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction," Freud describes sublimation as a process of "idealization" in that the "object, without any alteration in its nature, is aggrandized and exalted in the subject's mind" (14:94). This accurately describes Digby's *modus operandi*.

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971), 215.

the receiver of Digby's projection. For Digby, metalepsis' elusive nature, its double substitution of the signified, like electronic double encryption in internet security, renders the signified inaccessible to his awareness.

Digby's scientific research into palingenesis coupled with his psychic state following his wife's death could only have been exacerbated by his awareness of Venetia's middle name, *Anastasia*, Greek for "resurrection." The name certainly begs for a way to read Digby. But, at least in his scientific work, Digby shows himself to be nothing but a sober, methodical, and exacting natural philosopher, much more in the mold of Hobbes and Descartes than of Robert Fludd. He in no way countenances mystification of phenomena and is not very patient with those who do. This is not the case, however, in his private correspondence and memoir, wherein he adopts many of the tropes and conventions common to Christian Neoplatonism. It is as if we have two Digbys before us: the Aristotelian scientist, and the Christian Neoplatonist. And rarely do the two overlap.

Arising more from the Christian Neoplatonist side of his personality, Digby grew to be a close friend of the aging Ben Jonson and served as the poet and playwright's literary executor, bringing out the second folio of Jonson's *Workes* in 1641. As a result of their friendship, Jonson dedicated poetry to Venetia: "An Epigram to My Muse, the Lady Digby, on Her Husband, Sir Kenelme Digby" as well as the five poems and one poetic fragment surviving from the series about Lady Digby, "Eupheme; or, The Faire Fame. Left to Posteritie." The poems are quite excessively laudatory, and one wonders whether or not Digby may have contributed at least a little "over editing" as he prepared his edition.

Not only did the death of Lady Digby inspire Jonson: obviously, it also served as a key event of Sir Kenelm's life. Though he and Venetia had been friends from childhood, as a youth

of seventeen Digby became smitten with this beauty three years his senior and this infatuation led to a tempestuous courtship that ended in a clandestine marriage in about 1625. According to John Aubrey, they kept the wedding secret because Digby's mother disapproved of the reputation Venetia had earned as "a celebrated Beautie and Courtezane."³⁹ Aubrey claims that prior to marrying Digby, Venetia had borne at least one child to Richard, third earl of Dorset, and he insinuates that she had also been mistress to Sir Edmund Wyld.⁴⁰ Of course, Aubrey was writing long after the fact and from hearsay, so placing much credence in his remarks warrants caution. Whatever the case, after marriage Lady Digby appears to have become a very devout Catholic and Sir Kenelm's condition at that point has been described as "deeply uxorious."⁴¹

Digby tells the story of his travels abroad and his courtship of Venetia in a very curious work first published as his *Private Memoirs* by Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas in 1827. Nicolas found several sections of the manuscript inappropriate for his audience due to their erotically charged nature and did not include them in his edition, though he thought better of it and privately published the expunged material in 1828 in a volume entitled *Castrations*. A full edition, under the editorship of Vittorio Gabrieli, was not published until 1968 under Digby's original title, *Loose Fantasies*. The work itself is a *roman à clef*, but, indeed, a very odd one and tells the story of Theagenes (Digby) and his transcendent love for Stelliana (Venetia). In it, Digby paints a portrait of himself as Virgilian hero, of Venetia as immortal beloved, and of their love as Neoplatonic legend. Though the work is not without charm, in Gabrieli's words, its

³⁹ Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 98.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 98 – 103.

⁴¹ Michael Foster, "Digby, Sir Kenelm (1603–1665)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7629>, accessed 3 March 2010].

“strictly literary merits [...] do not rank very high.”⁴² Nevertheless, it is an interestingly self-attesting, often self-aggrandizing, document the author records for posterity.

Digby drafted the work as early as August of 1628 while on a privateering expedition (the same journey that yielded the comments on Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*). The *Fantasies* obviously held importance for Digby, but his intentions concerning its possible readership are unclear. Jackson Cope believes that in the *Loose Fantasies* “Digby’s baroque treatment of love and death was quite conscious, and self-consciously aimed at his contemporary audience through a calculated manipulation of figures,”⁴³ a view also maintained by Digby’s descendent Roy Digby Thomas.⁴⁴ However, Gabrieli asserts that there is no evidence that the work was circulated—even among friends—during Digby’s lifetime.⁴⁵ And the readership that finally received the text, certainly, was not comprised of Digby’s contemporaries.

Though modern readers may be tempted to read *Loose Fantasies* as a document of Renaissance self-fashioning, Digby himself, I believe, would have described the work as a testament of love. The work reads more in the way of a philosophical gesture than a memoir, a document in which Digby articulates for himself the truth event induced by the love he shares with Venetia, and in which, as Alain Badiou might say, the lovers “enter into the composition of *one* loving subject, who *exceeds* them both.”⁴⁶ There are traces of Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier* in the work. Castiglione concludes his book with a paean (attributed in the text to Pietro

⁴² Vittorio Gabrieli, Introduction to *Loose Fantasies*, ed. Vittorio Gabrieli (Roma: Edizioni di e Letteratura, 1968), xvi.

⁴³ Jackson I. Cope, “Sir Kenelm Digby’s Rewritings of His Life,” in *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth Century England*, ed. Derek Hirst (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 53.

⁴⁴ Thomas, *Digby: The Gunpowder Plotter’s Legacy*, 27.

⁴⁵ Gabrieli, *Loose Fantasies*, xviii.

⁴⁶ Alain Badiou, *Ethics, An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 43.

Bembo) on the courtier as apostle of transcendent beauty,⁴⁷ and such a move is entirely consonant with Digby's aesthetics and philosophical pose.

In appropriating for his constructed self in the romance the name Theagenes, Digby points to the epithet (*nate dea*) Virgil assigns to Aeneas. In *Sir Kenelm Digby and His Venetia*, E. W. Bligh includes a photographic plate of the flyleaf to Digby's volume of Virgil, upon which Digby copied Petrarch's account on first seeing Laura: an interesting if inconclusive piece of evidence illustrating the Digby-as-Theagenes-as-Aeneas-as-Petrarch chain of signification.⁴⁸ Likewise, by changing Venetia's name to Stelliana, Digby evokes a host of goddess associations, from *Aphrodite Urania* to the woman clothed with the sun and crowned with stars in Revelation—which is not too much of a stretch, considering the hagiographic portrait of Venetia Digby paints in his letters. This glorification is most apparent in a section of the *Loose Fantasies* in which Theagenes engages in a dialogue with the character "Rogesilius" (whom the key accompanying the Nicolas edition identifies as Sir Kenelm's cousin Robert Digby). Theagenes in his discourse meditates on love in true Christian Neoplatonic terms: "this is the blessed state of the divinity, to have eternally the understanding replenished with notions of infinite perfection, and to have the will continually taken up entirely in loving and being loved; which causeth a perfect joy in this happy and eternal society."⁴⁹ He closes his argument with an avowal that Stelliana is the *exemplum* of divine love on earth: "I having proved how noble a thing love is, and how necessary to make a man completely happy, and that in the object of mine there is so much perfection, as I am sure you will say (who are yet an indifferent and unpassionate judge) that she deserveth it beyond all women that you or I have ever known."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1967), 333 – 43.

⁴⁸ E. W. Bligh, *Sir Kenelm Digby and His Venetia* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1932), plate facing page 206.

⁴⁹ Kenelm Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, ed. Vittorio Gabrieli (Roma: Edizioni di e Letteratura, 1968), 129 – 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

Besides Castiglione, beneath the palimpsest of these lines we can discern traces of the teachings on love of the First Letter of St. John, of Plato's Diotima, and the *Theologiae Platonicae* of Marsilio Ficino. First, Digby transforms Venetia via language act into Stelliana ("the star woman"), who is herself further allegorized as a Neoplatonic love goddess. This is, of course, standard Renaissance Neoplatonism, and Digby still realizes he is involved in a rhetorical game here. But not long after he initially recorded his *Loose Fantasies*, his beloved was indeed exiled to heaven through the agency of death, mitigating the representational character of the trope and edging it toward a more literal understanding. That is, the heavenly Venetia/Stelliana was no longer a metaphor. Or perhaps it is better to say that, in Digby's psyche at least, the Venetia of metaphor replaced the Venetia of flesh, blood, and spirit. The "real" Venetia disappeared, and the ideal, figurative Venetia became the new real. As Gabrielli observes, "it is hard to assess how far the *Fantasies* 'literally' reflect Digby's life, and where the transposition and stylization of actually experienced reality—which is the function of art—begins and ends."⁵¹ Digby assuredly revised the work following Venetia's death,⁵² and it is not too much of a risk to speculate that in his later emendations he exalted his beloved in more glorified terms than in earlier drafts. He certainly tends in this direction in some of the letters he wrote after his wife died. But he also betrays a propensity for glorification in his scientific work.

Digby invested considerable speculation, experiment, and, one may assume, expense on the possibility of effecting palingenesis. Nearly thirty years transpired from what were probably his earliest researches into the subject during his seclusion at Gresham College in the mid-1630s to the presentation of his findings on botany "at a Meeting of the Society for promoting Philosophical Knowledge by Experiments," also at Gresham, on the twenty-third of January

⁵¹ Gabrielli, *Loose Fantasies*, xxxii.

⁵² Bligh, *Sir Kenelm Digby and His Venetia*, 13; Gabrielli, note to *Loose Fantasies*, 179.

1660. During the intervening period, Digby had twice lived in exile in France and had been imprisoned for a time because of his support for the Catholic cause in England. He habitually fell in and out of the confidences of kings and magistrates, but, despite his troubles and peregrinations, palingenesis remained an intriguing subject for him.

Digby's first published mention of palingenesis appears in the response to Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* written while under confinement in 1643, ten years after Venetia's death. Browne, in a section of his text that begins with a consideration of the resurrection of the dead, affirms the possibility of the palingenesis of mercury, of animals, and, especially, of plants:

Let us speake naturally, and like Philosophers, the formes of alterable bodies in their sensible corruption perish not; nor, as wee imagine, wholly quit their mansions, but retire and contract themselves into their secret and inaccessible parts, where they may best protect themselves from the action of their Antagonist. A plant or vegetable consumed to ashes, to a contemplative and schoole Philosopher seemes utterly destroyed, and the forme to have taken his leave for ever: But to a sensible Artist the formes are not perished, but withdrawne into their incombustible part, where they lie secure from the action of that devouring element. This is made good by experience, which can from the ashes of a plant revivifie the plant, and from its cinders recall it into its stalk and leaves againe. What the Art of man can doe in these inferiour pieces, what blasphemy is it to affirme the finger of God cannot doe in these more perfect and sensible structures? This is that mysticall Philosophy, from whence no true Scholler becomes an Atheist, but from the visible effects of nature growes up a reall Divine, and beholds not in a dreame, as *Ezekiel*, but in an ocular and visible object the types of his resurrection.⁵³

Certainly, for Browne, as for Digby, this science is informed by a theological belief in the resurrection of the body. Nevertheless, and curiously, Digby *disavows*, somewhat mildly, palingenesis in the *Observations*, saying of Browne,

His owne store furnisheth him with a most pregnant example [of the soul's immortality] of reviving a plant (the same numerical plant) out of his owne ashes. But under his favour, I beleeve his experiment will faile, if under the notion of the same, hee comprehendeth all the Accidents that first accompanied the plant; for since in the ashes

⁵³ Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici: A New Critical Edition with Biographical and Critical Introduction*, ed. Jean-Jacques Denonain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 63.

there remaineth onely the fixed Salt, I am very confident that all the colour, and much of the odor and Taste of it, is flowne away with the Volatile salt.⁵⁴

And while Digby's pronouncements here might *seem* to stem purely from theory, they are in fact the result of experience. However, being somewhat the cagey and secretive scientist, Digby did not divulge his findings until his *Discourse Concerning Vegetation of Plants* in 1660. There Digby describes an experiment in palingenesis in which he "calcined [i.e., incinerated] a good quantity of Nettles, Roots, Stalks, Leaves, Flowers" and subjected the ashes to a cycle of moistening, warming, filtering, and congealing. He tells his audience

it is most true, that when the water [of the distillation of the ash] was congealed into ice, there appeared to be abundance of Nettles frozen in the ice. They had not the colour of Nettles. No greenesse accompanied them. They were white. But otherwise, it is impossible for any Painter to delineate a throng of Nettles more exactly, then they were designed in the water.⁵⁵

This was as close as Digby could get to achieving palingenesis of *plants*, though his friend the Jesuit scientist and philosopher Athanasius Kircher (c. 1602 – 1680) "assured" Digby he had accomplished it.⁵⁶ Digby's results may have been as much as anyone could have expected, as success in palingenesis could also be counted in the operator's beholding the dead body's form "in a smokelike image."⁵⁷

However his vegetable experiments may have proceeded, Digby was able to convince himself he had achieved the palingenesis of "Cray-Fishes"—through some dubious methodology.⁵⁸ Digby, generally following the same procedure with crayfish as he had with

⁵⁴ Kenelm Digby, *Observations vpon Religio Medici, Occasionally Written by Sir Kenelme Digby, Knight* (1643), 52.

⁵⁵ Digby, *Vegetation of Plants*, 76 – 78. Interestingly, Digby's observation of the crystallization of the "nettles" bears a striking resemblance to experiments in "capillary dynamolysis" undertaken by Eugene and Lilly Kolisko in the 1930s. See their *Agriculture of Tomorrow*, trans. John Jennings (1939; repr. Bournemouth, UK: Kolisko Archive, 1978).

⁵⁶ Digby, *Vegetation of Plants*, 75.

⁵⁷ Herbert Silberer, *Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult Arts (Problems of Mysticism and Its Symbolism)*, trans. Smith Ely Jelliffe (1917; repr. New York: Dover, 1971), 142.

⁵⁸ Digby, *Vegetation of Plants*, 83 – 84.

nettles, contributed one extra step—and a whopper of a mistake it was. He added sand and water to his decoction and before too many days saw crayfish, indeed, appear in his alembic. Crayfish eggs, apparently, were hidden in the sand. He concludes that one “cannot allow Plants to have Life. They are not *Se Moventia*.” Crayfish, on the other hand, are self-moving.

The idea of resurrection underwrites Digby’s preoccupation with palingenesis. He prefaces his discussion of palingenesis with the hope that through this work the operator will produce from the ashes “a kind of glorified body, such as we hope ours will be after the Resurrection.”⁵⁹ After Digby relates his experiences with palingenesis, his language morphs from scientific discourse to theological meditation upon the restoration of the body in glory as promised to faithful Christians. In the *Vegetation of Plants* Digby says of the Resurrection, “it will follow out of the force of nature, after the great dayes Conflagration hath calcined the whole Masse of Matter into a formlesse heap of Ashes: So disposing it, by excluding and destroying all particular formes, to admit the action of subsistent ones upon it.”⁶⁰ Resurrection, then, is absolutely rational, a thoroughly scientific, process. God, for Digby, is the ultimate alchemist.

This is the point when it comes to early modern scientific discourse. As Ann Blair argues, the entire scientific project of Renaissance natural theology was engaged with leading the student toward God through “observing and understanding the intricate and causal interconnections that account for the harmonious arrangement and variety of the creation.”⁶¹ This way of viewing the world was not regarded as mystical, however, but as thoroughly rational. Indeed, Digby upbraids Sir Thomas Browne for sloppy scientific thinking as regards, among other things, the existence

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶¹ Ann Blair, *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 26.

of witches; and, following Aristotle, he admonishes Browne to stick to phenomena.⁶² Not that Digby is always so demanding of himself.

The notion of associating the chemical perfection bodies with the Resurrection was, of course, a tenet of alchemy. Comparing the perfection of nature to the glorified body was nothing new. In the *Bibliotheca chemica* (printed in 1546, but written as early as 1330) Petrus Bonus makes the connection easily.⁶³ As scholars have observed, the alchemist could easily associate the language and aims of alchemy with the Christian program of salvation, perfection, and resurrection.⁶⁴ This metaphor occurs in the alchemical tract *The Glory of the World*, wherein the unnamed author compares perfection of matter to resurrection and describes alchemical work in theological terms: “the body loses all its grossness, and becomes new and pure; nor can this body and soul ever die, seeing that they have entered into an eternal union, such as the union of our bodies and souls shall be on the last day.”⁶⁵ Compare these to Digby’s words that the plant raised from its ashes would have “a kind of glorified body.”⁶⁶ In a letter dated 11 September 1633 and addressed to “My kinde friend” Digby employs similar language: “Glory neither destroyeth nor drowneth nature, but refineth her and then leaueth her att liberty to exercise all her orderly functions; of w^{ch} loue is the noblest.”⁶⁷

It would be wrong, however, to interpret Digby’s philosophical/scientific stance as idealist. On the contrary, his is a thoroughly materialist project, grounded as it is in an

⁶² Digby, *Observations*, 36 – 37; 40 – 41.

⁶³ C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies.*, vol. 13 in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 297 – 98.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 299. See also Fernando Vidal, “Brains, Bodies, Selves, and Science: Anthropologies of Identity and the Resurrection of the Body,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2002): 947 – 48 and 952 – 57.

⁶⁵ In *The Hermetic Museum*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Edward Waite (1953; repr. York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1990), 175.

⁶⁶ Digby, *Vegetation of Plants*, 73.

⁶⁷ Kenelm Digby, “A New Digby Letter-Book: ‘In Praise of Venetia,’” ed. Vittorio Gabrieli, *The National Library of Wales Journal* 9.2 (1955): 147.

Aristotelian/empiricist framework.⁶⁸ Indeed, in his *Two Treatises on Souls and Bodies*, Digby upbraids those who apply spiritual terminology to physical realities and admonishes them to stick to describing the soul in terms of observable qualities.⁶⁹ In the section treating the soul in *Two Treatises*, Digby considers not a taxonomy of the soul, but limits himself to describing its operations: logic, the accumulation of knowledge, the experience of time, and the like. In this, he follows Aristotle's assertion that "all the affections of the soul involve a body."⁷⁰ Even Digby's experiments with the so-called "Powder of Sympathy," though laughable to us, were based on a materialist understanding of the atomic nature of the world. Digby clearly held to a dualistic worldview not dissimilar from that of his friend Descartes. The bifurcation of Digby's *Two Treatises*—one part on bodies and one on the soul—certainly speaks to this. But that is not all there is to Digby.

In Praise of Venetia

While his scientific work is grounded in an Aristotelian and even Cartesian sensibility, Digby reveals himself in the letters and *Loose Fantasies* as imbued with the spirit and aesthetics of Christian Neoplatonism, evidence of a truly impressive intellectual ambidextrousness. But what is interesting in his scientific work concerned with palingenesis is the way the Christian Neoplatonist haunts the Aristotelian. He thinks he is treating the subject as a scientist, when in fact he is unconsciously treating it as a metaphysical poet.

⁶⁸For more on Digby's Aristotelian materialism see Betty Jo Dobbs, "Studies in the Natural Philosophy of Sir Kenelm Digby," *Ambix* 18, no. 1 (March 1971): 1 – 25. See also John Henry, "Atomism and Eschatology: Catholicism and Natural Philosophy in the Interregnum," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 15, no. 3 (November 1982): 211 – 39.

⁶⁹Kenelm Digby, *Two Treatises. in the one of which, The Nature of Bodies; in the other, The Nature of Mans Soule; is looked into: in way of discovery, of the Immortality of Reasonable Soules* (1644), 394 – 97.

⁷⁰*De Anima* 1.1.403a.16. From Aristotle, *Basic Works*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

Michel de Certeau calls the mysticism of the early modern period a “bereavement” that “emerges from mourning,” and results from “absence.”⁷¹ This is certainly the trajectory onto which unconscious metalepsis draws Digby following Venetia’s death: one which he traces until his own. Certeau further defines the mystic’s desire as a desire for the absent God and suggests that the Mystical Body of the Church becomes a kind of surrogate for the hidden deity. For Certeau, “this central logos calls back one who has disappeared and calls for an effectuality. Those who take this discourse seriously are those who feel the pain of an absence of body. The ‘birth’ they all await, in one way or another, must invent for the verb a body of love.”⁷² Digby’s researches into palingenesis received all the intensity of his bereavement for “the one who has disappeared,” and his pain for the “absence of a body” was very real. As a result of this very palpable absence, Digby created a surrogate for the absent body in his attention to palingenesis and its promise of resurrection. Palingenesis became the psychic object of Digby’s cathexis, wherein Digby the Aristotelian and Digby the Neoplatonist found momentary stasis. His incredibly romantic nature, unbeknownst to him, left him prey to a symbol of transcendence from which he never escaped.

The letters Digby wrote to his family and friends following Venetia’s death offer the best insight into the manner in which metalepsis writes Digby in his scientific work. These letters, entitled “In Praise of Venetia,” were meticulously copied by Digby’s scribe and are preserved among the Morgan MSS of the New York Public Library, documentary evidence not publicly available until 1937. In Gabrieli’s opinion “they read like formalised soliloquies wherein Digby tried to clarify his feelings, work off his despondent mood and give vent to his equally sincere

⁷¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1 – 2.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 80.

instinct for self-dramatization.”⁷³ Gabrieli follows the tradition, begun by Digby himself and followed upon by E. W. Bligh and R. T. Petersson, which depicts Venetia’s death as *the* psychological threshold in Digby’s life.⁷⁴ And while Venetia’s death was no doubt a key event in his life, one can speculate as to whether the seeds of Digby’s own psychological palingenesis were not planted long before Digby encountered his immortal beloved.

As he does in considering the *Loose Fantasies*, Cope questions whether Digby’s series of letters written subsequent to Venetia’s death may be an attempt to rehabilitate his wife’s reputation.⁷⁵ But before whom? Not, as Cope suggests, before the Digbys’ peers, who probably never saw the letters in question. Perhaps, we might argue, Digby’s project of rehabilitation was enacted for the edification of his sons, still very young children at the time of their mother’s death. Perhaps, it is almost too obvious, his marital apologetics were performed before the addressees of the letters, Digby’s brother John among them. Even here, though, the relationship between form and intention is hazy. Gabrieli, for one, questions whether or not the letters ever reached their addressees. “Some of them,” he admits, “no less than meditations, may very well have been composed as literary exercises.”⁷⁶ More likely, the letters were written as a glorification, a theological transumption, of Venetia before Digby himself.

In the letter to his sons, Kenelm, John, and George, dated 18 May 1633 (less than three weeks after Venetia’s death) Digby writes at very great length and with vehement emotion. Digby certainly wrote the letter with posterity in mind, as his sons were very young at the time: Kenelm born in 1625, John in 1629, and George earlier in 1633. In the letter, Digby extols Venetia in decidedly Neoplatonic terminology, equating her beauty with virtue in a tone also

⁷³ Vittorio Gabrieli, “A New Digby Letter-Book: ‘In Praise of Venetia,’” ed. Vittorio Gabrieli. *The National Library of Wales Journal* 9, no. 2 (1955): 114.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷⁵ Cope, “Sir Kenelm Digby’s Rewritings of His Life,” 59.

⁷⁶ Gabrieli, “Letter-Book,” 9, no. 2: 113.

encountered in the *Loose Fantasies*: “For a beginning then, I shall tell you that I am confident a richer and a brauer soule was neuer lodged in a fairer and more louely bodie: they held a iust proportion together; they were both master peeces of God and nature, and aequally wth out taint or blemish”⁷⁷ Digby in another place explains that Venetia “grew fatt”;⁷⁸ and Gabrieli, based on evidence he garners from Digby, believes her sublime countenance was marred by the ravages of small pox.⁷⁹ Digby proceeds to attest Venetia’s modesty and her piety, relating that she had “with her a ghostly father; a reverend and holy man,” suggesting she was harboring a Catholic priest.⁸⁰ He likewise describes her devotion to “the Sacrament” and her desire that “att the houre of breathing out her soule she might haue the habite of St. Francis vpon her,”⁸¹ which implies that she was a Third Order Franciscan.⁸² Then he renders a brace of excessive—and slightly creepy—blazons on Venetia’s beauty, both living and dead.⁸³

In a letter dated 24 June 1663 to his brother John, Digby gives further evidence of his unconscious metalepsis. Here, following a passage in which he asserts of the body that “the sacrament [of marriage] giveth a diuine addition and confirmation to it,” Digby speaks of Venetia in alchemical terms:

But sometimes (though very rarely) nature will show vnto us, as if to iustifye her power, that she can make a Master piece perfect on euery hand, so that on no side of it censorious critikes shall be able to finde a blemish or a shadow. But (alas) when she parteth with such a Phoenix out of her bosome, and deliuereth her vp in her due season

⁷⁷ Ibid., 122.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 131.

⁷⁹ Digby, “A New Digby Letter-Book: ‘In Praise of Venetia,’” *National Library of Wales Journal* 9, no. 4 (1956): 440. In a letter, undated, written in French, Digby describes Venetia as having “quelques marques et vestiges d’autre fois un mal discourtois.” See “Letter-Book,” *National Library of Wales Journal* 10, no. 1 (1957): 104. There is speculation that Nathaniel Hawthorne modeled his characters Aylmer and Georgiana of “The Birth-mark” on Sir Kenelm and Lady Digby (see Alfred S. Reid, “Hawthorne’s Humanism: ‘The Birth-mark’ and Sir Kenelm Digby.” *American Literature* 38, no. 3 [Nov 1966]: 337 – 51.)

Apparently, Digby’s medical treatment of Venetia included her regular partaking of a “viper wine” as a tonic over a space of *nine years* (!) (Petersson, *Ornament*, 103).

⁸⁰ Digby, “Letter-Book,” 9, no. 2: 125.

⁸¹ Ibid., 132.

⁸² Ibid., 133.

⁸³ Ibid., 129 – 31.

into fortunes handes, that enuious Goddess repining att the perfection of the others worke, looketh seldom wth a benigne eye vpon her: whereby we often see that they haue the worst fortune, who have in them selues groundes to hope and deserue the best. The Phoenix of this age was my wife: for as in exactnesse of beauty and features, in goodlinesse of shape and person, and in gracefulness of behavior, she exceeded y^e handsomest of her age, euen of their owne acknowledgement.⁸⁴

The phoenix was the symbol *par excellence* utilized by alchemists as emblematic of the circuit of alchemical perfection and as a cipher for palingenesis: illustrations of an assortment of birds, salamanders, and even anthropomorphic figures arising from ashes or fire are standard features of alchemical iconography. Lyndy Abraham describes the phoenix as “a symbol of renewal and resurrection signifying the philosopher’s stone” as well as emblematic of “alchemical multiplication, where the quality and quantity of the elixir are infinitely multiplied by dissolution and coagulation.”⁸⁵ Digby, in this exuberant description of his deceased beloved, seems to have conveniently “forgotten” the theological-alchemical motif implied in the symbol and relies instead on a figure of excellence. Nevertheless, in Digby’s selection on the phoenix as a metaphor for his dead wife, we can read an additional strand of the unconscious metalepsis that played havoc with his psyche.

In a *second* letter to his brother John, also dated 24 June 1663, Digby makes the Venetia-palingenesis-resurrection association even more explicitly. Following the macabre blazon in which the melancholic Digby catalogues the corruption and decay of Venetia’s body in the tomb, he conjectures about what she may be pondering in spirit, asking “is not her soule afflicted with thinking that this vncouth carkasse she must one day dwell in againe?”⁸⁶ Yet, he already possesses the answer, for he believes Venetia

knoweth that this is the course of nature and the lawe of God prescribed in the creation, which by such changes bringeth thinges to perfection. In nature euery retrogradation is

⁸⁴ Digby, “Letter-Book,” 9, no. 2: 144.

⁸⁵ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 152.

⁸⁶ Digby, “Letter-Book,” 9 no. 4: 455.

the meanes to acquire new degrees of excellency; and after euery dissolution, when the partes are ioyned together againe, the meanest thinges multiplie thier vertues a hundred and a thousand fold.

I can not place the resurrection of our bodies among miracles, but do reckon it the last worke and periode of nature; to the comprehension of which, examples and reason may carry vs a great way.⁸⁷

For Digby, resurrection is not contrary to the laws of nature. Rather, resurrection accords with nature's intention. In his theory of resurrection Digby tries to explain exactly how nature works toward perfection. Furthermore, this is a thoroughly—for the time—*scientific* position, as Digby “proves”:

Lett vs call to our ayde the spagyrike art and that will teach vs that it is not in the power of any agent to destroy the forme of the meanest vegetable that groweth vpon the earth, nor to separate it so totally from the matter it was in but that it will still retaine a seede or rather a sparke of fire that hath power to assimilate other fitt matter into its owne nature, and to make an other substance like the former, but much more noble and perfect. Take but a contemptible nettle out of a ditch, and by putrefaction and distillation separate all the partes of it, and calcine the faeces with the strongest fire that can be made, and vse all the power of art to destroy this poore weede; yet there will remaine a salt which all the elements together can not alter or corrupt; and as soone as that meeteth with a fitt subject (though neuer many so many yeares after), a fresh herbe, the same indiuiduall in essence and substance that was before, will spring vp againe.⁸⁸

Here Digby shows all his cards. We see evidence of his study of Paracelsus, who in a neologism referred to his variety of medical alchemy (also called iatrochemistrice) as the “*ars spagyrica*” (“spagyric art”).⁸⁹ We also find traces of Digby's own work with palingenesis in the seemingly offhand example of nettles—the very plant he tells his audience at Gresham thirty years later he had used in attempting the palingenesis of plants. When Digby says that the decomposed plant will “retaine a seede or rather a sparke of fire,” however, he is not only referring to the physical seed. Rather, we find in this reference an echo or transumption of a passage from St. Paul mediated through Paracelsian science:

⁸⁷ Ibid., 455.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 455.

⁸⁹ Paracelsus, *Hermetical and Alchemical Writings*, 166 – 67.

But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body [....] So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. (1 Cor 15: 35—38; 42)⁹⁰

As he continues the letter to John, Digby ascribes to the risen plant “the attributes of a gloryfyed bodie.”⁹¹ (457). Then, in a bizarre twist, as he contemplates his beloved’s state “in heauen,” while addressing his brother, Digby begins to apostrophize *Venetia*. It is almost as if we witness Digby’s breakdown:

Braue Soule, if thou beest so neere me, or where thou mayst heare my voice, or comprehend the motions of my heart which thinketh of nothing but thee, be so charitable as to wipe away the mistes and filmes that so dimme my eyes, as well as vnderstanding as of sense, that I can not see the least glimmering of the light that shineth about thee.⁹²

And he continues in much the same vein for several lines, before begging John’s pardon with the oxymoronic apology, “Mine is a kinde of rationall maddnesse.”

Had Digby the language of psychoanalysis at his disposal, he might have been able to identify his obsession with palingenesis as a sublimation of his grief over *Venetia*’s death. But he did not. In this letter more than in any other example found in his written work, we see the left-brain/Aristotelian Digby and the right-brain/Neoplatonic Digby united in a brief but unstable union. This clearly is a “rationall maddnesse.” Elsewhere, the scientist and the poet are segregated into neutral corners of his psyche, and he maintained this psychological sequestration throughout the remainder of his life in which his writing fell into two general categories: scientific research, on the one hand, and Catholic apologetics on the other. But in this letter written only six weeks after *Venetia*’s death, Digby comes closer than he ever does in his writing

⁹⁰ Authorized version.

⁹¹ Digby, “Letter-Book,” 9 no. 4: 457.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 458.

to bringing his conflict to a resolution. Freud might say that, in his state of exalted melancholia, Digby was suffering from a denial of Venetia's death and that he fixated himself on the symbol of palingenesis as a link to "the loved object." But it may be more accurate to detect echoes of the eroticism and exaltation of the beloved familiar in the writing of mysticism. Certainly, this notion can be found in Petrarch's love for Laura and Dante's for Beatrice, but both have analogues if not antecedents in mysticism. Henri Bergson, for one, recognized this relationship. "When critics reproach mysticism with expressing itself in the same terms as passionate love," he writes, "they forget that it was love which began by plagiarizing mysticism, borrowing from its fervour, its raptures, its ecstasies: in using the language of a passion it had transfigured, mysticism has resumed possession of its own."⁹³ For Bergson, then, human erotic love models itself on the human desire for God, a notion going back at least to Plato and revisited by Augustine and Aquinas to mention only the most popular examples in the Christian West. Digby's exaltation of his love for Venetia bears resonances with this tradition. But the metaleptic chain by which Digby is drawn—and its attendant symbol of resurrection—reaches beyond his love for Venetia and his guilt about her death. It springs from deeper psychological and existential layers, one of which is his relationship with his father.

Digby the Catholic

Digby's relationship with his father was characterized more by absence than presence—but his father's was a powerful absence. When, on 30 June 1606, Sir Everard was executed for his participation in the Gunpowder Plot, his elder son Kenelm was only two-years old. As horses drew the prisoner in a wattle hurdle to the gallows, it is reported, Sir Everard's wife Mary

⁹³ Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton with W. Horsfall Carter (1932; repr., New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1935), 42.

“braved the crowd’s displeasure by crying out to him and two small boys waved from a window, keeping their heads low.”⁹⁴ We may safely assume that the two boys were Masters Kenelm and John Digby. When the hangman drew the heart from the still living Sir Everard and held it up to the hostile crowd announcing, “Here is the heart of a Traytor!”, legend has it the dying man replied, “Thou liest!”⁹⁵

It is not hard to conjecture what his father’s martyrdom must have meant to Sir Kenelm. Often our first memories—typically registered between the ages of two and five—are connected to an experience of pain or trauma. His father’s death may well have been Sir Kenelm’s earliest memory. And, even were it not, awareness of the circumstances of his father’s death would easily have taken on legendary proportions in the mind and imagination of a personality already prone to interpreting events in mythic terms. While imprisoned and awaiting his execution, the elder Digby wrote a letter to his sons, in which he admonished them to

Let this end (God’s service I mean) be the chief and onely contentious strife between you...Let this be the mark which your thoughts and actions may still level at; for here is the chieftest Prise, to recompense the best deseriver...I...pray that you live as I may hope to die, which is in the perfect obedience of the Catholick and onely saving Church [...]. Above all things in the world, seek to obey and follow your Mother’s will and pleasure; who as she hath been the best wife to me that ever man enjoyed, so can she not fail to shew her self equal to the best Mother, if you deserve not the contrary.⁹⁶

According to Roy Digby Thomas, this letter was found among Sir Kenelm’s private papers following his death and his servants often found him rereading it. Considering the importance of Sir Everard’s letter to his son, one can interpret the letter Digby wrote to his own sons following Venetia’s death as a mimesis in which he both imitates his martyred father and calls him back from the dead.

⁹⁴ Thomas, *Digby*, 3.

⁹⁵ Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 96; Thomas, *Digby*, 3.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Thomas, *Digby*, 19.

Obviously, Digby's was a thoroughly—and defiantly—Catholic family. His godfather, and a close friend of his parents, was John Gerard, leader of the Jesuit mission in England, and one of the nation's most wanted fugitives.⁹⁷ Further proof of Digby's recusancy is the fact that he left Oxford without taking a degree in order to avoid the mandatory Oath of Supremacy.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Digby formally converted to the Anglican faith in 1630, a move most critics interpret as political rather than theological.⁹⁹ Indeed, his conversion coincided with Digby's being made Commissioner in the Royal Navy, and he is said to have been a candidate for Secretary of State by 1632.¹⁰⁰

However, following Venetia's death, Digby returned to the religion of his birth, the religion for which his father died. Digby's friend Archbishop William Laud wrote letters urging him to reconsider.¹⁰¹ The date of his re-conversion is assumed to have been between 1633 and 1635. Gabrieli argues that, like the "secret" period of his marriage to Venetia, Digby's formal return to the Catholic Church came in 1635 following a similarly "secret" period. Venetia's death was the zero point of his return to the Catholic fold.¹⁰²

Digby's return to Rome was followed by a fervent engagement in Catholic apologetics on his part. As with the roles of courtier, lover, and scientist, Digby threw himself wholeheartedly into the new role of apologist. Among the first of his works following his ecclesiastical renewal

⁹⁷ Ibid., 9. On Fr. Gerard, see, in particular, Alice Hogge, *God's Secret Agents: Queen Elizabeth's Forbidden Priests and the Hatching of the Gunpowder Plot* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005). In his *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest*, Fr. Gerard relates that he was responsible for bringing the Digby family into the Roman Church. He instructed Sir Everard in the faith and then the two of them conspired to lead Lady Digby thence as well. He admits of Sir Everard that "I loved him very much." See John Gerard *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest*, trans. Philip Caraman (New York: Pellegrini, 1952), 166 – 68. Later, Sir Everard defended the Jesuit at his trial (204).

⁹⁸ R. T. Petersson, *Sir Kenelm Digby: The Ornament of England, 1603 – 1665* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 35.

⁹⁹ Petersson speculates that Digby's conversion was due to being resigned that the sun had set once and for all on the Catholic faith (92 – 95). Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas conjectures that Digby was "educated a Protestant for obvious political reasons" in the Preface to Digby's *Private Memoirs* (viii). For Nicolas, Digby was never "of any other religion" than that of the Church of Rome.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, *Digby*, 113 – 14.

¹⁰¹ Petersson, *Ornament*, 110; 337 n138.

¹⁰² Gabrielli, Introduction to "Letter-Book," 9 no. 2: 119.

was a preface to Sir Tobie Mathew's translation of Augustine's *Confessions* (Paris, 1636). It was at this period that Digby recorded his conversations with Sir Edward Coke's daughter Frances Villiers, Lady Purbeck, present at that time in France, as he attempted to sway her to Catholicism.¹⁰³ These discussions, published as *A Conference with a Lady about Choyce of Religion* (Paris, 1638), show Digby at once fervent, rational, and romantic. Digby also prepared a paraphrase of Albertus Magnus' *A Treatise of Adhering to God* (London, 1654). In addition to these endeavors, he composed a two-hundred-plus-page letter to his cousin, George Digby, urging him to convert to the Roman Church, published as *Letters between Ld George Digby, and Sr Kenelm Digby, kt. Concerning Religion* (London, 1651).¹⁰⁴ During exile in France, Digby wrote *A Discourse, Concerning Infallibility in Religion* (Paris, 1652; with another edition issued in Amsterdam during the same year). Of Digby's enthusiasm for winning souls to Rome, Robert Sidney, the second Earl of Leicester, writing from France, lamented to King Charles I, "Sir Kenelm is busy in seducing the King's subjects in these parts from the Church of England."¹⁰⁵ Digby also consulted with Pope Urban VIII on behalf of England's Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria, who was concerned for the Catholic cause in England, making Digby's return to Rome literal as well as figurative.¹⁰⁶

Venetia's death, then, tragic in itself, became a further metalepsis of the death of Sir Everard for Digby, which was also a metalepsis of the Catholic Church. The constellation of realities and symbol which intruded upon Digby's psyche following his wife's death brought him back to Rome. His work in palingenesis was an excrescence (perhaps it would be better to say an

¹⁰³ Petersson, *Ornament*, 134

¹⁰⁴ Petersson (in *Ornament*) reports that Digby's evangelical efforts were successful with both George Digby and Lady Purbeck. Lord Digby, however, relapsed into Anglicanism (138); whereas Lady Purbeck's conversion was of a more militant and permanent strain (142).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 212 – 22.

inflorescence) of this chain of tropes: in a sense, the alchemical distillation of his (unconscious) Great Work. Digby's thoughts on palingenesis and the Glorified Body, furthermore, are truly materialist notions, perhaps the epitome of materialism. Finally, the absence upon absence experienced by Digby drove him in response to find "real presences" in every sense of the phrase. As de Certeau describes it, "One suffers the pangs of absence because one suffers the pangs of the One."¹⁰⁷ Digby's suffering is a symptom triggered by the absences of Venetia and his father, but derives from a desire for assurance in a religious context: the real presence standing as the final referent in his long chain of metalepsis is the real presence of the resurrected Christ. Indeed, Digby's period of Catholic apologetic activity can be read as a therapeutic discourse in which he sought to appease the ghosts of his Catholic father and wife while defining his (and his age's) more immediate concerns for religious assurance and at the same time defining for himself his own relationship to a more holy Ghost. His religious writing, then, is as much apology as apologetics.

The Digbian *corpus* can be seen, as Slavoj Žižek says of Christianity itself, as "a militant work of love."¹⁰⁸ This is why I would hesitate to interpret Digby's train of metalepsis in the Freudian sense of repression, libido, and Oedipal anxiety that Bloom detects in literary influences. The irony resides in the fact that, though Digby focused on the palingenesis of plants and animals in his work, his real sphere of activity is grounded not in biology but in the soul. The manifestations of unconscious metalepsis evident in Digby's life and work are more akin to what George Steiner describes as *real presences*, living presences born of admiration, or love, or appreciation, or duty, or even guilt. That Digby's metalepsis is unconscious for the most part, I

¹⁰⁷ Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Delpech-Ramey, "An Interview with Slavoj Žižek," 36.

have little doubt. But its energy derives as much from love as from anxiety as he strives to forge an epistemology of assurance.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROSICRUCIAN MYSTICISM OF HENRY AND THOMAS VAUGHAN

“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” ~ Colossians 2:2 – 3.¹

Like Dee, Donne, and Digby, the identical twin brothers Henry and Thomas Vaughan in their writing also disclose a desire for intimacy with God that responds to the changing intellectual and religiopolitical circumstances of their cultural moment.² We see in them what Charles Taylor has called a “religious longing, the longing for and response to a more-than-immanent transformation perspective” which he believes “remains a strong independent source of motivation in modernity,” despite Western civilization’s apparent move away from it.³ And, as with all of the writers in this study, Henry and Thomas Vaughan’s respective and intertwined turns to religion and religious writing are also a product of their own life experiences and their grappling with “ultimate issues.”

Some critics, however, dismiss any notion of a “religious turn,” at least in Henry Vaughan. This was certainly a position advanced by Frank Kermode, during the heyday of New Criticism. He argued that the “conversion” of Henry Vaughan was more a poetic than a religious experience. “What cannot be too strongly stated,” he wrote, “is the absolute uselessness of attempts to discuss poetry as if its value were determined by his religious life, and of seeking in poetry evidence, to be interpreted in philosophical or theological terms, of a religious experience

¹ Authorized Version.

² Though documentary evidence attesting to the fact is skimpy, most Vaughan scholars take it for granted that the Vaughans were identical twins. See Jennifer Speake, “Vaughan, Thomas (1621–1666),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28148>, accessed 30 Aug 2011]; *Thomas and Rebecca Vaughan’s ‘Aqua Vitae: Non Vitis (British Library MS, Sloane 1741)*, ed. and trans. Donald R. Dickson (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), xi; Stevie Davies, *Henry Vaughan* (Bridgend, UK: Seren, 1995), 32 – 33.

³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 2007), 530.

or series of such experiences.”⁴ He has been followed by others, particularly Jonathan F. S. Post, who claims that the apparently religious nature of Henry’s work is simply a product of his mimesis of George Herbert.⁵ He diminishes Henry as a “bold, sometimes careless, but rarely meek imitator of Herbert.”⁶ It may be better, however, to side with Joan Bennett who wryly observes that “Herbert may have made Vaughan a poet, but he did not make him in his own image.”⁷ E. C. Pettet, though he acknowledges the real presence of Herbert in Henry Vaughan’s poetry, still recognizes Vaughan’s poetry as “richly individual,”⁸ an assessment having much merit. In recent years, R. V. Young has attempted to reorient our understanding of the fundamentally personal and religious nature of Vaughan’s poetic project, though others have been reluctant to join him.⁹ Instead, recent scholarship has attended to the presence of political agendas in Henry’s poetry¹⁰ or to his use of language as a way to configure a religious “self.”¹¹

Recent criticism has also tried to downplay the religious elements of Thomas Vaughan’s work. Historian of science William R. Newman, in the spirit of his discipline, focuses on the proto-scientific elements of Thomas’ work, leaving religious considerations to others for the most part.¹² Scholars of literature, however, have also treated Thomas’ science in isolation from

⁴ Frank Kermode, “The Private Imagery of Henry Vaughan,” *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 1, no. 3 (July 1950): 225.

⁵ Jonathan F. S. Post, *Henry Vaughan: The Unfolding Vision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 72.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷ Joan Bennett, *Five Metaphysical Poets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 85.

⁸ E. C. Pettet, *Of Paradise and Light: A Study of Vaughan’s Silex Scintillans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 70.

⁹ R. V. Young, *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry: Studies in Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and Vaughan*, *Studies in Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000).

¹⁰ Holly Faith Nelson, in both “Historical Consciousness and the Politics of Translation in the Psalms of Henry Vaughan,” *Studies in Philology* 104.4 (Fall 2007): 501 – 25 and “Biblical Structures in *Silex Scintillans*: The Poetics and Politics of Intertextuality,” in *Of Paradise and Light: Essays on Henry Vaughan and John Milton in Honor of Alan Rudrum* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 165 – 91. See also Phillip West, *Henry Vaughan’s Silex Scintillans: Scripture Uses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). West’s sense of the political—as was Vaughan’s in his own way—is inextricable from the religious.

¹¹ Ceri Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of Conscience in Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹² William R. Newman, *Gehennical Fire: The Lives of George Starkey, an American Alchemist in the Scientific Revolution* (1994; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 213 – 22.

his religion, which does not give a very complete picture of the philosopher and actually does damage to our ability to understand him. This is particularly evident in the case of Donald R. Dickson, who tries to situate Thomas as a proto-scientific, empirical researcher at the expense of the obviously religious worldview that underpins his alchemical activities.¹³ Dickson points to the experimental nature of the material found in *Aqua Vitae: Non Vitae*, the diary of Thomas and his wife Rebecca, and questions whether it is better to think of the former as an “experimental philosopher” or as a “‘spiritual’ alchemist,” as if these categories were mutually exclusive.¹⁴ Obviously, they are not: there is no reason Thomas could not have been both. The records of alchemical experiments and recipes in the work certainly attest to the diary’s scientific utility, but Thomas’ occasional entries cataloguing his various significant dreams, visions, and mystical insights surely complicate matters—which Dickson is reluctantly forced to admit.¹⁵ Thomas’ work is deeply informed by the mythos of the Fall: any critic who hopes to understand him without taking into account Adam’s lapse and the promised regeneration of humankind avoids the patently religious center of Thomas’ philosophy.¹⁶ Nevertheless, most scholarship on Thomas—and there is not a considerable amount of it—places him in the history of science and not in the history of religion.¹⁷

Though recent critical habit has been inclined to interpret Henry’s religious turn as more-or-less manufactured, when his work is considered alongside of Thomas’, such a view does not hold up very well to scrutiny. The religious turn in the Vaughans is real, and imagination’s place

¹³ Dickson does the same thing with Henry Vaughan. See his “Henry Vaughan’s Medical Annotations,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (September 2007): 427 – 52.

¹⁴ *Aqua Vitae: Non Vitae*, xxxi.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xxviii – xxxi.

¹⁶ For a discussion of this aspect of Thomas’ work, see Lauren Kassell, “‘All Was This Land Full Fill’d of Faerie,’ or Magic and the Past in Early Modern England,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 1 (2006): 114 – 17.

¹⁷ See, for example, Harold Whitmore Jones, “Mid-Seventeenth Century Science: Some Polemics,” *Osiris* 9 (1950): 254 – 74; J. Andrew Mendelsohn, “Alchemy and Politics in England, 1649 – 1665,” *Past & Present* 135 (May 1992): 30 – 78. A book-length study of Thomas Vaughan has yet to appear.

in it makes it no less real. Indeed, it could be argued, religious belief itself is an activity that takes place primarily in the imagination. Pro or con, Henry Vaughan scholarship has devoted a considerable amount of energy to this problem (while Thomas Vaughan scholarship, slight as it is, has almost entirely ignored it). Less attention is given, however, to cultural events that had just as significant an impact on the religious thinking of the two brothers: events which provided both of them with a vocabulary for expressing their religious insights as well as the methods for realizing their respective religious projects. These cultural events were 1) the arrival and spread of Paracelsian medicine in England; 2) the influx of the ideas of the Silesian mystic Jacob Boehme in England during the period; and 3) the appearance of Rosicrucianism.

In this chapter I will argue that the Vaughan brothers' approach to God can best be described as a kind of "Rosicrucian mysticism." By this term, I propose a variety of religious experience that is intuitive, and that the intuition in question is focused on the natural world and arises from a simultaneously scientific and religious contemplation of nature. The Vaughans' awareness of God's presence in the physical world found a vocabulary in Rosicrucianism, which also acknowledged the intrinsic harmony between scientific and religious modes of inquiry. This kind of religious experience is not to be confused with what is typically described as "nature mysticism" nor as a kind of early modern pantheism. The Vaughans' approach to God is unique in how they propose that God can be discerned in nature both through scientific methods and through a devout contemplation of the natural world. Furthermore, their approach is thoroughly holistic: they see nature, scripture, the self, and God through a "big picture" methodology. Kenelm Digby, it is true, also recognizes the relationship of God and nature, but he examines nature one piece at a time and does not attain the symphonic conception of the physical and the metaphysical that we see in the Vaughans. In Thomas' work, method is explicit while devotion is

implicit, whereas in Henry's poetry devotion is foregrounded and method implied, fitting rhetorical strategies conducive to their respective extroverted and introverted personalities.

Furthermore, I wish to examine the Rosicrucian mysticism of Henry and Thomas Vaughan as disclosing a symbiosis. Too much critical ink has been wasted on trying to figure out who influenced whom, as if brothers—and identical twins at that—need to read each other's work in order to know each other's mind.¹⁸ As Alan Rudrum has conclusively shown in his masterful editions of each brother's work, cross-referencing the Vaughans is a task that could go on nearly *ad infinitum*: hardly a page goes by in one Vaughan's work that cannot find a correlation in the writing and thought of the other.¹⁹ Helen C. White long ago recognized the "striking resemblances" in the writing and thought of the two brothers,²⁰ as did Elizabeth Holmes.²¹ Likewise, Arthur J. M. Smith detected "an accord between the two brothers on nearly all philosophical and religious matters,"²² though more recent criticism has tried, unsuccessfully for the most part, I think, to complicate this issue.²³ It is hard to ignore the sympathy that exists between the two writers. Their friend Thomas Powell, in fact, wrote admiringly of the

¹⁸ Among the many following this path are Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 232; Ralph M. Wardle, "Thomas Vaughan's Influence upon the Poetry of Henry Vaughan," *PMLA* 51, no. 4 (December 1936): 936–52.

¹⁹ *Henry Vaughan: The Complete Poems*, ed. A. Rudrum (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) and *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, ed. A. Rudrum (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1984). Sadly, long out-of-print and initially issued in relatively short runs, both are nearly impossible to find.

²⁰ Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 264.

²¹ Holmes, *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy* (1932; repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), 15.

²² Arthur J. M. Smith, "Some Relations between Henry Vaughan and Thomas Vaughan," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters* 18 (1933): 561.

²³ Particularly in the case of Dickson, though he is hardly alone. In an unpublished dissertation, for instance, Karl M. Kregor has argued that Henry, "a religious conservative," was uncomfortable with Thomas' "occultism." See Karl M. Kregor, *A Comparative Study of the Major Images and Themes Shared by Henry Vaughan and Thomas Vaughan* (Ph.D. Diss., Syracuse University, 1970), 16. He seems to be following here F. E. Hutchinson's *Henry Vaughan: A Life and Interpretation* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1947). Hutchinson asserts "There are enough parallel sentences in Thomas Vaughan's treatises and Henry's poems to show that the elder brother had some acquaintance with the writings of Eugenius Philalethes, but it is unlikely that he followed his brother far into the maze of his blend of theosophy, alchemy, and occult philosophy" (*Life*, 152). More recently, Stevie Davies has recognized the Vaughans as being formed "in the crucible of twinship," and sees their eventual separation as grown men (Henry remained in Wales while Thomas moved to London) as a source of psychological disturbance, especially for Henry. Unfortunately, Davies is very unconvincing as a psychologist. See Davies, *Henry Vaughan*, chapter one.

intellectual harmony between the two in his dedicatory poem to Henry's *Olor Iscanus*, "Upon the Most Ingenious Pair of Twins, Eugenius Philalethes, and the Author of these Poems,"

What *Planet* ruled your *birth*? what *witty star*?
 That you are so like in *souls* as *bodies* are!
 So like in *both*, that you seem *born* to free
 The *starry art* from *vulgar calumny*.
 My *doubts* are solved, from hence my *faith* begins,
 Not only your *faces*, but your *wits* are *twins*. (lines 1 – 6.)

This may be poetry, but it is not hyperbole. While he acknowledges that both Vaughans were interested in "*res creatae*" in their work, Donald R. Dickson proposes that "intertextual references" in the writing of the two do not go very far in supporting a view of a deep bond between the two.²⁴ Considering that he favors an interpretation of Thomas' wife Rebecca as fulfilling the role of spiritual companion to the alchemist and priest, this comes as no surprise.²⁵ However, I fail to see how Thomas' relationship with his wife would necessarily obliterate any intimacy, intellectual or emotional, that he might have had with his brother. In fact, Thomas may have expected the type of intimacy native to twins to be present in his relationship with Rebecca and brought those expectations to his marriage. What we do find between the two brothers is, I think, what might be called a religio-semantic field: a language particular to the both of them (as often happens with twins) but in their case colored by the religious-scientific-mystical currents then circulating in their intellectual sphere. One of the twins, Henry, comes across as contemplative, sober, and conservative, whereas Thomas is outspoken, bombastic, and radical.²⁶ Their faces and wits may have been identical, but their temperaments were not. This opens the field. We are not dealing here with a monoculture of personality: twin brothers in absolute and deadening unison. Rather, we should look at them as polarities and discover what arises *between*

²⁴ Dickson, Introduction to *Aqua Vitae*, x – xi.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

²⁶ For such reasons Ralph M. Wardle considers Thomas as "the dominant twin." See Ralph M. Wardle, "Thomas Vaughan's Influence," 939.

them. The twentieth century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905 – 1988) described his relationship with the mystic and physician Adrienne von Speyr (1902 – 1967) as a symbiosis and suggested that the work of one could not be fully understood without knowledge of the other.²⁷ I find a similar dynamic between the two Vaughans and propose that they can best be read in this light.

Worlds of Light

Several factors contributed to the religious conversions of Henry and Thomas Vaughan, which, in a kind of synergy particular to twins, manifested in their writing at about the same time, 1650. One factor was the Civil War. The Vaughans were Royalists, both apparently serving the king as officers in his army, but with the ascendancy of the Parliamentarians they found themselves disenfranchised.²⁸ Thomas, an Anglican priest, was thrown out of his living at Llansantffraid (St Bridget’s Church in English) in the Vaughans’ home village of Brecon, Wales shortly after the “Act for better Propagation and Preaching the Gospel in Wales” was proclaimed in 1650. The charges brought against Thomas were the usual ones levied against Anglican prelates: “*Drunkennes, Swearing, Incontinency, being no Preacher*”— but more honestly “for having been in *Arms* for the *King*.”²⁹

Another factor contributing to their religious turn was the death of their younger brother William in 1648. Earlier critics made much of William’s death on 14 July 1648 as *the* central event in Henry’s Vaughan’s “conversion.” In his biography of Henry Vaughan, F. E. Hutchinson suggested that *all* of the otherwise untitled elegiac poems in *Silex Scintillans* (published in two

²⁷ Johann Roten, SM, “The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions of the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Communio Books-Ignatius, 1991): 65 – 86.

²⁸ Hutchinson concludes that Henry served as a lieutenant and Thomas as a captain. See *Life and Interpretation*, 65.

²⁹ Quoted in Dickson, ‘*Aqua Vitae: Non Vitis*,’ xiii.

installments, 1650 and 1655) indicated by a pilcrow (paragraph mark) were written with William in mind.³⁰ This, as most latter critics concur, cannot be taken as absolute: the Vaughans saw many friends killed, wounded, or dispossessed in the wars, with the execution of King Charles I on 30 January 1649 inflicting a further existential and psychological blow on them.³¹ As Henry wrote in one of his better-known poems, they were “*all gone into the world of light.*”³² This is not to diminish the significance of William’s death for Henry. Nor was the loss any less for Thomas, who mentions William’s death twice in his published work. The first instance is at the end of his first book, *Anthroposophia Theomagica* (1650), as he begs the reader’s indulgence about the text’s defects: “I would not have Thee look here for the *Paint, and Trim of Rhetorick,* and the rather because *English* is a language the *Author* was *not born to.* Besides, this *Piece* was compos’d in *Haste,* and in my *Dayes of Mourning,* on the *sad Occurrence* of a *Brother’s Death.*”³³ Thomas also mentions William’s death in his ongoing war of words with the Cambridge Platonist Henry More.³⁴

As we have seen, Paracelsian medicine probably arrived in England as early as 1573, though it did not attain a great deal of popularity until the 1640s³⁵ with the “near breakdown of

³⁰ Hutchinson, *Life and Interpretation*, 95.

³¹ Davies, *Henry Vaughan*, 78. See also E. L. Marilla, “The Religious Conversion of Henry Vaughan,” in *Essential Articles for the Study of Henry Vaughan*, ed. Alan Rudrum (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1987): 68 – 77.

³² “They are all gone into the world of light!” line 1. My emphasis. All quotations of Henry Vaughan’s poetry are from *The Complete Poems of Henry Vaughan*, ed. French Fogle (New York: Norton, 1964). Though Alan Rudrum’s edition is admirable, he does not consistently maintain the typographical features, such as use of italic, of the 1650 or 1655 editions of *Silex*. Fogle does.

³³ *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, ed. Alan Rudrum with Jennifer Drake-Brockman (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1984), 94. Hereafter indicated in-text as *Works*. All emphasis is found in the source material unless otherwise noted. Thomas Vaughan’s published work, with the exception of 1651’s *Aula Lucis* (which was ascribed to “S. N.” –the last letters of Vaughan’s signature), was all issued under the pseudonym “Eugenius Philalethes.”

³⁴ In his attack on *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, More had indecorously commented that William must have died from “studying Aristotle” so Thomas retaliated in *The Man-Mouse Taken in a Trap, and tortur’d to death for gnawing the margins of Eugenius Philalethes*. See *Works*, 281.

³⁵ Deborah E. Harkness, *The Jewel House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 76 – 83; Allen G. Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (1965; repr., New York: Franklin Watts, 1966), 127.

“censorship” that was a feature of the Interregnum.³⁶ The opening decade of the seventeenth century saw the appearance of the work of Joseph Duchesne (Quercetanus) in English translation by Thomas Tymme. Tymme translated Duchesne’s *Liber de Priscorum Philosophorum verae medicinae materiae* (1603) and *Ad Veritatem Hermeticae ex Hippocratis veterumque decretis ac Therapeusi* (1604) as part of his *Practise of Chymicall, and Hermeticall Physicke, for the Preserving of Health* (London, 1605), and the book disseminated a theoretical Paracelsianism in English. Active during this period was the English Paracelsian physician Robert Fludd, a prominent natural philosopher who, though initially rejected from the Royal College of Physicians due to his unabashed devotion to the methods of Paracelsus, eventually rose to prominence in that distinguished body.³⁷ Both Vaughan brothers, according to Henry Vaughan’s admission, were physicians, as he wrote in a letter their cousin, the biographer John Aubrey: “My brothers imployment was in physic and Chymistrie.... My profession also is physic, which I have practised now for many years with good successe (I thanke god!) and a repute big enough for a person of greater parts than my selfe.”³⁸ Henry Vaughan does not seem to have taken a degree when—or if—he attended Oxford.³⁹ Nor does he appear to have been licensed as a physician.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he certainly made his living as a doctor and his interest in what we

³⁶ Thomas Willard, “The Rosicrucian Manifestos in Britain,” *Bibliographical Society of America* 77, no. 4 (1983): 493.

³⁷ Debus, *English Paracelsians*, 106.

³⁸ John Aubrey, *Aubrey’s Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (repr., 1949; Boston: David R. Godine, 1999), 304.

³⁹ There is much speculation about Henry’s alleged attendance at Oxford. Dickson (Introduction to *Aqua Vitae*, x) believes he attended but did not finish. Brigid Allen (“Henry Vaughan at Oxford,” *Jesus College Record* [1997/1998]: 23 – 27) believes he attended three years after Thomas. However, conclusive proof of Henry’s attendance at university has not been found, though proof of Thomas’ has (Alan Rudrum, Table of Dates, in *Henry Vaughan: The Complete Poems*, 21).

⁴⁰ Davies suggests that Henry may have practiced without a license, the acquisition of which would surely be a nuisance for a Paracelsian living in the chaotic times of the Interregnum (*Henry Vaughan*, 12 – 13). Hutchinson, though, defends Henry’s honor, writing that “we may assume...he was a medical graduate of a British or Continental university. But he may have begun to practise without a degree” (*Life and Interpretation*, 193). It should also be noted that John Pordage, the Anglican priest, mystic, and mentor to Jane Lead, also seems to have disregarded the necessity of a medical degree when practicing physic. See Hutchinson, *Life*, 192. Pordage did, however, eventually attain the MD in Leiden in 1639 which was eventually recognized in England in 1640, and he

would now call alternative medicine is surely evident in his decision to issue his own translation of Heinrich Nolle's *Hermetical Physick*⁴¹ in January of 1654/1655, nine weeks before he registered the second, enlarged edition of *Silex Scintillans*.⁴² In 1657 he followed up with a second translation of a work by Nolle, *The Chymists Key*.⁴³ Thomas, on the other hand, was deeply engaged with the practical applications of Paracelsian principles to medicine, what is usually called *iatrochemistry*. As a result of his researches, unfortunately, Thomas lost his life due to complications arising from an explosion involving mercury.⁴⁴

Next, and also coming from Germany, is the mysticism of Jacob Boehme. Boehme's work began to appear in English translation when John Sparrow brought out an edition of Boehme's *Beschreibung der drei principien göttliches Wesens* as *A Description of the three principles of the Divine Essence* in 1648, at roughly the same time as the death of the Vaughans' brother William.⁴⁵ Boehme, who has been called "one of the outstanding figures of early modern culture,"⁴⁶ had an influence on late-seventeenth-century English literature and religion that is not negligible.⁴⁷ Both brothers show evidence of having read Boehme: Thomas directly in *Coelum*

was incorporated as an MD at Cambridge. See Ariel Hessayon, "Pordage, John (bap. 1607, d. 1681)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22546, accessed 5 July 2011].

⁴¹ Heinrich Nolle, *Hermetical Physick of the right way to preserve, and to restore, Health*, trans. Henry Vaughan (London, 1655). Nolle, also known as Henry Nollus, was an avowed Paracelsian. See Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 226 – 27.

⁴² Hutchinson, *Life and Interpretation*, 183.

⁴³ *The Chymists Key to open, and to shut: or the True Doctrine of Corruption and Generation* (London, 1657). The work was published by Thomas Vaughan under his familiar pseudonym, Eugenius Philalethes.

⁴⁴ According to Thomas à Wood's annotation in his copy of *Athenae Oxioniensis* "Eugenius Philalethes died as twere suddenly wⁿ he was operating strong mercurie, some of w^{ch} by chance getting into his nose marched him off. So Harris of Jesus Coll." Alan Rudrum reports that in the 1721 edition of *Athenae Oxioniensis* these words appear with "killed him" substituted for "marched him off" and without the comment about Harris. See Alan Rudrum, Biographical Introduction, *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, 24. On Thomas' iatrochemistry see Dickson, *Aqua Vitae: Non Vitis*, xxxix – xlix.

⁴⁵ This was not the first appearance of Boehme's ideas in English, however. Durant Hotham had issued his sketch, *The Life of one Jacob Boehmen*, in 1644.

⁴⁶ B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and Its Development in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

⁴⁷ See, for instance: Mendelsohn, "Alchemy and Politics in England, 1649 – 1665," 135 – 36; Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640 – 1660* (Oxford: The Clarendon

Terrae (1650)⁴⁸ and by inference in *Aula Lucis* (1651)⁴⁹ and Henry especially in the second part of *Silex Scintillans*.⁵⁰ Scholars have not ignored the religious and mystical sympathies between the Vaughans and Boehme.⁵¹ Certainly, Boehme's mystical writings, tinged as they are with metaphors from nature and alchemy—despite their being what has been called “intolerably obscure”⁵²—would prove sympathetic to the mystical apprehension of God's presence in the natural world as evident in Henry's poetry and Thomas' theo-scientific writing. Nevertheless, even though Alan Rudrum has recognized that Boehme's mystical aesthetic “suits very well many poems of [Henry] Vaughan's,”⁵³ we have yet to see a comprehensive treatment of the Vaughans in relation to the work of the Silesian mystic.

Third and finally, Rosicrucianism, a kind of mystical-theological science with decidedly political and chiliast overtones—again, originating in Germany—gave the Vaughans a

Press, 1989), 185 – 225. Older studies were particularly attracted to this connection, such as Percy H. Osmond, *The Mystical Poets of the English Church* (New York: Macmillan-Society for Promoting Christian Truth, 1919), 153; Margaret Lewis Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme: A Study of German Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914). See also Elizabeth Holmes, *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy*, 15.

⁴⁸ This appears in a marginal note for a passage wherein Vaughan speculates that Boehme was a Rosicrucian: “See Jacob Behmen in his most excellent and profound Discourse of the Three Principles” (*Works*, 215). I suspect this was due to a passage in the *Fama*: “for it is fitting, that before the rising of the Sun there should appear and break forth *Aurora*, or some clearness, or divine light in the sky” (80 – 81). Thomas Vaughan was not the only writer of the era to think Boehme was a Rosicrucian. John Webster, the sometime radical preacher, made the same connection: “I cannot (howsoever fabulous, impossible, or ridiculous it may be accounted of some) passe over with silence, or neglect that signal and wonderful secret (so often mentioned by the mysterious and divinely-inspired *Teutonick*, and in some manner acknowledges and owned by the highly-illuminated fraternity of the *Rosie Crosse*) of the language of nature.” See John Webster, *Academiarum Examen, or the Examination of Academies* (London, 1654), 26. Frances Yates has observed this to be “an interesting (and undoubtedly correct) insight into the affinity between Boehme and the Rosicrucian manifestos” (Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* [1972; repr., Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1978], 186). Boehme's *Aurora. That is, the Day-Spring or Dawning of the Day in the Orient or Morning-Rednesse in the Rising of the Sun*, his first book and published in German in 1612, appeared in John Sparrow's English translation in 1656.

⁴⁹ “Truely, I am of opinion that hee never knew the *naturall world*, but how well acquainted hee was with the *Tinctures* in the *spiritual world*, I will not determine. I must confess many *brave*, and *sublime truths*, have fallen from his *Pen*.” *Works*, 465. Both Rudrum (*Works*, note on p. 710) and A. E. Waite see this as pointing to Boehme. See *The Works of Thomas Vaughan, Mystic and Alchemist (Eugenius Philalethes)*, ed. Arthur Edward Waite (1919; rept., New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1968), 325.

⁵⁰ See in particular the poems “Cock-crowing,” “The Starre,” “The Palm-tree,” and “The Knot” among others.

⁵¹ As, for instance, Dickson in *Aqua Vitae*, xvii; Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 224; Davies, *Henry Vaughan*, 50.

⁵² Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Belief in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 376.

⁵³ Alan Rudrum, *Henry Vaughan* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), 37.

philosophical grounding for their religious intuitions. Rosicrucianism certainly contributed the most significant influence upon their unique religious vision.

Rosicrucianism: Background and Teaching

In the second decade of the seventeenth century, a series of curious publications set the learned of Europe on their ears, at least momentarily. What have become known to us as the Rosicrucian manifestos announced a more complete and final Reformation, one that would include a renovation in education, learning, and politics as well as in religion. First appearing in German in 1614 and published at Kassel, the *Fama Fraternitatis* laid out the tenets of Rosicrucianism and presented a rather sketchy narrative concerning its “founder,” the legendary “C.R.C.” The *Confessio Fraternitatis*, published in Latin in 1615 and also in Kassel, in a similarly sketchy fashion, outlined the objectives of the brotherhood. A third work, the allegorical romance *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz anno 1459*, known in English as *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, saw publication in 1616 in Strasbourg and has been attributed to the juvenilia of the Lutheran pastor and theologian Johann Valentin Andreae, who is also suspected of having a hand in the other manifestos.⁵⁴ Thomas Vaughan issued an English translation of the first two Rosicrucian documents as *The Fame and Confession of the Fraternity R. C., commonly of the Rosie Cross* in 1652, in the middle of his intense publishing

⁵⁴ There is *much* debate about Andreae’s alleged involvement in the creation of the *Fama* and the *Confessio*. John Warwick Montgomery, *Cross and Crucible: Johann Valentin Andreae (1586 – 1654), Phoenix of the Theologians*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973) has stridently argued that Andreae had and wanted nothing to do with Rosicrucianism, even though Montgomery believes he did write the *Chymische Hochzeit*. However, most recent scholarship asserts that Andreae was connected to the movement and that in addition to *Chymische Hochzeit* the *Confessio* also belongs to the Lutheran theologian. See, for instance, Donald R. Dickson, *The Tessera of Antilia: Utopian Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 19 – 22; Hereward Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix: Spiritual Alchemy and Rosicrucianism in the Work of Count Michael Maier (1569 – 1622)*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte*, Band 88 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 127 – 31; Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 50.

activity, though it does not appear that he was responsible for the work of translation.⁵⁵ Nearly forty years after the initial Rosicrucian furor, Vaughan's translations revived interest and debate in an issue that had grown cold. Scholars have treated Thomas' Rosicrucianism indifferently (usually categorizing it under the term "Hermeticism") and have negated any impact the movement may have had on Henry. This was not the case. Rosicrucianism had a profound impact on the religious worldviews of both brothers and found its way into their writing.

The Rosicrucian "doctrines," if that is what we can call them, as set forth in the *Fama* and *Confessio* are surprisingly straightforward. First of all, the fraternity claims that "God in these later days hath poured out so richly His mercy and goodness to mankind, whereby we do attain more and more to the perfect knowledge of Jesus Christ and of Nature" (*Fama*, 1).⁵⁶ This serves as a fitting encapsulation of the entire Rosicrucian project, as the disciplines of religious devotion and scientific inquiry in the movement are inextricably linked—as the work of both Vaughans testifies.

Furthermore, in keeping with the post-Reformation ethos of Protestantism, the group admits to being against the pope, whom they slander with the usual charge of "Antichrist" (*Confessio*, 33). Likewise, as did most Reformers, they hold to two Sacraments (*Fama*, 28). Curiously for such heterodox writings, the manifestos were first advertised as "Teutsche Theologische Bücher der Calvinisten" ("Theological Books of the German Calvinists") in connection with the Leipzig and Frankfurt book fairs.⁵⁷ Though their Calvinism is doubtful, the manifestos have rarely been looked at as theological treatises since. Hereward Tilton charges the

⁵⁵ An English translation of *Chymische Hochzeit* did not appear until Ezekiel Foxcroft's treatment was published as *The Hermetick Romance: or The Chymical Wedding* (1690). The translation probably circulated in manuscript for some time, as Foxcroft died in 1674.

⁵⁶ All references to the manifestos are from Vaughan's edition, *The Fame and Confession of the Fraternity R. C., commonly of the Rosie Cross* (1652).

⁵⁷ Tilton, *Quest of the Phoenix*, 118.

manifestos with a “virulent anti-Catholicism,” but his language here tends toward hyperbole.⁵⁸ In fact, the anti-Catholicism of the manifestos is of the garden variety: we are not dealing with anti-Catholic polemic here. The manifestos do not attack any Roman dogma or doctrine directly. Furthermore, the idea of the cloister comes off in a positive light—hardly in keeping with Protestantism—and, interestingly for what is professedly a Protestant group, all of their members must be celibate (*Fama*, 13). The legend of C.R.C. reports that he was brought up in a “Cloyster” (3) and drew from there three of the first brethren (12). Christopher McIntosh observes that, while much Protestant polemic came out in German-speaking countries following the appearance of the manifestoes, Catholic commentators for the most part ignored the Rosicrucian documents. McIntosh rejects the idea that the Rosicrucian movement may have been a Jesuit ruse, as some have suggested, though he does acknowledge that the broader aims of the movement as expressed in the manifestoes would have appealed to at least some Catholics.⁵⁹ The Rosicrucian manifestos are hardly straightforward in their Protestantism.

But they are straightforward in their own, specialized religious commitments. In the *Fama*, first of all, the founding brethren enumerate their principles:

First, That none of them should profess any other thing, then to cure the sick, and that *gratis*. 2. None of the Posterity should be constrained to wear one certain kind of habit, but therein to follow the custom of the Country. 3. That every year upon the day C. they should meet together at the house *S. Spiritus*, or write the cause of his absence. 4. Every Brother should look out for a worthy person, who after his discease, might succeed him. 5. The word *C.R.* should be their Seal, Mark, and Character. 6. The Fraternity should remain secret one hundred years. (14 – 15)

Furthermore, the *Fama*’s description of C.R.C.’s tomb is inscribed with affirmations of Christian piety:

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁹ Christopher McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology, and Rituals of an Esoteric Order*, 3rd edition (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1997), 31. For the Jesuit conspiracy angle, see Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 98 – 101.

Round about the first Circle or Brim stood,

Jesus mihi omnia.

In the middle were four figures, inclosed in circles, whose circumscription was,

1. *Nequaquam Vacuum.*
2. *Legis Jugum.*
3. *Libertas Evangelii.*
4. *Dei Gloria Intacta.* (21 – 22)

The statement, “*Nequaquam Vacuum*” (“by no means a vacuum”) is particularly intriguing as it suggests that there is no place in the universe where God is not, an idea that certainly touches upon the *natura pura* debates of the seventeenth century as well as addressing what was perceived as the increasing threat to a spiritual worldview proposed by Cartesian materialism and to which I will return.

In the *Confessio*, the Fraternity avows a pronounced dedication to creating a completely Christian culture, including all possible realms of knowledge:

...we hold this, that the Meditations, knowledge and inventions of our Christian Father (of all that, which from the beginning of the world, *Mans Wisdom*, either through God’s Revelation, or through the service of Angels or spirits, or through the sharpnels and deepness of understanding, or through long observation, use and experience, hath found out, invented, brought forth, corrected, and till now hath been propagated & transplanted) are so excellent worthy and great, that if all books should perish, and by God’s almighty sufferance, all writings, & all learning should be lost, yet posterity will be able onely thereby to lay a new foundation, and bring truth to light again. (38)

In short, the Rosicrucian project is intended to (re)claim all fields of knowledge as part of the Kingdom of God, certainly a facet of the inherent chiliasm of the manifestos. Many commentators have noticed in the Rosicrucian ideal a basic agreement with the aims Francis Bacon espouses in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) and treats more imaginatively in *New*

Atlantis (1624).⁶⁰ While it is hard to deny the comparison, suggesting Bacon was a Rosicrucian would be rather hasty.⁶¹ The religious element in Bacon is subsumed into his greater project of providing ideal models of education and scholarship.⁶² In *New Atlantis* the scholarly endeavor Bacon imagines taking place in Salomon's House sounds quite a bit like a modern research university: "The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, the secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible."⁶³ Even the Bible published by Bacon's Atlanteans is more a deluxe scholarly edition than a popularization.⁶⁴ Religion, on the other hand, is never subsumed by any other elements of the Rosicrucian vision.

The *Confessio*'s science is bent toward investigating the secrets of Nature under the assumption that they will be in implicit harmony with the secrets of God, "those great Letters and Characters which the Lord God hath written and imprinted in Heaven and the Earths Edifice" (44).⁶⁵ For the Fraternity, a deep reciprocity exists between the Book of Nature and the

⁶⁰ Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 118 – 19; McIntosh, *Rosicrucians*, 39; Clare Goodrick-Clarke, "The Rosicrucian Afterglow: The Life and Influence of Comenius," in *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*, ed. Ralph White (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 1999), 208.

⁶¹ Frances Yates believes that "undoubtedly" there are "connections between the two movements" (Baconian philosophy and Rosicrucianism) though she confesses "these are difficult to trace and to analyze" (*Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 121).

⁶² On Bacon's religion, see Stephen A. McKnight, *The Religious Foundations of Francis Bacon's Thought* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

⁶³ Francis Bacon, *Essays and New Atlantis*, ed. Gordon Sherman Haight (New York: Walter J. Black, 1942), 288.

⁶⁴ "The book contained all the canonical books of the Old and New Testament, according as you have them (for we know well that the Churches with you receive), and the Apocalypse itself; and some other books of the New Testament, which were not at that time written, were nevertheless in the book." Bacon, *Essays and New Atlantis*, 260.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, the Latin phrase that the translator of Vaughan's *Confessio* here renders as "Earths Edifice" is "Mundi machinae," or "machinery of the world." "Magnas illas Dei litteras, quas Mundi machinae inscripsit." This version of the *Confessio* was included with Philippon à Gabella's *Secretoris Philosophiae Consideratio brevis à Philippon à Gabella, Philosophiae St. conscripta & nunc primum unà cum Confessione Fraternitatis R. C. in lucem edita* (Cassellis, 1615), H3^v. It may be that Thomas Vaughan as editor (or the translator) decided to avoid the Cartesian and materialistic connotations implied in "machinery" (which Waite uses as "world's mechanism" in his adaptation of Vaughan. See Arthur Edward Waite, *The Real History of the Rosicrucians* [1887; repr. Blauvelt, NY: Steiner Books, 1977], 91). Scholarly consensus tends to agree that the source of Vaughan's English version was based on a translation from Scots dialect, a manuscript version now known as the Crawford Manuscript. [See

Sacred Scripture: “These Characters and Letters, as God hath here and there incorporated them in the holy Scripture the *Bible*, so hath He imprinted them most apparently into the wonderful Creation of heaven and Earth yea in all Beastes. So that like as the *Mathematician* or *Astronomer* can long see and know the Eclipses which are to come, so we may verily fore-know and fore-see the darkness of Obscurations of the Church, and how long they shall last” (48). But attending to Nature will prove fruitless without a serious study of the Bible first:

...we do admonish every one for to read diligently and continually the holy *Bible*; for he that taketh all his pleasures therein, he shall know that he prepared for himself an excellent way to come in to our *Fraternity*: For as this is the whole sum and content of our Rule, That every Letter or Character which is in the World ought to be learned and regarded very well; so those are like unto us, and are very near allyed unto us, who do make the holy *Bible* a Rule of their life, and an aim and end of all their studies; yea to let it be a *Compendium* and Content of the whole World: And not only to have it continually in the mouth, but to know how to apply and direct the true understanding of it to all times and Ages of the World. Also, it is not our Custom to prostitute and make so common the holy *Scriptures*; for there are innumerable Expounders of the same; some alledging and wresting it to serve their Opinion, some to scandal it, and most wickedly do liken it to a Nose of Wax, which alike should serve the *Divines*, *Philosophers*, *Physicians* and *Mathematicians*, against all the which we do openly witness and acknowledg, That from the beginning of the World there hath not been given unto Men a more worthy, a more excellent, and more wholesom Book then the holy *Bible*; Blessed is he that hath the same, yea more blessed is he who reads it diligently, but most blessed of all is he that truly understandeth the same, for he is most like to God, and doth come most near to him. (49 – 50)

The influence of Paracelsus (1493 – 1541) was strong on the writers of the Rosicrucian manifestos. He is mentioned twice in admiring terms in the *Fama*, though the brethren claim “he was none of our Fraternity” (10). Like the Rosicrucians who followed him, the Swiss physician, alchemist, and philosopher likewise combined an innovative blend of science and spirituality in his medical work. The Rosicrucian commitment to curing the sick surely would have appealed to Henry and Thomas Vaughan as much as to Paracelsus, since both brothers were engaged “in the practice of physic” and employed a variety of Paracelsian medicine.

Thomas Willard, “Rosicrucian Manifestos in Britain,” 491.] At the very least, “Edificies” comes off as an odd choice.

When they were first published, the Rosicrucian manifestoes created quite a stir in Europe. Many intellectuals, René Descartes for one, attempted—and failed—to contact them.⁶⁶ Initial reaction to the manifestoes included appeals to the Fraternity asking to be included among their august ranks, as in Julius Sperber’s *Echo der von Gott hocheleuchteten Fraternitet des Lobl. Ordens R.C.* (1615). Sperber (1540 – 1616), it is now known, also wrote under the pseudonym “Julianus de Campis”⁶⁷ and produced in the same year a *Sendbrieff* inquiring information about the Rosicrucians and complaining, though he listed himself among the members of the Fraternity, about the paucity of contact with his brethren.⁶⁸

Others, such as Andreas Libavius (1555 – 1616), took quite an opposite approach. Indeed, Libavius vociferously attacked the brotherhood in *DOMA Exercitatio Paracelsica nova de notandis ex scripto fraternitatis de Rosea Cruce* and *Analysis Confessionis Fraternitatis de Rosea Cruce*, both of which are included in *Examen philosophiae novae, quae veteri abrogandae opponitur* (Frankfurt, 1615). Libavius’ objections stemmed from what he believed were the incredulous claims that the Fraternity was commissioned “of God” to commandeer a general Christian Reformation of Europe. “If the society hath been ordained and commissioned by God,” he asserts, “it ought to be in a position to prove its vocation in some conclusive manner.”⁶⁹ He had a point. But what is, arguably, even more interesting than the impact the “Rosicrucian furor” made on the Continent is the manner in which it was received in England.

⁶⁶ McIntosh, *Rosicrucians*, 50. Hilton (*Quest for the Phoenix*, 150) counts more than four hundred ‘Rosicrucian’ apologies and opposing *Kampfschriften* that appeared following publication of the manifestos.

⁶⁷ McIntosh, *Rosicrucians*, 32.

⁶⁸ Waite, *Real History*, 256. Waite does not seem to be aware that Sperber and “Julianus de Campis” are one and the same.

⁶⁹ From *Exercitatio Paracelsica*. Quoted in Waite, *Real History*, 250.

The Rosy Cross in England

In the *Fama*, “Brother J. O.” is named as the first of the founding brethren to have died, and he is said to have been stationed in England: “In *England* he is much spoken of, and chiefly because he cured the young Earl of *Norfolk* of the Leprosie” (*Fama*, 16). However, there is no record of an Earl of Norfolk ever suffering from this disease and there may not have even been an earldom in Norfolk during the period in question.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, in the manifestos England is the only country besides Germany associated by name with the members of the fraternity. Indeed, the connections between Rosicrucianism’s German roots and its branches in England are extraordinarily rich.

The first rumbling of Rosicrucianism in England sounded in 1612, when Michael Maier (1568 – 1622), the German alchemist and personal physician to Emperor Rudolf II, visited the country.⁷¹ The year 1612, as far as we know, was the year the earliest manuscript version of the *Fama* had begun to circulate (though the *Chymische Hochzeit* may have existed in at least a rudimentary form from as early as 1605).⁷² Curiously, during his visit Maier presented James I with an enormous Christmas greeting on a sheet of parchment approximately two feet by three. The greeting features a rose with eight petals, a stem, and base, all of which are constructed of text. Cleverly embedded in the writing is a message which reads: “VIVE IACOBE DIU REX MAGNE BRITTANNICE SALVE TEGMINE QUO VERE SIT ROSA LAETA TUO.”⁷³

There is some scholarly debate as to whether or not the rose depicted on Maier’s Christmas greeting is emblematic of the Rosicrucian fraternity. Adam McLean, following Yates,

⁷⁰ Hilton, *Quest for the Phoenix*, 150. See also Benedict J. Williamson, Introduction to *The Rosicrucian Manuscripts*, ed. Williamson (Woodbridge, VA: Invisible College Press, 2002),

⁷¹ The most important text to date on Maier is undoubtedly Hilton’s *Quest of the Phoenix*.

⁷² McIntosh, *Rosicrucians*, 33, 23.

⁷³ “Long live James, Great Britain King! Greetings! that by your true protection the rose may be prosperous!” My translation. The Latin term “*laeta*” may be translated as “joyful,” “luxuriant,” “propitious,” “prosperous”—all of which are applicable in this case. Adam McLean, “A Rosicrucian Manuscript of Michael Maier,” *The Hermetic Journal* 5 (Autumn 1979): 6.

takes this as evidence of Maier being engaged in a Rosicrucian mission on behalf of Frederick, the Elector Palatine, in order to secure support for the Protestant cause in Germany.⁷⁴ Hilton believes it is not, since Maier “gave scant regard to rumours of a ‘Fraternity of the Rose Cross’ when he first heard of them in England.”⁷⁵ Both claims, I think, are off the mark. McLean and Yates mistakenly apply secret society cloak-and-dagger drama to what, even if they were correct (which is doubtful), would have been a fairly straightforward diplomatic mission and hardly requiring such obscurity. Hilton takes Maier too much at his word. While it may be a coincidence that Maier used the image of a rose—an image that would become increasingly important to him as his career proceeded—it is difficult to accept Hilton’s “scant regard” dismissal. The Rosicrucian ethos discouraged publicity: “he shall sooner lose his life in seeking and searching for us, then to find us, and attain to come to the wished Happiness of the *Fraternity of the Rosie Cross*” (*Confessio*, 55 – 56). If Maier were a member of the Fraternity (if, in fact, it even existed), he would never admit to it; if he were not and wished to be, he would wish to prove his worth by upholding their principles. It is certainly within the realm of possibility that Maier was sounding out the Jacobean court in search of the elusive fraternity.

As with, it seems, every facet of Rosicrucianism, there is also much scholarly debate on whether Maier met the English Paracelsian Robert Fludd when he visited England. It is tempting to assume he did. Both men were Paracelsian physicians (Maier less enthusiastically than Fludd), both profoundly religious, both eventually became Rosicrucian apologists.⁷⁶ And, as Yates has pointed out, both eventually used the same publisher for their books, the Palatine printer Johann Theodore de Bry, whose sumptuous editions of works by Maier and Fludd boast an abundance of

⁷⁴ McLean, “Rosicrucian Manuscript,” 7. Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 88.

⁷⁵ Hilton, *Quest of the Phoenix*, 90.

⁷⁶ Maier’s primary Rosicrucian apology is *Silentium Post Clamores* (Frankfurt, 1617).

highly-detailed and richly-embellished emblems and portraiture.⁷⁷ William H. Huffman believes the fact that the two Rosicrucian apologists never mention each other in print strongly suggests that they maintained a “privately-kept relationship,” kept mum “lest they be accused of being members of the Fraternity.”⁷⁸ He does not think they were Rosicrucians, however; nor, for that matter, does he think that the Fraternity existed in reality.⁷⁹ Maier and Fludd certainly had a lot in common, but evidence pointing to their meeting is as yet undiscovered.⁸⁰

Fludd (1574 – 1637) issued his first published work, *Apologia Compendaria, Fraternitatem de Rosea Cruce*, a defense of the Fraternity from the attacks of Libavius, in 1616. In the work, Fludd admires what he takes to be the venerability of the Rosicrucians, “*accepimus fraternitatem Sapientum tunc temporis in India flourisse*”⁸¹ But, even more, he upholds their religious orthodoxy, “*Alibi etiam in confessione invenimus, quòd Christum pure & sincere amplectantur, vitamque Christianam agant*”⁸² In 1617, Fludd expanded his defense of the Rosicrucians in the *Tractatus Apologeticus Integritatem Societatis de Rosea Cruce defendens*, which includes the *Apologia Compendaria* as a proem.⁸³ This work, one-hundred-seventy-seven pages of text, is far longer than the eleven pages of the *Apologia Compendaria*, and in it Fludd not only defends the claims of the Rosicrucian manifestos but expands upon their theoretical applications and philosophical-theological-scientific possibilities. Foremost among these is his approval of the Rosicrucian worldview that finds God’s handiwork not only in scripture but in

⁷⁷ See Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, chapter 6.

⁷⁸ William H. Huffman, *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1988), 156.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 153; 136.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 153. See also Hilton, *Quest for the Phoenix*, 27, especially n.109.

⁸¹ “we accept the wise fraternity to have flourished at that time in India.” R. de Fluctibus [Robert Fludd], *Apologia Compendaria, Fraternitatem de Rosea Cruce suspicionis & infamiae maculis aspersam, veritatis quasi Fluctibus abulens & abstergens* (Leyde, 1616), 4.

⁸² “In another place we find also in the *Confession* that they embrace Christ purely and sincerely and they encourage a Christian life.” *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸³ R. de Fluctibus [Robert Fludd], *Tractatus Apologeticus Integritatem Societatis de Rosea Cruce defendens* (Lugduni Batavorum, 1617).

nature. “Libros etiam visibiles, duplices esse reperimus,” he writes, “nam in uno Deus mysticè scripsit in rerum creatione, & insculpsit veras formas & proprietates cujus libet creaturae, hocque literis & characteribus arcanis, atque hanc ejus scripturam Verbo, & Spiritu suo sacrosancto complevit.”⁸⁴ The hand of God, for Fludd, inscribes the divine essence into not only the Book of Scripture, but also into the Book of Nature. Just as God inscribed his word on tablets of stone (an image Fludd uses over and over again), his Word is likewise indelibly written on his creation: “nam sacrosancto verbo (FIAT) admirabiles effectus interiores & exteriores in omni stella, animali, planta, & mineralis usque ad vltimum (PEREAT) vim atque efficaciam habebit.”⁸⁵ He revisits this notion in *another* apology, *Clavis Philosophiae et Alchymiae Fluddanae* (1633), where he writes, “Leges enim spirituales tabulis carnis sunt impressae, non lapideis.... In spiritu igitur, non litera; Dei lumen, quod nobis in est ex gratia.”⁸⁶ Fludd, as Urszula Szulakowska has noted, wrote “primarily as a theologian,” a fact that is more than evident⁸⁷ but has been generally ignored by scholars who tend to prefer viewing Fludd as an occult oddity and esoteric kook.⁸⁸ As Reid Barbour has argued, this was hardly the case: Fludd was well-educated,

⁸⁴ “Therefore we discover the visible books to be two-fold: for in one God mystically writes in the creation of things, and he sculpts true forms and qualities of whatever creature he pleases; and with these letters and mysterious characters he completed this scripture by his Word and by his most holy Spirit.” Fludd, *Tractatus*, 36.

⁸⁵ “For by the most holy word (FIAT) it will have wondrous interior and exterior effects and have power in all stars, animals, plants, and minerals continuously to the last violence (PEREAT).” *Ibid.*, 40 – 41. Fludd’s curious employment of FIAT and PEREAT may seem confusing but becomes clear when reading it alongside a passage of the *Fama*: “our ROTA takes her beginning from that day when God spake *Fiat* and shall end when he shall speak *Pereat*” (72).

⁸⁶ “In fact, the spiritual laws were impressed in the tables of flesh, not in stone.... In the spirit, therefore, not letters; the light of God which is in us by grace.” Roberti Fluddi [Robert Fludd], *Clavis philosophiae et Alchymiae Fluddanae* (Francofurti, 1633), 23.

⁸⁷ Urszula Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom: Alchemy and Apocalyptic Discourse in the Protestant Reformation*, Aries Book Series: Texts and Studies in Western Esotericism (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 121. Huffman, however, concurs: “Above all, the foundation of Fludd’s philosophy was religious.” See *Robert Fludd*, 101.

⁸⁸ Wayne Shumaker, for example, brands both Fludd and Thomas Vaughan as “abnormally eccentric Englishmen,” illustrating one reason why these two thinkers have been given such short shrift in early modern English studies (Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972], 239.) Indeed, as of 28 December 2011, the database Early English Books Online (EEBO) only listed *two* of Fludd’s works, *Doctor Fludds answer vnto M. Foster or, The squeeing of Parson*

monied, respected, wrote his works in Latin for a learned audience,⁸⁹ and engaged in scholarly debate not only with Libavius but with Descartes' friend and confidante Marin Mersenne (1588 – 1648),⁹⁰ Pierre Gassendi (1592 – 1655),⁹¹ and the noted astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571 – 1630),⁹² as well.⁹³ Without a doubt, Fludd took the doctrines and aims of the Rosicrucians seriously and attempted to inculcate their principles into his own life to the point of remaining celibate,⁹⁴ a dedication we do not find in Maier.⁹⁵ The notion of the “Two Books,” certainly, had precedent in Christian spirituality going back to at least Augustine,⁹⁶ and it returned in Rosicrucianism which stood in defiance of the increasing desacralization apparent in the thought of the seventeenth century. The difference is that the Rosicrucian approach to the two books

Fosters sponge (London, 1631) and *Mosaicall philosophy grounded upon the essentiall truth, or eternal sapience* (London, 1659). This seems to me to be a glaring oversight.

⁸⁹ Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 181.

⁹⁰ Mersenne, a French Catholic priest and scientist, argued against Fludd's holistic conception of the universe and favored a mechanistic model. According to Margaret Wertheim, “Mersenne envisioned the world as an inert machine operating strictly according to laws externally imposed by God.” See her *Pythagoras' Trousers: God, Physics, and the Gender Wars* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 93. One text in which Fludd takes on Mersenne is the *Clavis Philosophiae et Alchymiae*. On the friendship between Mersenne and Descartes see “The Second Set of Objections with Replies By Descartes, Collected by Marin Mersenne,” in *Early Modern Philosophy: Essential Readings with Commentary*, ed. Aloysius Martinich, Fritz Allhoff, and Anand Vaidya (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 124 – 31; Marjorie Glicksman Grene, *Descartes* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 88 – 92.

⁹¹ Gassendi, like Mersenne, was a French Catholic priest and scientist who held to a mechanistic view of creation. He attacked Fludd in *Examen Philosophiae Roberti Fluddi Medici* (1630). Contra Fludd, he wrote that “God is not the soul of the world, but its governor or director” (quoted in Wertheim, *Pythagoras' Trousers*, 93.) On Gassendi, see Antonia Lalordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁹² Johannes Kepler, of course, is one of the pillars of Renaissance science, the man who first argued that the orbits of the planets are elliptical rather than perfect spheres, a notion which set the stage for Newtonian physics. His ongoing brawl with Fludd was based on his accusations that the English doctor was arguing from “pure symbolism” and not from empirically-gathered fact. See Robert S. Westman, “Nature, Art, and Psyche: Jung, Pauli, and the Kepler-Fludd Polemic,” in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 177 – 230.

⁹³ Allen G. Debus has also commented on Fludd's intellectual brawls. See his *Chemistry and Medical Debate: Van Helmont to Boerhaave* (Canton, MA: Science History Publications-Watson Publishing, 2001), 26 – 29.

⁹⁴ J. B. Craven, *Dr. Robert Fludd (Robert de Fluctibus), the English Rosicrucian: Life and Writings* (Kirkwall, UK: William Pearce, 1902), 31; Jocelyn Godwin, *Robert Fludd: Hermetic Philosopher and Surveyor of Two Worlds* (1979; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes, 1991), 6; Szulakowska, *Sacrificial Body*, 122.

⁹⁵ Tilton, *Quest for the Phoenix*, 181 – 82.

⁹⁶ See Augustine, *The Catholic and Manichaeon Ways of Life (De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum)* in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 56, trans. Donald A. Gallagher and Idella Gallagher (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1966), 32.

becomes a matter of scientific investigation. The Rosicrucian understanding of God and God's relationship to nature as found in Fludd and the Rosicrucian manifestos is integral to the understanding of the religious poetry of Henry and the mystical science of Thomas Vaughan.

The Vaughans were more than familiar with the work of Fludd. Thomas, indeed, quotes liberally from Fludd's *Tractatus Apologeticus* in his Preface to *The Fame and Confession*, though the quotation is unattributed (*Works*, 501).⁹⁷ In *The Second Wash, or The Moore Scour'd once more* (1651), his second attack on Henry More, Thomas bristles at More's insinuation that the Welshman was a follower of Fludd and "a bad chip off that block."⁹⁸ Given this criticism and Thomas' tendency to oversensitivity, he probably thought it best to keep Fludd's name out of his Preface when the *Fame and Confession* was published the following year. Thomas also mentions Fludd in *Anthroposophia* (90) and Rudrum detects Fludd's influence in quite of bit of his work.⁹⁹ The real presence of Robert Fludd in the work of Thomas Vaughan is hard to ignore.

Previous scholarship has focused on Rosicrucianism and the ways it seemed to presage the Enlightenment,¹⁰⁰ or how it is perceived to have engaged in a subversion of religion in seventeenth century Europe,¹⁰¹ or as related to the history of magic, Freemasonry, and other arcane practices.¹⁰² Add to these the superabundance of popular texts looking at Rosicrucianism through the lens of conspiracy theory and we can appreciate what a morass of scholarship and pseudo-scholarship one wades into when entering the term "Rosicrucian" into a search engine.

⁹⁷ See also Rudrum's note 501.868-76 on page 721.

⁹⁸ [Henry More], *The Second Lash of Alazonomastix* (Cambridge, 1651), 81.

⁹⁹ In, for instance, the title to *Magia Adamica*, which Rudrum connects to Fludd's *Mosaicall Philosophy*. See *Works*, 631, note 139.

¹⁰⁰ Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (1972; repr., Boulder, CO: Shambala, 1978).

¹⁰¹ Szulakowska, *Sacrificial Body*, 7 – 8. See also Carlos Gilly, "'Theophrastia Sancta': Paracelsianism as a Religion in Conflict with the Established Churches," in *Paracelsus: The Man and His Reputation, His Ideas and Their Transformation*, ed. Peter Grell (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 151 – 85; Susanna Åkerman, *Rose Cross over the Baltic: The Spread of Rosicrucianism in Northern Europe*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

¹⁰² McIntosh, *Rosicrucians*; Waite, *Real History*; Arthur Edward Waite, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross: A History of the Rosicrucians* (1924; repr., New York: Barnes and Noble, 1993).

However, very little work has been done in examining Rosicrucian spirituality as it appeared in more orthodox religious contexts, let alone on Rosicrucian spirituality's impact on early modern English literature.

The Rosicrucian Mysticism of Henry and Thomas Vaughan

Scholars often speculate about how “hermetic philosophy” informs both Thomas’ religious writing and Henry’s poetry. “Hermetic philosophy,” I think, is an incredibly inexact term. Certainly, Hermetism, a theosophical school stemming from the body of late classical writings known as the *Corpus Hermeticum* and attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, was, along with Neoplatonism, an important ingredient in humanist thought during the Renaissance, especially following Marsilio Ficino’s translation of the works into Latin in 1471.¹⁰³ And though Hermetic ideas trickled into early modern English intellectual life, as Robert M. Schuler has suggested, “among English writers familiarity with the actual texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was comparatively rare.”¹⁰⁴ A scholarly edition, however, Francesco Patrizi’s (1529 – 1597) *Hermes Trismegisti Opuscula*, in parallel Latin and Greek, was published in London in 1611,¹⁰⁵ and at least two editions of John Everard’s English version of the Hermetic (using the word in its proper setting) *The Divine Pymander* appeared between 1649 and 1657.¹⁰⁶ Thomas Vaughan, to be sure, mentions Trismegistus in several places, but it appears that the work he was most familiar with was the *Pymander*.¹⁰⁷ As it has come down to us, “hermetic philosophy” is a catch-

¹⁰³ Clement Salaman, “Echoes of Egypt in Hermes and Ficino,” in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology and His Legacy*, ed. Michael J. B. Allen, Valery Rees, Martin Davies (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 116.

¹⁰⁴ Robert M. Schuler, “Some Spiritual Alchemies of Seventeenth-Century England,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41, no. 2 (1980): 309.

¹⁰⁵ *Hermes Trismegisti Opuscula, cum fragmentis quotquot reperiuntur, ordine scientific disposita, et scholiis perutilibus illustrate* (London, 1611).

¹⁰⁶ *The Divine Pymander of Mercurius Trismegistus in XVII. Books*, trans Doctor [John] Everard (London, 1649; 1657)

¹⁰⁷ See *Works*, 58, 60, 79, 145, 188, 191, 469.

all phrase for a plethora of more-or-less heterodox ideas, including alchemy, magic, Kabbalah, and astrology as well as Neoplatonism and Hermeticism proper. This habit seems to have been a product of the seventeenth century, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* situates the earliest usage of the term “hermetic” in the mid 1600s. Unfortunately, this imprecise descriptive has become almost universally accepted, even in contemporary scholarship. Scholarship, indeed, has perpetuated the idea, as we see in Elizabeth Holmes’ *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy* (inspired in great part by L. C. Martin’s employment of “Hermetic” as an adjective describing Henry Vaughan’s poetry),¹⁰⁸ Yates’ popular *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*,¹⁰⁹ and many others that find the (imagined or real) presence of the ideas of Hermes Trismegistus in early modern texts. This makes for some often bizarre critical statements, such as this comment that attempts to justify calling Henry Vaughan’s poetry “hermetic”: “I do not mean that Vaughan necessarily subscribed to the ideas and doctrines from the *Corpus Hermeticum* that appear in it or that, as such, they were a dominant part of his religious creed.... Vaughan, I think, saw no fundamental incompatibility or contradiction between his borrowings and the more traditional Christian ideas he espouses in many of the poems of *Silex Scintillans*.”¹¹⁰ Perhaps such inexact terminology were best left alone. A more exact way to describe the work of the Vaughans is as “Rosicrucian.”

By describing the Vaughans’ work as Rosicrucian, I do not mean to suggest that they were actual, dues-paying members of the Fraternity. Scholarly consensus has not concluded that the group even existed during the seventeenth century anywhere, save in print. What is important is that Michael Maier, Robert Fludd, and Thomas Vaughan thought they were real, and they said

¹⁰⁸ Holmes, *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy*, 1. See also L. C. Martin, editor, *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957). The first edition appeared in 1914.

¹⁰⁹ Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹¹⁰ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 231 – 32.

so in print (we have no explicit mention of the Rosicrucians from Henry Vaughan). As Thomas wrote in the Preface to the *Fame and Confession*, “*I am in the Humor to affirm the Essence, and Existence of that admired Chimaera, the Fraternitie of R. C.*” although elsewhere he added “*I have for my own part no Relation to them*” (*Works*, 480; 483). Indeed, Maier, Fludd, and Thomas Vaughan were each at one time or another accused of being members of the Fraternity. Thomas Vaughan, for instance, is described in *Athenae Oxioniensis* as “a great Chymist, a noted son of the fire, an experimental Philosopher, a zealous brother of the Rosie-Crucian fraternity.”¹¹¹ Furthermore, the religious and philosophical ethos as laid out in the manifestos and found in Fludd is in profound resonance with the work of both brothers. Since we have no evidence of what the thought of the Vaughans was like prior to the late 1640s (when Henry worked through his first two poetry collections, *Poems, with the tenth Satyre of Juvenal* [London, 1646] and *Olor Iscanus* [London, 1651, but prepared in 1647]) we cannot properly say how it was or was not in harmony with the Rosicrucian ethos. It is fairly certain that Thomas must have seen the manifestos in manuscript by no later than 1648, the date he gives in the dedication to the “regenerated Brethern R.C.” in his first publication, *Anthroposophia Theomagica* (1650). We can infer, then, due to the intertextual connections between the writings of the two brothers, that Henry had at least undertaken a preliminary investigation of Rosicrucianism at the around the same time or very shortly thereafter.¹¹²

As we have seen with Fludd and his commentaries upon the Rosicrucian manifestos, a significant idea in Rosicrucianism is the understanding that the natural world bears witness to the glory of God. This notion, surely, has biblical antecedents, such as Psalm 19’s declaration that “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (19:1). But,

¹¹¹ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Life and Interpretation*, 149.

¹¹² Thomas O. Calhoun, *Henry Vaughan: The Achievement of Silex Scintillans* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1981), 54.

for both Vaughans as well as for the manifestos and Fludd, this glory is obscured by the fallenness of both nature and the human being. For this reason, God's glory, the *Dei Gloria intacta* of the *Fama*, cannot be seen without the presence of grace. "Wherefore should we not freely acquiesce," asks the *Confessio*, "in the onely truth then (which men through so many erroneous and crooked ways do seek) if it had onely pleased God to lighten unto us the sixth *Candelabrum*?" (89). Henry Vaughan explores this notion in the opening poem of *Silex Scintillans*, the Latin "*Authoris (de se) Emblema*":

*Tentâsti, fateor, sine vulnere saepius, et me
 Consultum voluit Vox, sine voce, frequens;
 Ambivit placido divinior aura meatu,
 Et frustra sancto nirmure praemonuit.
 Surdus eram, mutusque Silex: Tu (quanta tuorum
 Cura tibi est!) alia das renovare via;
 Permutas Curam: Iamque irritatus Amorem
 Posse negas, & vim, Vi, stiperare paras,
 Accedis propior, molemque et Saxea rumpis
 Pectora, fitque Caro, quod fuit ante Lapis.
 En lacerum! Caelosque tuos ardentia tandem
 Fragmenta, et liquidas ex Adamante genas.
 Sic olim undantes Petras, Scopulosq; vomentes
 Curâsti, O populi providus usque tui!
 Quam miranda tibi manus est! Moriendo, revixi;
 Et fractas jam sum ditior inter opes.¹¹³*

Henry lays out his theological aesthetic in this poem. His speaker, a cipher for himself,¹¹⁴ refers to his own fallenness and sinfulness ("*Surdus eram, mutusque*"—"I was deaf and dumb") in

¹¹³ In French Fogle's edition, John Carey gives this rendering: "Often have you attempted, I confess, to capture me without wounding me. Your speechless voice has tried unceasingly to bring me to my senses. Your divine breath has striven to win me over by its gentle motion, warning me in vain with sacred murmuring. I was deaf and dumb: a flint. So you consent (how great is your care for your dear ones!) to reform me in another way: you change your method completely and now, provoked, you declare that love cannot succeed: you plan to conquer force by force. You launch your attack and shatter that boulder, my stony heart. What was stone, becomes flesh. Look at it, broken in pieces! Look, its fragments are flashing at last to heaven and to you, and my cheeks are wet with tears wrung from flint. In the same way, ever provident for your people, you once commanded dry rocks to overflow and crags to gush with water. How marvelous your hand is! By dying I have gained new life: amidst the wreckage of my worldly fortunes, I am now richer than ever."

¹¹⁴ I find myself in agreement with Robert Ellrodt on the hegemony of the New Critical insistence on divorcing the author of a poem from the alleged "speaker," especially of an early modern poem and even more so of an early modern religious poem. As Ellrodt writes, "My own conviction has always been that the author does speak and,

terms evocative of Christ's healings of the deaf, dumb, lame, and blind found in the Gospels and the association of these afflictions with sin.¹¹⁵ He then goes on to repeatedly speak of himself in mineral terms: "Silex," "Saxae," "Lapis," "Adamante," "Petras," "Scopulos" as well as "Fragmenta" and "fractas," indicating both the "brokenness" of the speaker and the way in which minerals break—into fragments, literally "going to pieces." The use of capitalization and setting these words apart by not using italic adds further emphasis to an already compelling argument. "Adamante" and "Petras" are particularly poignant, punning on and alluding to, as they do, the biblical Adam and Peter: one disobeyed God the Father, while the other denied Christ. Henry here does something spectacular: he sets himself as well as the Scriptures in relationship to nature, each of which is inextricable from the other two. This is not, of course, the nature with which Wordsworth would be familiar.¹¹⁶ Robert Ellrodt has observed that Vaughan's alleged "nature mysticism" though "at once intense and vague" is ultimately "more precise than the later Romantic emotions because of its associations with a definite theology or natural philosophy."¹¹⁷ Nature does not interest Vaughan in and of itself; it only interests him as it relates to God. Nor can he conceive of nature, however fallen it might be, as separate from God. Likewise, he cannot imagine himself outside of nature; nor can he imagine himself, however fallen he might be, as outside of God's reach. He writes as much in the didactic "Rules *and* Lessons":

To highten thy *Devotions*, and keep low
 All mutinous thoughts, what business e'r thou hast
 Observe God in his works; here *fountains* flow,

when the writing is not purely imitative, does reveal some characteristics of his identity. Besides, through the study of a number of poets I was led to think that some unchanging structures of the individual mind were discernible in literary works." See his *Seven Metaphysical Poets: A Structural Study of the Unchanging Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

¹¹⁵ As, for instance, in Mark 7:32 – 37.

¹¹⁶ Henry Vaughan is all too often described as a precursor to Wordsworth as some kind of Romantic *avant le lettre*, an unfortunately tenacious association. Pettey is guilty of such an association in *Paradise and Light*, 13 – 14. See also Arthur C. Clements, *Poetry of Contemplation: John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan and the Modern Period* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 171.

¹¹⁷ Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, 70.

Birds sing, *Beasts* feed, *Fish* leap, and th' *Earth* stands fast;
 Above are restless *motions*, running *Lights*,
 Vast Circling *Azure*, giddy *Clouds*, days, nights. (lines 85 – 90)

Furthermore, as we find in “The Tempest,” Henry Vaughan reads nature as figuring metaphysical desire:

All things here shew him heaven; *Waters* that fall
 Chide, and fly up; *Mists* of corruptest fume
 Quit their first beds & mount; trees, herbs, flowres, all
 Strive upwards stil, and point him the way home. (lines 25 – 28)

This notion is found in Romans 8: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:22 – 23). In Henry’s poetry, then, nature and the processes of nature become signs of God.¹¹⁸ Signs are important to the Vaughans, for, as Boehme wrote, a sign is “the Receptacle, Container or Cabinet of the Spirit.”¹¹⁹

Thomas Vaughan uses nearly identical language to Henry’s in “*Authoris (de se) Emblema*” in a poem he includes in his first published work, *Anthroposophia Theomagica* (1650). The second stanza of the poem reads,

My God! my *Heart* is so,
 ‘tis all of *Flint*, and no
Extract of *teares* will yield:
 Dissolve it with thy *Fire*
 That something may *aspire*,
 And *grow* up in my *Field*. (*Works*, 70 – 71)

¹¹⁸ Joseph A. Mazzeo sees Henry Vaughan’s habit of interpreting nature and things in nature as simultaneously signs of God, an inheritance of Bonaventurian spirituality, though this is certainly a feature of Franciscan spirituality in general. See Joseph A. Mazzeo, “Universal Analogy and the Culture of the Renaissance,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15, no. 2 (April 1954): 302.

¹¹⁹ Jacob Behmen [Jacob Boehme], *Signatura Rerum*, trans. J. Ellistone (London, 1651), 2.



Figure 4.1: Title page to *Silex Scintillans* (1650)

It is certainly no coincidence that Thomas uses the word “flint” to describe his heart—the exact word that Henry uses, though in Latin (“Silex”), to describe himself in “*Authoris (de se) Emblemata*” and to entitle his collection, *Silex Scintillans* (“a sparking flint”). Indeed, the title page of Henry’s volume bears an image that could be used to illustrate Thomas’ poem: a heart made of stone dissolving in fire. In Thomas’ Latin poem, “*Carolus Primus, Anglorum Rex,*”

which Henry included in the collection *Thalia Rediviva* (1678)¹²⁰ twelve years after Thomas' death, the younger brother puts the Latin word to use:

En, en Deorum *Magnes*, & tracti Numinis
Sub sole *Thronus*: Ignium Coeli *Silex*
Ferroque tritus in suas flammam abiens!"¹²¹

The use of the *flint* as an image, of course, is important because of the flint's ability to generate sparks when struck. In symbolic terms, it is not completely dead. Likewise, the speakers of both poems, though suffering from their own sinfulness, still retain a spark of divinity. As Thomas writes, again using the figure, in *Lumen de Lumine* (1651):

Fire, notwithstanding the *Diversities* of it in this *Sublunarie Kitchin* of the *Elements*, is but *one Thing*, from *one Root*. The *Effects* of it are *various* according to the *Distance*, and *Nature* of the *subject* wherein it *resides*, for that makes it *Vital*, or *Violent*. It *sleeps* in most *things* as in *Flints*, where it is *silent* and *Invisible*. (*Works*, 336)

Thomas's association of this spark and its various effects ("Vital, or Violent") dependent upon the nature of the subject seems to be related, at least in part, to Boehme's idea of God's perceived "wrath" or "love" being likewise dependent upon the state of the subject.¹²² The notion of violence, of course, suggests repentance, contrition, and even the "correction" God might choose to give his servants in order to bring them back to him, as Henry wrote in a poem using the same image:

¹²⁰ *Thalia Rediviva, the Pass-Times of a Countrey-Muse, in Choice Poems on several Occasions with Some Learned Remains of the Eminent Eugenius Philalethes, Never made Publick till now* (1678).

¹²¹ Rudrum provides this translation: "Behold, the magnet of the gods, and the throne of God who has been drawn down below the sun: flint of heavenly fires, fretted by the steel and vanishing in flames!" (*Works*, 758). The line following refers to "Depressa palmae" ("the oppressed palm-tree") and certainly bears a relationship to Henry's poem "The Palm-tree": "Dear friend sit down, and bear awhile this shade / As I have yours long since; This Plant, you see / So prest and bow'd, before sin did degrade / Both you and it, had equal liberty / With other trees" (lines 1 – 5).

¹²² This idea permeates Boehme's mysticism. God's wrath, however, was only revealed in Adam's perception—God is unchangeable—as a result of the Fall. See, for example Jacob Behme [Jacob Boehme]. *Concerning the Election of Grace. or Of Gods Will Towards Man. Commonly Called Predestination*, trans. John Sparrow (London, 1655), especially chapter seven, from which I quote: "At this very hour, was in Man a Gate of the Dark world; in Gods anger, *open*; viz. *Hell*, or the Jawes and Throne of the Devill, as also the Kingdome of *Phantasie* was manifested in him. The Angry God, so called according to the Kingdome of Darknesse, was manifested in him, and caught hold on him according to the Soules Essence, *in the Creature*" (7.15; page 67).

for flints will give no fire
 Without a steel, O let thy power cleer
 Thy gift once more, and grind this flint to dust!” (“The Tempest,” lines 59 – 60).

What we have here is an entirely holistic worldview: nature, the soul, scripture, and God cannot be understood in isolation from one another.

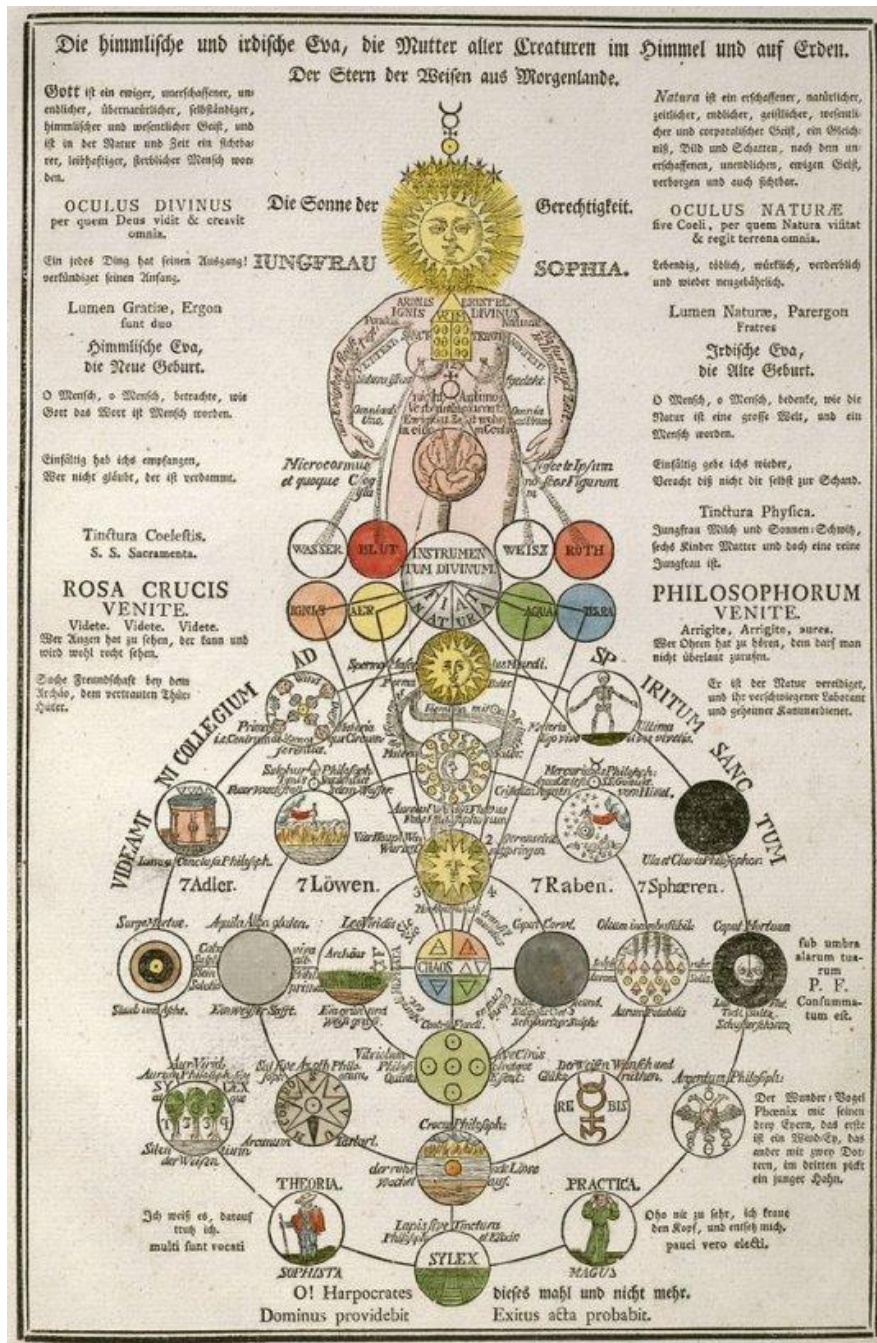


Figure 4.2: Emblem from *Die Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer* (1785)

Furthermore, “flint” (*silex*) is a Rosicrucian symbol. Thomas O. Calhoun, for one, suggests Henry Vaughan’s use of *silex* in the title of his book is in reference to the Philosopher’s Stone as it was understood in Rosicrucianism.¹²³ There is something to be said for this opinion. Indeed, the word also appears (spelled “SYLEX”) in a Rosicrucian emblem included in the eighteenth century compendium *Die Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer aus dem 16^{ten} und 17^{ten} Jahrhundert* (Altona, 1785) in a diagram depicting the Virgin Sophia standing above a network of spheres. The lowermost sphere is labeled “SYLEX,” the nadir of creation, but still housing the potential for heavenly fire within its outwardly cold and hard substance. The Vaughans surely were operating within the same aesthetic and philosophical/religious framework as we find in the emblem.

There are other elements of shared imagery, of shared theological aesthetic between Henry and Thomas Vaughan. One is in their employment of “shell” and the “kernel” as metaphors for superficiality and depth, outward appearance and inner mystery. Thomas applies the metaphor primarily to theological discussion. In *Anthroposophia Theomagica* he complains of theologians who, he believes, miss the religious and mystical depths of even the mystery of the Sacrament of Baptism by focusing too much on outward signs and ceremonies:

Nay, this very day there is not one amongst all our contemporarie *School-Doctors*, or late *ex-Temporaries* that knows what is represented unto us by the outward Element of *Water* in *Baptism*. True indeed: They tell us it betokens the *washing away* of *sin*, which we grant them; but this is not the *ful signification* for which it was *ordained*. It hath been the Common error of all times to mistake *signum* for *signatum*, the *shel* for the *Kernel* (*Works*, 75).

He does not, at least in the *Anthroposophia*, go on to actually explain the mystical signification of the water of Baptism, but in *Magia Adamica* he reveals more of his insight into the

¹²³ Calhoun, *Henry Vaughan: The Achievement of Silex Scintillans*, 55.

relationship of *signum* to *signatum*. “If I should insist in this place on the *Moysaicall Ceremonial Law*,” he writes,

with its severall Reverend *shadows* and their *Significations*, I lose my self in a *Wilderness* of *Mysteries* both *Divine* and *Naturall*; For verily that whole *System* is but one *vast Skreen*, or a certain *Majestic Umbrage* drawne over *two Worlds*, *Visible* and *Invisible*. But these are things of a higher speculation than the Scope of our present Discourse will admit of. I onely informe the Reader that the *Law* hath both a *shell*, and a *Kernell*, it is the *Letter* speaks, but the *spirit* interprets. (177)

Even though in both instances Thomas writes in terms of religious ordinance, he frames these ordinances in the context of nature and religion’s, particularly Christianity’s, fundamental entwinement with the natural world. Essentially, for Thomas Vaughan, there is more to nature than bodies and more to religion than the spirit.

Henry Vaughan, in his treatment of the shell/kernel metaphor, which he only uses in the opening section of *Silex*, moves outside, but not by much, the more obviously theological context that Thomas observes, but in such a way that adds to and opens up Thomas’ argument. First, in “Religion,” a poem which argues against the Puritan assertion that the Age of Miracles has ceased because the church has fallen into corruption, he insists,

No, no; Religion is a Spring
That from some secret, golden Mine
Derives her birth, and thence doth bring
Cordials in every drop, and Wine (lines 29 – 32).

Here, again, religion and the “things of God” are spoken of in terms of the natural world. Despite its pristine origins, this spring “Growes still from better unto worse, / And both her taste, and colour staines” (35 – 36) and becomes “stead of Phisick, a disease” (44). Yet, apparently unlike Thomas, Henry knows that reaching for a more rarefied and sublime expression of religion may be just as superficial as sticking to the surface: “Nor must we for the Kernell crave / Because

most voices like the *shell*" (47 – 48). It would seem that Henry is nudging his brother with a gentle reminder that the invisible aspects of religion may not always be superior to the visible.

In a second employment of the image, Henry continues the dialectic with his twin, opening up the field in an attempt to articulate the essence of the underlying *problem* (rather than the *dynamic* to which Thomas attends) of the binary. This, as might be expected, turns out to be a repercussion of the Fall:

The skinne, and shell of things
 Though faire,
 are not
 Thy wish, nor pray'r
 but got
 My meer Despair
 of wings. ("The Search," lines 81 – 87)

This, again, is first applied in how they approach nature, for the Rosicrucian idea is not to simply look at the materiality of nature, its physicality, but to disclose its relationship—even down to the "chymical" level—to God, "from whom all good things come,"¹²⁴ certainly the source of all healing for these two physicians. As Henry writes in "Rules *and* Lessons," "Thou canst not misse his Praise; Each *tree, herb, flower* / Are shadows of his *wisdome*, and his Pow'r" (lines 95 – 96).

Henry also tests the shell and kernel figure in "The Incarnation, and Passion." His use of it here opens our understanding of this religious aesthetic through his insistence on the importance of Christ's Incarnation—and even more on the importance on the very *physical* nature of Christ's death and resurrection:

Brave wormes, and Earth! that thus could have
 A God Enclos'd within your Cell.
 Your maker pent up in a grave,
 Life lockt in death, heav'n in a shell. (lines 9 – 12)

¹²⁴ From the Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Easter. *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, ed. John Booty (Washington, D.C.: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), 164.

Both Henry and Thomas uphold an understanding of Christ's participation in nature and in nature's processes that is crucial to an understanding of their respective religious and scientific visions. Christ's regeneration, that is, is the key to both religion and science. For the Vaughans, the resurrection is not only an article of faith, but a scientific—and therefore discoverable—fact.

The Vaughan twins also engage in some playful doubling on the title of one of Thomas' works, *Aula Lucis, or The House of Light* (1651). *Aula Lucis* is the only one of Thomas' treatises not to be published under the pseudonym "Eugenius Philalethes." Instead, it is ascribed on the title page to "S. N. *a Modern Speculator*," a not too obscure ruse, employing the last letters of his given name as initials. He plays with his aliases when he criticizes imprudent chymical philosophers: "But had my young friend Eugenius Philalethes been present he had laughed without mercy" (*Works*, 466).¹²⁵ *Aula Lucis* is the shortest of Thomas' works, a rambling, discursive text that is equal parts meditation on light and darkness, exposition of Christian-Rosicrucian anthropology, and attack on his enemies, particularly Henry More.

In the more serious moments of the tract, Thomas explores the connections between the scientific search and the inherently religious phenomenon of metaphysical desire. If the reader wishes to discover the secret of the preparations of the alchemical work, Vaughan is willing to give instruction. "[T]hy best course," he writes,

is to consider the *way of nature*, for there it may bee *found*, but not without reiterated, deep, and searching *meditations*. If this *Attempt* fails thee, thou must *pray* for it (not that I hold it an *easie* or a common thing to attain to *Revelations*, for wee have *none* in *England*)¹²⁶ but *God* may discover it to *thee*, by some *ordinarie* and meere *natural meanes*: In a word, if thou canst not attaine to the *knowledge* of it in this *life*, yet thou

¹²⁵ He actually alludes to his pseudonym twice in the text. See also, *Works*, 456.

¹²⁶ Rudrum interprets this as a gibe at Commonwealth-era "religious fanatics" who claimed immediate inspiration from the divine. (*Works*, 709, note 460.276-7). However, I think it more probable that Vaughan is suggesting that there is no revelation because no one (besides himself) is utilizing the methods he describes. Such an interpretation certainly agrees with the gist of the text.

shalt know it in thy *own body*, when thou art past knowing it in this *subject*. (*Works*, 460 – 61)

Thomas' own "meditations" have led him to conclude that "*Matter...is the House of Light*" (468). Light, for Vaughan, is not to be confused with or reduced to that which we see raying from the sun, though this would be a very apt figure of what he is trying to communicate. Rather, light needs to be understood as a hidden *principle* in all things of nature.

Wee see there is a certain *face of Light* in all those *things* which are very *deare*, or very *precious* to us. For Example, in *Beautie, Gold, Silver, Pearls*, and in every *thing* that is *pleasant* or carries with it any *opinion of happiness*. In all such *Things* I say there is inherent a certain *secret concomitant luster*, and whiles they *last* the *possessors* also are *subject* to a *Cleannesse and Serenitie of Mind*. *On the contrary in all Adversities* there is a certain corroding, *heavie sadness*; for the *spirit* grieves because he is *Ecclips'd*, and overcast with *darknesse*. (470)

The idea of light as it is used here is also evocative of the *Silex* figure: the flint carries within itself the light it is capable of producing. And it is worth noting that the "SYLEX" sphere in the emblem from *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer* is half dark and half light, a figuration of the principle Thomas describes here. Indeed, Thomas held to this idea throughout his work and mentions "the small Sparks of Heavenly *Wisdom*, which yet remaineth with men" in the Epistle to *The Fame and Confession* (A7^v). The idea of a hidden light was also an aspect of Fludd's Rosicrucianism, as he affirms in the *Apologia Compendiaria* when he writes of that which is "*Lucis universalis creatæ & spiritus mundani origo, admirabiles effectus, proprietates occulta, mysteria arcana*" as well as the "*admiranda Lucis arcana virtute*."¹²⁷ Undergirding the concept is the notion of light found in the Prologue to John's Gospel—"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John

¹²⁷ "begotten of the Universal Light and the origin of the spirit of the world: the admirable effects, hidden qualities, hidden mysteries" as well as the "hidden strength to be admired in Light." Fludd, *Apologia Compendiaria*, 21.

1:4 – 5)—which Fludd does not fail to quote in his discussion.¹²⁸ Later Rosicrucianism and Masonic philosophies capitalized on this imagery,¹²⁹ though they no longer retained much of the scientific import that we find in Robert Fludd and Thomas Vaughan.

Thomas' idea of the indwelling light and its intrinsic beauty, truth, and goodness also has much in common with the twentieth-century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar's notion of "splendour," of that quality which shines forth from nature, works of art, scripture, or liturgy and awakens in the beholder a feeling of wonder or recognition of the numinous. In the presence of this splendour, "[w]e are confronted," writes Balthasar,

simultaneously with both the figure and that which shines forth from the figure, making it into a worthy, a love-worthy thing. Similarly we are confronted with both the gathering and uniting of that which had been indifferently scattered—its gathering into the service of one thing which now manifests and expresses itself—and the outpouring, self-utterance of the one who was able to fashion by himself such a body of expression: by *himself*, I say, meaning 'on his own initiative,' and therefore with pre-eminence, freedom, sovereignty, out of his own interior space, particularity, and essence....we are brought face to face with both interiority and its communication, the soul and its body, free discourse governed by laws and clarity of language.¹³⁰

The Rosicrucian ethos, though articulated in different cultural and historical circumstances, stands in general agreement with Balthasar. For both, God's grace is able to shine through nature as light illuminates a pane of stained glass. Thomas argues that

Hee that desires to be *happy*, let him looke after *Light*, for it is the *Cause* of *happinesse* both *Temporall*, and *Eternall*. In the *House* thereof it may be *found*, and the *House* is not farr off, not *hard* to *find*, for the *Light* walks in *before* us, and is the *guide* to his own *habitation*. It is *Light* that *forms* the *gold*, and the *Rubie*, the *Adamant* and the *silver* and he is the *Artist* that *shapes* all things. Hee that hath him, hath the *Mint* of *Nature*, and a *Treasure* altogether *inexhaustible*. (471)

¹²⁸ Ibid., 23. Nor does Thomas Vaughan, as can be seen, for instance, first in *Anthroposophia Theomagica*. See *Works*, 58.

¹²⁹ McIntosh, "The Rosicrucian Legacy," in *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*, 257.

¹³⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume I: Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio S.J. and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 20. Emphasis in source.

As we can see, the claims of science, theology, aesthetics, and anthropology here coalesce. As in the Rosicrucian manifestos, Thomas Vaughan articulates in metaphoric terms the idea of a holistic, Christian culture underwritten by words found in the Gospel of John: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

When we turn to the poetry of Henry Vaughan, we do not need to look very far in order to find a similar theological aesthetic. Light, indeed, is one of Henry’s primary metaphors for God’s grace and presence, and several instances of Henry’s use of the figure stand in dialectic with the writing of his twin. First of all, we find it in his anthropology, as stated in “Corruption,”

Sure, It was so. Man in those early days
Was not all stone, and Earth,
He shin’d a little, and by those weak Rays
Had some glimpse of his birth. (lines 1 – 4)

But Henry speaks most directly to his brother in one of his most noted poems, “Cock-Crowing.” The poem appeared in the second edition of *Silex Scintillans*, issued in 1655, well after Thomas published *Aula Lucis* in 1651.

In “Cock-crowing,” which has been called a poem in which he “is most triumphantly and fully himself,”¹³¹ Henry straightway acknowledges the source of light as well as of all good things as he opens the poem with a direct quote from the Epistle of James, “Father of lights!” (line 1).¹³² Light as an image moves throughout the poem, but in the second stanza it alludes to Thomas’ book as well as to the principle being explored, as Henry writes in terms of the cocks’ heralding of daybreak:

Their eyes watch for the morning-hue,
Their little grain expelling night

¹³¹ Alan Rudrum, “An Aspect of Vaughan’s Hermeticism: The Doctrine of Cosmic Sympathy,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500 – 1900* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 131.

¹³² James 1:17.

So shines and sings, as if it knew
 The path unto the *house of light*.
 It seems their candle, howe'r done.
 Was tinn'd and lighted at the sun. (lines 6 – 12)¹³³

It may seem at first that Henry is not referring explicitly here to *matter* as the “house of light,” the definition Thomas gives, but to the *source* of light. However, the two brothers may not be in disagreement. In *Aula Lucis*, Thomas explains things:

It is *Light* then that wee must *looke* after, but of it selfe it is so *thin* and *spirituall*, wee can not lay *hands* upon it, and make it our *Possession*. We cannot *confine* it to any *one place*, or that it may no more *rise*, and *set* with the *Sunne*; wee cannot *shut* it up in a *Cabinet*, that we may *use* it when wee *please*, and in the darkest *Night* see a glorious *Illustration*. Wee must looke then for the *Mansion of Light*, that *oylie Æthereal substance* that *retaines* it, for by this *meanes* wee may *circumscribe*, and *confine* it. (*Works*, 472).

What is important here, I think, is a tiny phrase in Henry’s poem one could easily miss: “as if.”¹³⁴ Henry is not saying his metaphorical bird knows the secret pathways to the light—only that it seems (in the world of the poem) *as if* it did. The house of light for Henry, then, *is* that which Thomas describes: the bird recognizes the light *in the world*. It is merely the innocence of the bird manifesting as instinct that allows the bird to recognize the splendor of the sun. The light of the sun, that is, is still *material*: the splendour contained in the *aula lucis*, on the other hand, is a spiritual substance revealed through all of creation.

William Huffman comments that, of all of the religio-scientific insights Robert Fludd arrived at “by contemplation” and presented to the public in his works, he was most proud of a figure representing “the emanation of spirit downward and matter upward by two

¹³³ My emphasis.

¹³⁴ For a philosophical discussion of the “as if” see Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 35 – 39.

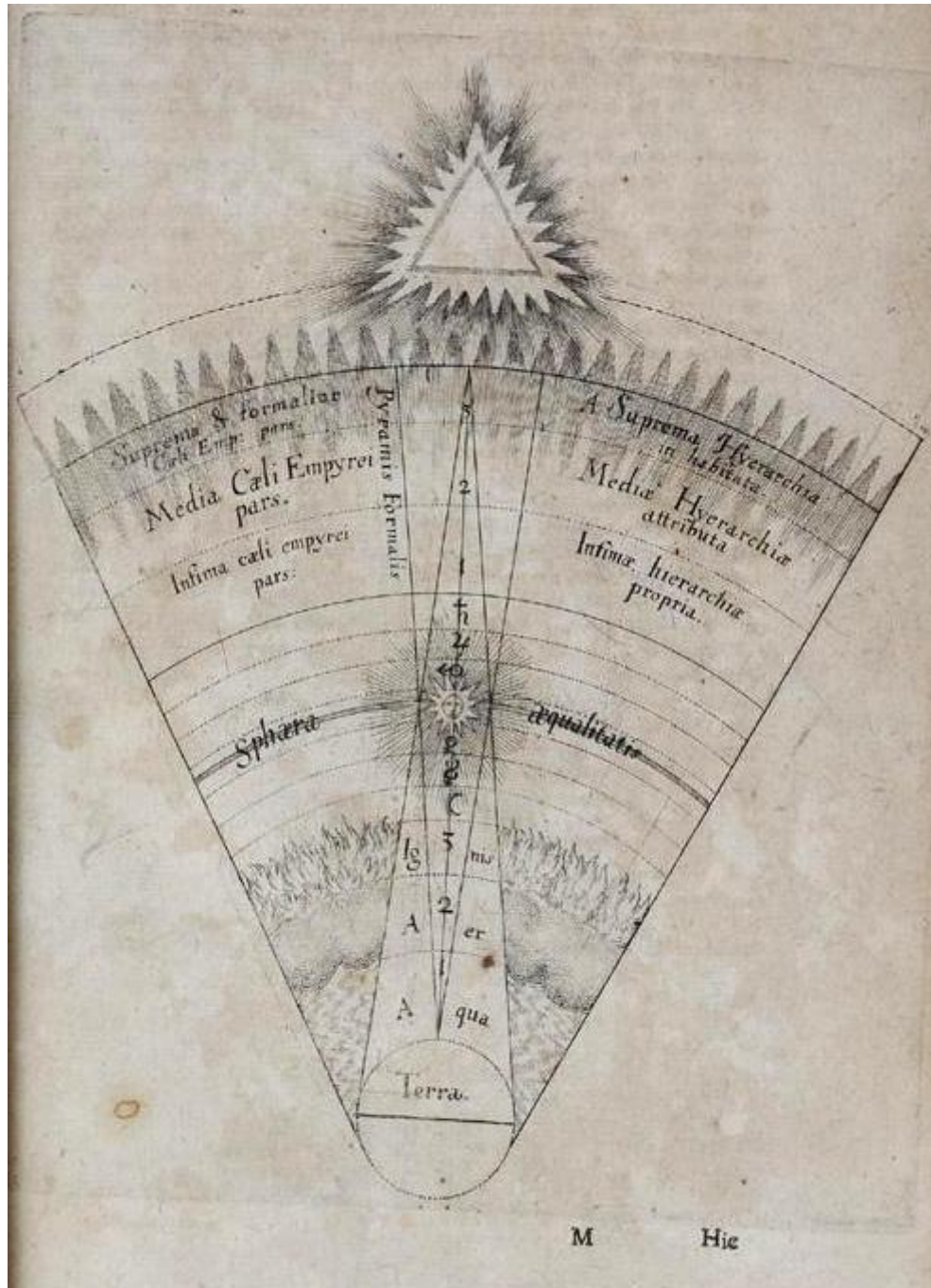


Figure 4.3: Illustration from *Utriusque Cosmi Historia*, Vol I, page 89

interpenetrating pyramids.”¹³⁵ This is the essence of what has been called Fludd’s “non-mechanistic poesis”¹³⁶ present in the Vaughans as well. In Fludd’s *magnum opus*, the massive

¹³⁵ Huffman, *Robert Fludd*, 105.

¹³⁶ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 114.

Utriusque Cosmi Historia (1617 – 1623)¹³⁷ we find several of these pyramids, which often are depicted in musical analogy as monochords.

The mundane and cosmic pyramids radiate toward one another, finding balance at the sphere of the sun (for Fludd, a *signum* of Christ¹³⁸). Such a diagram and such an understanding of Christian metaphysics are certainly at home with the work and thought of the Vaughans. The earthly and divine orders completely interpenetrate, even though, as Fludd's diagram illustrates, God himself (the fiery triangle at the top of the diagram) is completely outside of all order. The natural is never lacking the supernatural, nor the supernatural the natural; for, as Fludd's design shows, though one triangle's apex reaches the other's base in a true spiritual reciprocity, even though it is diminished in proportion, it is still present. As Thomas Vaughan has it in *Anima Magica Abscondita* (1650), in words that almost serve as a caption for Fludd's diagram, "Here now lies the Mystery of the Magicians *denarius*, his most secret and miraculous *Pyramid*, whose first Unity or *Cone* is always in *Horizonte Eternitatis*, but his Basis or *Quadrante* is here below in *Horizonte Temporis*" (*Works*, 111). He later reaffirms this notion with scripture, citing Wisdom 8:1, "God is not *absent* from his *Creatures* but that *Wisdom reacheth mightily from one end to another* and that *his Incorruptible Spirit filleth all things*" (112). Such an understanding is essential to Thomas' thought, and his ongoing complaints against the innovations of the Neo-scholastics are based precisely on the idea that they, he believes, hold God to be divorced from nature: "But, indeed, the doctrine of the schoolmen, which in a manner makes God and Nature contraries, hath so weakened our confidence towards Heaven that we look upon all Receptions from thence as impossibilities"¹³⁹ (*Works*, 83). It would be wrong, though, to ascribe this

¹³⁷ R. de Fluctibus [Robert Fludd], *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris scilicet et Minoris Metaphysica, Physica Atque Technica Historia*, 2 vol. (Oppenheim, 1617 – 1620).

¹³⁸ Debus, *English Paracelsians*, 113.

¹³⁹ In *Anthroposophia Theomagica*.

schematic to the “Great Chain of Being” familiar to scholars of Renaissance philosophy.¹⁴⁰ Fludd is not describing a system of degrees so much as two interpenetrating spheres, which we might call the natural and supernatural orders, that cannot even properly be thought of as discreet categories, save in the abstract. What we have here is less a hierarchical conception of world processes than a holistic one.

Such an idea is hardly foreign to Henry Vaughan. The pyramid image, in fact, shows up in “The Tempest,” when Henry contemplates the ways in which human beings remain oblivious to this essential metaphysical truth:

All have their *keyes*, and set *ascents*; but man
 Though he knows these, and hath more of his own,
 Sleeps at the ladders foot; alas! what can
 These new discoveries do, except they drown?

Thus groveling in shade, and darkness, he
 Sinks to dead oblivion; and though all
 He sees, (like *Pyramids*,) shoot from this ball
 And less’ning grow up invisibly (lines 37 – 44)¹⁴¹

Though human beings cannot easily recognize such a phenomenon, Vaughan argues, it is nevertheless there. This is one of his favorite images, and, indeed, Henry often meditates upon the intertwined relationship of the divine and natural orders, as in “The Check,” where he writes,

Whose pow’r doth so excel
 As to make Clay
 A spirit, and true glory dwell
 In dust, and stones” (lines 33 – 36).

¹⁴⁰ The classic study on this concept is, of course, E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture: A Study of the Idea of Order in the Age of Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton* (1948; repr., New York: Vintage-Random House, 1968).

¹⁴¹ Rudrum connects these lines with those of Thomas Vaughan on the pyramid in *Anima Magica Abscondita* quoted above. See Rudrum, note 42 – 4 to “The Tempest,” *Complete Poems*, 577.

Likewise, in “I Walkt the other day,” Henry articulates the ways in which God is signified in nature, indicating the flashes of the descending, celestial pyramid he detects in this world and the offer given to the flesh-bound to ascend:

That in these Masques and shadows I may see
 Thy sacred way,
 And by those hid ascents climb to that day
 Which breaks from thee
 Who art in all things, though invisibly (lines 50 – 54)

The source of this ascent is planted in human nature—and, indeed, in all nature. In “The Starre,” for example, this idea takes on colorings of metaphysical desire:

For where desire, celestiall, pure desire
 Hath taken root, and grows, and doth not tire.
 There God a Commerce states, and sheds
 His Secret on their heads. (lines 25 – 28)

He also writes in terms of great consonance with Fludd’s design in the poem, “Ascension-Hymn.” The poem opens with the lines,

Dust and clay
 mans antient wear!
 Here you must stay,
 But I elsewhere” (1 – 4)

and each stanza proceeds by degrees to illustrate the process of sublimation. The poem is a fine example of what Louis Martz called “melting association” in Henry’s work.¹⁴² The speaker at first seems to be Christ as he ascends to heaven. Then the duties of speaker gradually slip over into a very human speaker, which is clear by the seventh and last stanza:

Hee alone
 And none else can
 Bring bone to bone
 And rebuild man,
 And by his all subduing might
 Make clay ascend more quick then light (lines 37 – 42).

¹⁴² Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 87.

What is interesting here, besides the destabilization of speaker, is the way the poem performs ascension: the first word of the poem is “Dust” and the last is “light.” In between, as the reader tries to sort out the Christ-speaker from the human-speaker, we witness the equivalent of a literary sublimation. Not only that, but the reciprocity figured in the poem is stunning, as it opens with Christ contemplating the earthly and culminates with the human speaker contemplating the celestial.

Critics have sometimes remarked on Henry Vaughan’s sympathies with certain aspects of Catholicism.¹⁴³ His translations of the popular Polish Jesuit poet, Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, popularly known as Casimirus, in *Olor Iscanus* (1651, but written before *Silex*) certainly give some evidence of this. Another work of translation by his hand, *Flores Solitudinis* (1654), is also heavily indebted to Jesuit sources.¹⁴⁴ Add to that Vaughan’s translation of the Latin version of the Spanish Catholic Bishop Antonio de Guevara’s *Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea* (1539) as “The Praise and Happinesse of the Countrie Life” (placed at the end of *Olor Iscanus*) and it is hard to dismiss such an assertion outright. Catholic as well as specifically Jesuit devotional material certainly made its way into Protestant editions, but they were heavily edited, their overt Catholicism removed.¹⁴⁵ Henry Vaughan, on the other hand, felt no inclination to keep the sources of his translations secret. I am not suggesting that Henry Vaughan aspired to be a Catholic. Rather, I think he held to a sacramental vision of Christianity, an idea in harmony

¹⁴³ Particularly Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, 98 – 99; Kregor, *Comparative Study*, 16; Young, *Doctrine and Devotion*, 83; and Calhoun, *Henry Vaughan: The Achievement of Silex Scintillans*, 143.

¹⁴⁴ Hutchinson, *Life and Interpretation*, 131.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Patrick Collinson, “Literature and the Church,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Lowenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 374 – 98, especially pages 396 – 98. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski has tried to argue for an “indigenous Protestant tradition” in early modern English devotion (see her *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979], 147), though R. V. Young has called her to task, arguing that her criteria are highly selective and dubious, pointing, as they do, to figures such as Erasmus, Gerson, and Thomas à Kempis. “Apparently,” he writes, “the establishment of a Protestant meditative tradition requires that anyone not a Scholastic logician or a Jesuit be regarded as a Protestant.” See his *Doctrine and Devotion*, 85 – 86.

with the Rosicrucian affirmation of God's accessibility through the natural world, and one that celebrated God's immanence made actual through the Incarnation—ideas certainly compatible with Roman Catholicism.

In the second part of *Silex Scintillans*, however, Henry Vaughan pushes the limits of his own Anglicanism and challenges the Commonwealth authorities with his invocations of the Virgin Mary. The first of these appears in his dedication:

To my most merciful, my most
loving, and dearly loved Re-
deemer, the ever blessed,
the onely Holy and
JUST ONE,
JESUS CHRIST,
The Son of the living
GOD,
And the sacred
Virgin Mary.

Henry's evocation of the Virgin, when it appeared in 1655, surely would have raised Puritan concerns, as the poet no doubt intended. Curiously, in one of his translations from Casimirus in *Olor Iscanus* ("Epodes iii") Henry had *removed* a reference to the Virgin, obviously refraining from coming across as too "popish."¹⁴⁶ In part two of *Silex*, on the other hand, he has no qualms about *adding* references to the Virgin. Indeed, the second part of *Silex* is much more militant than the first. There is a heightened apocalypticism in the second edition which, while present in the first, reaches a higher intensity, and Vaughan's distaste for the Cromwellian regime stands defiantly in the open. The allusions to and quotations from the Song of Songs, so prevalent in part one, have disappeared and been replaced by words and images from the Revelation. Nevertheless, Henry maintains his theological vision informed by the Rosicrucian affirmation of

¹⁴⁶ L.C. Martin, note to "Epodes iii."

God's immanence in creation, made explicit—and with explicitly Catholic overtones—in “The Knot”:

The Knot.

Bright Queen of Heaven! Gods Virgin Spouse!
 The glad worlds blessed maid!
 Whose beauty tyed life to thy house,
 And brought us saving ayd.

Thou art the true Loves-knot; by thee
 God is made our Allie,
 And mans inferior Essence he
 With his did dignifie.

For Coalescent by that Band
 We are his body grown,
 Nourished with favors from his hand
 Whom for our head we own.

And such a Knot, what arm dares loose,
 What life, what death can sever?
 Which us in him, and him in us
 United keeps for ever.

While acknowledging that in this poem Henry Vaughan crosses a doctrinal line which George Herbert refused to transgress,¹⁴⁷ Helen C. White has suggested that “there is nothing in the praise given to the Virgin in ‘The Knot’ that might offend the strictest Anglican theology as to her role in the process of redemption.”¹⁴⁸ White certainly has a point, but she does not take into account the context in which Henry Vaughan wrote these lines. The Cromwellian regime was well into securing its political power and part of the regime’s intention was to eradicate all remnants of “idolatry” and “papism” from forms of English worship. Certainly, were this poem not known to belong to Henry Vaughan, it could easily be attributed to Robert Southwell. As with his mention

¹⁴⁷ As Herbert expresses in his poem, “To All Angels and Saints”: “Not out of envy or maliciousness/Do I forbear to crave your special aid:/I would address/My vows to thee most gladly, blessed Maid,/And Mother of my God... /But now (alas!) I dare not; for our King,/Whom we do all jointly adore and praise,/Bids no such thing.” (lines 6 – 10; 16 – 18). From *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, rev. and ed. John Tobin (London: Penguin, 2004).

¹⁴⁸ White, *Metaphysical Poets*, 258.

of her in the dedication, in this poem Vaughan “praises the Virgin in terms that openly defy the Puritan by expressing an essentially Catholic view of the Virgin’s place in the scheme of things.”¹⁴⁹ But that is not all he does. Henry here also echoes the discussion Boehme undertakes on the Virgin in *Of the Becoming Man, or Incarnation of Jesus Christ*. Boehme describes Mary’s salvific role in physical terms: “And in that wisdom and divine Substantiality, as also in the dead and now living Substantiality, *the Word became flesh, a Sulphur*, with the Center of Nature out of the Fathers Essence, and out of Mary’s Essence, a life out of Death, a fruit with both the *Tinctures* perfectly, whereas *both* the Tinctures were but *One*. And as Adam was become a Man, so Christ became, a Man also, according to the *outward* World.”¹⁵⁰ The Incarnation, then, is not simply a matter of God’s appearance in the world, but his integration with the natural order at the *chemical* or *biological* level. This is what distinguishes the Rosicrucian “Book of Nature” from the Augustinian/medieval edition: grace is not only a spiritual effect, but enters into and combines with nature itself.

The desire expressed in the Rosicrucian manifestos, to “attain more and more to the perfect knowledge of [God’s] Son Jesus Christ and of Nature” certainly complements Boehme’s notion of Mary’s role in the binding of divinity to the natural order and Henry Vaughan’s description of her as “the true Loves-knot” (line 5). Kenelm Digby’s work with palingenesis, and certainly so much of the work in palingenesis of the seventeenth century, also affirms the Rosicrucian ideal of a combined understanding of nature and divinity, for nowhere do the two so intimately interface as in the notion of a physical resurrection.¹⁵¹ What is implicit in such a

¹⁴⁹ Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, 98.

¹⁵⁰ Jacob Behme [Jacob Boehme], *The Fifth Book of the Authour in Three Parts, The First; Of the Becoming Man or Incarnation of Jesus Christ, The Sonne of God. That is, Concerning The Virgin Mary*, [trans. John Sparrow] (London, 1659), 73.

¹⁵¹ Henry Vaughan’s poem “The Sap” from *Silex Scintillans* also plays with notions of the palingenesis of plants, the bodily resurrection, and the vivifying power of Christ in the present.

notion is something rarely mentioned: that such chemical resurrection, even of nettles in an alembic, would be impossible had not the Resurrection of Christ occurred first. Christ's death and resurrection, according to this view, effected a chemical change on nature itself. As Fludd has it, Christ, quite literally, is "spiritus vivificans," a life-giving spirit.¹⁵² Henry affirms such a metaphysics in "The Sap." The "sap" of the poem is Christ's power, inherent in nature since his death and resurrection and united with nature. "[N]ow in this," Henry relates,

Lies such a heav'n of bliss,
That, who but truly tastes it, no decay
Can touch him any way,
Such secret life, and virtue in it lies
It wil exalt and rise
And actuate such spirits as are shed
Or ready to be dead,
And bring new too. (lines 27 – 35)

L. C. Martin has recognized the traces of George Herbert's "Peace" in the paternity of "The Sap."¹⁵³ The two poems certainly have much in common. But Herbert's poem is essentially Eucharistic: he writes of wheat springing from the earth in which Christ had been buried and then becoming bread—almost a *reverse* Eucharistic image with Christ becoming bread and not bread becoming Christ.¹⁵⁴ For Herbert, it is the wheat that is important here: the Crown Imperial he mentions does not fare quite so well, for at its root, his speaker tells us, "I saw a worm devour / What showed so well" (lines 17 – 18). Vaughan, however, though he may have started from Herbert's premise, explores new theological and poetic territory in "The Sap," extending the powers inherent in Christ's resurrection to all of nature.

¹⁵² R. de Fluctibus [Robert Fludd], *Tractatus Theologo-Philosophicus* (Oppenheim, 1617), 103.

¹⁵³ *Works of Henry Vaughan*, note to "The Sap."

¹⁵⁴ "Take this grain, which in my garden grows,/And grows for you;/Make bread of it: and that repose/And peace which ev'rywhere/With so much earnestness you do pursue,/Is only there" (lines 37 – 42).

This concept, of course, was not lost on Thomas Vaughan. In *Lumen de Lumine*, while discussing the regeneration, ascent, and glorification of matter he employs patently religious terminology:

You must *unite* them to a *new life*, and they will be *regenerated* by *Water* and the *Spirit*. These *two* are in all *things*, they are placed there by *God himself*, according to the speech of *Trismegistus*, *Unumquodque habet in se semen suae Regenerationis*.¹⁵⁵ Proceed then *patiently*, but not *manually*. The *work* is performed by an *invisible Artist*, for there is a *secret Incubation* of the *Spirit of God* upon *Nature*; you must only see that the *outward Heat* failes not, but with the *subject* it self you have no more to *doe*, than the *Mother* hath with the *Child* that is in her *womb*. The two former *principles* performe all, the *Spirit* makes *use* of the *water* to *purge* and *wash* his *Body*, and hee will bring it at last to a *Celestiall*, *immortall Constitution*. Doe not you think this *Impossible*. Remember that in the *Incarnation* of *Christ Jesus* the *Quaternarius* or *four Elements* as men call them, were *united* to their eternall *Unitie* and *Ternarius*. *Three* and *Four*e make *Seven*: This *Septenarie* is the true *Sabaoth*, the *Rest of God* into which the *Creature* shall *enter*. This is the best and greatest *Manuduction* that I can give you. In a word, *Salvation* it self is nothing else but *transmutation*. (*Works*, 356 – 57)

Even though William R. Newman dismisses the presence of religious metaphor or analogy in alchemical writing—such as Thomas’ here—and insists instead on reading the religious connotations as “code-names” for chemical processes,¹⁵⁶ the fact is that, for Thomas Vaughan at least, the notion of God being uninvolved with chemical processes—or any process in nature—was unimaginable.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, his career as a scientist, I would suggest, was unimaginable apart from his career as a priest. These categories did not bear the exclusivity that Newman reads into them for Thomas, nor for many in the early modern period. Both Thomas and his brother Henry

¹⁵⁵ “Each thing has in itself the seed of its own regeneration.”

¹⁵⁶ William R. Newman, “*Decknamen* or Pseudochemical Language?: Eirenaeus Philalethes and Carl Jung,” *Revue D’Histoire des Sciences* 49, no. 2 (1996): 159 – 88.

¹⁵⁷ Unfortunately, Donald Dickson follows Newman somewhat on this point, saying that “our understanding and appreciation of his achievements has been impeded, especially to the degree which he was an ‘experimental philosopher’ as opposed to a ‘spiritual’ alchemist.” (*Aqua Vitae*, xxxi). He blames A. E. Waite and the “Victorian mania for theosophy, hermeticism, and secret societies” for this perception (xxxii). Dickson begs for a Thomas Vaughan who can be considered as a straightforward scientist, and hopes that the publication of *Aqua Vitae* will vindicate this view. However, even the *Aqua Vitae*, despite its catalog of experiments, “real science,” includes some examples of Thomas’ dream life and mystical speculation that do not do much to support Dickson’s thesis. While I have no doubts that Thomas was a serious natural philosopher, I do not think we need to think of his work in such reductively “either/or” terms.

argued for a holistic picture of the world: one where the natural and supernatural realms intertwine and cannot be imagined apart from one another. They rejected the Calvinist insistence on God's absolute transcendence and they likewise rejected the idea they found creeping into the science of their time: the notion that God could ever be absent from the natural world.

Donald Dickson has observed that Thomas Vaughan's public career was in a very real sense a response to the "firestorm sparked by the work of Descartes."¹⁵⁸ Thomas surely had an aversion to the French philosopher's ideas, which he dismissed as the "*Whymzies of des Chartes*" (*Works*, 137). Dickson likes to think of Thomas as a Baconian, but admits that his dedication to Rosicrucianism complicates things.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Dickson smooths over the rough spots of this issue by proclaiming "the Rosicrucian manifestos were written as part of a campaign to foster a similar renewal [as Bacon's] in the early years of the seventeenth century."¹⁶⁰ I do not think Dickson quite gets this right. What the Vaughans were both asserting was a claim for a vision of the cosmos that was quickly vanishing. Descartes, certainly, represented one aspect of this disappearance. Bacon was useful, as Dickson notes, because of his empiricism and because he advocated reform in learning, an idea Thomas Vaughan could enthusiastically endorse.¹⁶¹ To be true, Thomas does allude to Bacon's project of educational reform, some believe, in the epigraph on the title page of *Anthroposophia Theomagia*.¹⁶² Likewise he refers to Bacon in *Anthroposophia*—incorrectly as *Roger Bacon* (*Works*, 51—though the marginal note names "L. Veralum in his N.H."). Bacon's name also appears in *The Man-Mouse Taken in a Trap* (238), Thomas' attack on Henry More, as well as in *Aula Lucis*

¹⁵⁸ Dickson, *Aqua Vitae*, xxxii.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

¹⁶² "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" from Daniel 12:4, which Bacon uses on the title page of the *Novum Organum* (Rudrum, note to *Works*, 597).

(456). But empiricism was only a tool, albeit a useful one, for the Vaughans; and it was all too obvious to the twin Paracelsian physicians that education was in a sad state of affairs. Such hardly qualifies either Vaughan for inclusion in the “Baconian vanguard.”¹⁶³ The Vaughans’ affinities were not with Bacon so much as they were allied with what Reid Barbour has called “Bacon’s polar opposite, Robert Fludd and his ‘Mosaical philosophy.’”¹⁶⁴ What Fludd and Rosicrucianism offered them was a unified vision of creation and the spiritual world as well as a philosophical platform that was clear enough to follow, while vague enough to not become doctrinaire. As Thomas wrote in the Preface to the *Fame and Confession*: “*To be short then, this Umbrage and Mist of their Text required some Comment and Clearness, but few being able to Expound, the World ran generally to the other side and the School-men have got the Day, not by Weight but by Number*” (*Works*, 483).

Descartes was educated by Jesuits in France, the milieu of debate over *natura pura*.¹⁶⁵ These debates centered around two issues: 1) the hypothetical conjecture that God’s presence could be absent from nature, or any part of nature; and 2) that human beings were not necessarily created with the beatific vision as an end. Jean-Luc Marion, for one, suspects that Descartes was influenced by the Jesuit debate and that he was in sympathy with the parties, such as Francisco Suarez (1548 – 1617),¹⁶⁶ who held that *natura pura* was possible and spoke of the human being

¹⁶³ Dickson, *Aqua Vitae*, xlv.

¹⁶⁴ Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 181.

¹⁶⁵ In the second half of the twentieth century, and spilling over into the twenty-first, the debates again began to rage, but almost exclusively in Roman Catholic and, later, Radical Orthodoxy, contexts. The most important theologian on this subject is, unarguably, the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896 – 1991) and his most important statement is *Surnaturel: Études Historiques* (1946; repr., Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991). He revisited the issue in modified form in *Le mystère du surnaturel* (1965) translated as *The Mystery of the Supernatural* by Rosemary Sheed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967). *Surnaturel* was censured for a time by the Vatican, though the ban was lifted; but it has never been translated into English. See also John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁶⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 91 – 92.

“*rediisse ad naturalem conditionem*” as a consequence of the Fall.¹⁶⁷ Such an understanding, certainly, opens the possibility for the mechanistic view of the universe suggested by Descartes, defended by Mersenne, and upheld by Gassendi. The argument against this point of view, of course, is that the “natural condition” of the human being *is* union with God and the felicity of the beatific vision, and that the Fall compromised this (super)natural state. That is, the *supernatural* condition is the real *natural* condition. For Marion, “it remains clear that if, starting with Descartes, the relation between man and God is apprehended by modern metaphysics in terms of power (*pouvoir*) and capacity (*puissance*), it is in large part thanks to the theology of pure nature.”¹⁶⁸ Henry and Thomas Vaughan would certainly have denied that God can be limited to either power or capacity, and, as their work shows, the idea of *natura pura* was abhorrent to them. *Nequaquam vacuum*.

The religious and scientific beliefs of Henry and Thomas Vaughan, as well as of Robert Fludd and Michael Maier, were still well within the bounds of the religious and the scientific orthodoxies of their times. All four men were physicians whose medical practices took into account the connection of the human being (the microcosm) to the universe (the macrocosm) and the permeation of both by the intentionality of God. But the culture was rapidly changing away from a worldview that recognized God’s participation in not only religious ritual and sacrament but also in matter at both the chemical and biological levels. As we have seen in the cases of Mersenne and Gassendi, even theologians were abandoning the idea of what Charles Taylor has called the “porous self,” the notion that invisible spiritual and cosmic forces can influence human beings, whether for good or evil, and proceeding in a direct line toward what he calls the

¹⁶⁷ Francisco Suarez, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 7 (Paris, 1857), 202.

¹⁶⁸ Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 95.

“buffered self,” the self contained within itself and closed off from the cosmos.¹⁶⁹ The Vaughans and their Rosicrucian forbears are emblematic of, not the Aurora of a new day (as they thought), but of the sunset of religious and scientific holism. In the ensuing centuries, the scientific thinking of Thomas Vaughan, Fludd, and Maier would be relegated to what has been called “Renaissance curiosa” and Henry Vaughan’s profoundly religious and philosophically-informed poetry, while not dismissed in the same way, would be nevertheless diminished by the label “nature mysticism.” These latter cultural biases have done much to diminish our own understandings of both science and religion.

We can see how the writing of Henry and Thomas Vaughan discloses the stresses that English culture was undergoing in the middle of the seventeenth century, and not only as regards the Civil War and Interregnum. Another, invisible, war was also being fought at this time: the war between materialism and holism. And, just as with their fortunes in the English Civil War, the Vaughans threw their lots in with the losing side. Even when they lived, the religious expression of “porousness” was beginning to be ridiculed as “enthusiasm,” while materialistic “bufferedness” was extolled as empiricism and rationality. This happened not only in scientific circles, but, as we have seen, in the theological milieu as well.

¹⁶⁹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 35 – 43.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PAULINE MISSION OF JANE LEAD

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. ~*First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* (1:1 – 3)¹

To the *living Stones* gathered, and to be gathered to Christ, the Foundation Stone, (where-ever hid, scattered, and dispersed) who are elected in God for the *New-Jerusalem-Glory* and *Mount-Zion-Church*; all *Love, Grace, Peace* and *Joy* be multiplied from him who was, is, and is to come. ~Jane Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*²

In England, by the last decades of the seventeenth century the project for cultural, political, and, above all, for religious renovation promised by the notion of “reformation” had slipped into chaos. The generally temperate Christianity of both Anglicans and Puritans, while still kept in a temperate manner by the mainstream, had also developed strains of what was widely disparaged as “enthusiasm” and manifested in the variety of antinomian expressions of religion as practiced by Ranters, Fifth Monarchists, Quakers and others who pursued visions, attempted prophecy, and claimed direct communication with angels as well as with God.³ Artistic depictions of angels had been relegated “into temporary abeyance”⁴ by early Protestantism, but angels returned with a vengeance in the non-representational forms of visions in the latter seventeenth century. Likewise, early Reformation notions of the in-dwelling of God and the free interpretation of scripture had moved out of the individual soul and into the world

¹ Authorized Version.

² J. L. [Jane Lead], *The Revelation of Revelations, Particularly as an Essay Towards The Unsealing, Opening and Discovering the Seven Seals, the Seven Thunders, and the New-Jerusalem State...* (1683), A2^r. Emphasis in Lead. All emphases hereafter will be from the sources unless otherwise indicated.

³ A significant body of scholarship has accrued on the various expressions of “radical religion” in recent decades. See, for instance, Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (1972; repr. London: Penguin, 1991); Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640 – 1660* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989); Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a concise overview, see Jim Daems, *Seventeenth-Century Literature and Culture* (London: Continuum Books, 2006), 19 – 34.

⁴ Alexandra Walsham, “Angels and Idols in England’s Long Reformation,” in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 146.

and, in some cases, promised a new revelation.⁵ In many ways, as a ballad of the period proclaimed and as Christopher Hill has emphasized, England during this period must have seemed like “a world turned upside down.”

Certainly, the political unease characteristic of the period that has been called the time of “the greatest upheaval that has yet occurred in Britain”⁶ and saw the Civil Wars, the rise and fall of the Commonwealth, and the Restoration’s return of the monarchy—all of which bore serious implications for religion—added to the existential anxieties of believers. And this unease did not go away. Indeed, following the Restoration, religious hysteria and persecution continued, for example, in the anti-Catholic mania of the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis (1678 – 81)⁷ as well as in the rejection of Catholic King James II’s Declaration of Indulgence (1687)⁸ and his eventual removal as a result of the Glorious Revolution. It is not surprising, then, to find that a significant amount of “enthusiasm”— prophecies, visions, and the like—touched on political concerns.

But religion is not only, nor even primarily, a matter of politics, and every expression of religion—even religious “enthusiasm”—is not necessarily a statement of political allegiance or the assertion of a political “self.” It is best, I think, to avoid the traps of historiography that reduce religion to an accretion of either historical/geographical setting or political ideology, and, instead, consider a view of religion that recognizes the ways in which “it lives in human

⁵ The idea of the indwelling Spirit of God and, as a result of it, the right to freely interpret scripture was central to the early Reformation, particularly as expressed by the Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1448 – 1531). See Arnold Snyder, “Word and Power in Reformation Zurich,” in *The Reformation: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, vol. 1, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London: Routledge, 2004): 241 – 43. Ranters, Fifth Monarchists, Quakers, and Seekers—not to mention the Philadelphians—all looked forward to, and promised, a new revelation. See Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts*, Christian Foundations (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 148 – 50.

⁶ Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 13.

⁷ A fascinating, but by no means conclusive, examination of the Plot is found in Caroline M. Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

⁸ Steve Pincus has described James II’s project as a “Catholic modernization strategy.” See his discussion on how the Declaration fit into James’ greater scheme in *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 198 – 213.

experience rather than primarily in the culture of texts and artefacts.”⁹ A clear example of a kind of religious experience that is primarily one of an individual’s intimacy with God—and not merely an excretion of political anxieties or mental illness—can be found in the life and work of Jane Lead.¹⁰

⁹ Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 42.

¹⁰ To date only one full-length study of Lead has been published in English, Julie Hirst’s *Jane Leade: Biography of a Seventeenth-Century Mystic* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), which is more properly two chapters of biographical information followed by five chapters examining the major themes in Lead’s work. Other studies, such as B. J. Gibbons’ *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and Its Development in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), examine the Pordage/Lead circle and the influence of Boehme on this movement, though the label “occult” is a bit of a misnomer when it comes to Lead and Pordage, as well as when it comes to Boehme. Hirst and Gibbons have contributed to a scholarly discussion that really only began in 1948 with the publication of Nils Thune’s *The Behmenists and Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Upsala, SE: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1948), which splits its attention between a historiographic examination of the religious movement and a psychoanalytic discussion of the two seers.

In recent years, scholarly engagement with Pordage and Lead has surfaced in New Historicist, Cultural Materialist, and Eco-Critical discourses, invariably embedded in the wider contexts of post-Reformation and seventeenth-century English religion. Paula McDowell, in her New Historicist evaluation, “Enlightenment Enthusiasms and the Spectacular Failure of the Philadelphian Society,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 515 – 33, does a superb job of placing Lead’s work in the context of the burgeoning rationalism of the seventeenth century and the religious responses to it. McDowell proposes that we might “recognize groups like the Philadelphians as the ‘positive unconscious’ of the ‘Age of Reason,’” an idea that certainly has value (529). In her earlier work, *Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678 – 1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), McDowell had argued for a Lead in the tradition of “social action” and tried to place Lead and the Philadelphians in the context of the underclass and underprivileged (10 and 19), whereas they were really from the middle-class and the gentry, but she subsequently backed off from this thesis.

Likewise working in New Historicism, Joad Raymond’s treatment of Lead comes in the context of his study of angels in early modern, post-Reformation culture. In *Milton’s Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), he strives to draw a portrait of Lead’s Sophia as “a figure clearly derived from Pordage’s theology” and suggests that Lead’s teachings were also derivative of her colleague’s work (153). Raymond’s study is an important contribution to the study of early modern angels, but his dismissive attitude toward Lead is a spectre of a critical attitude to which Lead has been subject in the past. Four times in two paragraphs Raymond belabors his point about Lead’s indebtedness to Pordage. Lead’s Sophia is “clearly derived from Pordage’s theology”; “her doctrine was deeply rooted in Pordage’s teachings”; the Philadelphian Society, though founded at least fifteen years after he died, “was Pordage’s spiritual gathering” (153); the visions and terms she uses “are clearly shaped by Pordage” (154). At one point he acknowledges that Pordage’s ideas may also have been influenced by Lead, but Raymond clearly wants to diminish Lead’s significance as both visionary and religious leader.

In *Speaking for Nature: Women and Ecologies of Early Modern Nature* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), the late Sylvia Bowerbank entirely misreads Lead as somehow a proto-ecological feminist who celebrated natural bodies and not as a dualistic religious thinker who privileged the spirit over the body and supernature over nature. In truth, Lead is doing anything but “speaking for nature,” which she describes as having been spoiled “by sowing of the Serpent’s Seed” (J. Lead, *A Living Funeral Testimony Or Death Overcome and Drown’d in the Life of Christ* [London: J. Bradford, 1702], 15.)

The most fruitful area of work on Lead, one might think, would be the result of feminist discourses, and some scholarship has, in fact, moved in this direction. The first feminist critic to devote any significant attention to Lead was Catherine F. Smith, who produced a handful of articles on Lead in the 1970s and 1980s. (See Catherine F. Smith, “Jane Lead: The Feminist Mind and Art of a Seventeenth-Century Protestant Mystic,” in *Women of Spirit:*

Jane Lead (1624 – 1704) was a visionary mystic, a prolific author, and the leader of the Philadelphian Society, a religious group dedicated to “the Reformation of Manners, for the Advancement of an Heroical Christian Piety, and Universal Love towards All” and named for one of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation.¹¹ By the time the existence of the Philadelphians was made public in 1697, Lead was seventy-three-years old and nearly blind. Nevertheless, she continued to guide the Society until her death in 1704 at eighty, a feat rare enough for a woman of the time without the additional social barriers of age and blindness.

Lead’s name first appeared in print with the publication of her book *The Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking* in 1681. The text, the only one which features her name spelled as “Leade,”¹² is a mystical treatise encouraging readers to an inner participation in the ascension and glorification

Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, ed. Rosemary Reuther and Eleanor McLaughlin [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979], 184 – 203; “Jane Lead: Mysticism and the Woman Cloathed with the Sun,” in *Shakespeare’s Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar [Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1979], 3 – 18; “Jane Lead’s Wisdom: Women and Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Poetic Prophecy in Western Literature*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain [Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1984], 55 – 63; “Mysticism and Feminism: Jacob Boehme and Jane Lead,” in *Women and Men: The Consequences of Power: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Dana V. Hiller and Robin Ann Sheets [Cincinnati, OH: Office of Women’s Studies, University of Cincinnati, 1976], 398 – 408). Smith, working within early feminist criticism’s project of (re)claiming the place of women in human history, tries to situate Lead as a proto-feminist, an understandable scholarly goal, but her work tries too hard to make Lead fit the mold Smith has created for her. For one thing, Smith wishes to present Lead’s ideas “as poetic rather than as religious or philosophical” (“Jane Lead: Mysticism and the Woman Cloathed with the Sun,” 11), which is problematic for a variety of reasons.

Likewise, Phyllis Mack, in *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), as can be seen from her title, works in a tradition pioneered by Smith, but she gives curiously short shrift to Jane Lead, even though she esteems Lead “the most eminent female visionary of the 1690s” (409). For Mack, by the time of Lead’s greatest productivity (the 1690s—Mack ignores Lead’s publications from the early 1680s) “the ongoing tradition of female mysticism and nascent feminism was increasingly detached from any vision of social solidarity or broad transformation” (410). This is a telling confession, and agrees with Catherine Smith’s observation that Lead “was, after all, a mystic with some artistic self-consciousness, but not a political advocate” (Catherine Smith, “Mysticism and Feminism,” 402).

Perhaps the most astute reader of Lead and the Philadelphians among contemporary feminist critics is Sarah Apetrei. Apetrei’s excellent study, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (2010), argues that certain women of the period “were beginning to regard themselves and their sex as the authentic defenders of faith, rationality and morality” (17). Her Lead is a woman whose “supra-formalism was hard-edged and uncompromising,” and, somewhat surprisingly (but accurately), she argues that the follower of Lead who brought her ideas “to their most radically feminist conclusion” was a man, the Anglican priest and Philadelphian Richard Roach (198; 233).

¹¹ [Francis Lee], *The State of the Philadelphian Society or, The Grounds of their Proceedings Considered* (1697), 7.

¹² Scholarly consensus seems to have agreed to spell the mystic’s name as “Lead” and pronounce it as “Led.” However, conformity to these conventions is anything but unanimous.

of Christ through an equally interior death and resurrection. In 1683 she provided introductory material, “To the impartial and well-disposed Reader,” for the posthumous publication of her friend and spiritual coworker John Pordage’s *Theologia Mystica*. In the same year, the first edition of her book *The Revelation of Revelations* saw print. This could have been the end of Lead’s publishing career were it not for the patronage of the German nobleman, Baron Freiherr von Knyphausen. In about 1694 Knyphausen had read the Behmenist Loth Fischer’s German translation (unknown to Lead at the time) of the *Heavenly Cloud* and offered to pay for the publication of anything Lead would write—in both English and German editions.¹³ With Knyphausen’s support, Lead’s publishing career accelerated at an astonishing degree, and she issued new editions of her works from the 1680s as well as at least fifteen other works, several seeing second editions in short order, including three volumes of her massive spiritual diary, *A Fountain of Gardens* (1697 – 1701). Add to this achievement the five issues of *Theosophical Transactions of the Philadelphian Society*, the short-lived periodical the group produced under her guidance in 1697, and a series of pamphlets—including *The State of the Philadelphian Society* (1697), *Propositions Extracted from the Reasons for the Foundation of a Philadelphian Society* (1697), and *The Declaration of the Philadelphian Society of England* (1699)—and we can see how remarkable was the output of Lead and her circle in such a very brief period.

Lead’s discourse is rich with images and allusions derived from the prophetic tradition, and in particular from the Book of Revelation. Indeed, that book’s evocation of the final defeat of evil and the ascendancy of the Age of Christ is a central feature of her theological aesthetic. The eschatological tone of *The Wonders of God’s Creation* attests to this: “Over thee, O City of London! a Mighty Angel doth fly, with this Thundering Cry, saying, Do not despise Prophecy, neither decry down the Ark of the Living Testimony; from which the Spirit as a flowing Stream,

¹³ Julie Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 90. “Behmenists” are followers of Jacob Boehme.

must renew Paradise upon the Earth.”¹⁴ Lead’s visionary, religious, and publishing activities all contributed to one central goal: calling the faithful—Protestant as well as Catholic, Eastern Orthodox as well as Jewish¹⁵—to a renewal of religion and an inner experience of Christ that would lead to the regeneration of religion, culture, and even of matter, through the advent of the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ.

But Lead’s religious vision was not only informed by the Revelation. It was also in large part inspired by the career trajectory and writings of St. Paul. Gregory Kneidel has argued that Paul’s influence in early modern English religious writing was formidable, and that Paul had many imitators among English writers (particularly Spenser, Daniel, Donne, Herbert, and Milton), but he has nothing to say about Lead whose mimesis of Paul was more thorough-going than anyone’s.¹⁶ In this chapter I will argue that Jane Lead’s religious imagination was heavily indebted to Paul and that she, in fact, deliberately modeled her evangelical mission on his. Other seventeenth century writers and religious figures may have followed Paul, but none, as did Lead, followed Paul in announcing a new religious dispensation. From her initial aleatory visionary experiences, to her evident flesh-spirit dualism, to her preoccupation with the tension between *kairos* and *chronos* in relationship to the Parousia, to her “missionary” activity as manifested through her publication project, Lead discloses her assimilation of her Pauline model, a role which she undertook with apostolic conviction, dedication, and devotion.

¹⁴ J. Lead, *The Wonders of God’s Creation Manifested, in the Variety of Eight Worlds; As they were made known Experimentally to the Author* [1695?], 55.

¹⁵ This is the gist of her *The Messenger of An Universal Peace: or A Third Message to the Philadelphian Society* (1698) wherein she names “the Seven Churches throughout the World disperst, as *first*, the Ancient Church of the Jews, that was, and is not, and is to be. 2. The Roman Church. 3. The Greek 4. The *Æthiopian*. 5. The *Lutheran*. 6. The *French Reformed, or Calvinistical*. 7. The Ancient Church of the *Valleys*” (pages 2 – 3).

¹⁶ Gregory Kneidel, *Rethinking the Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Literature: The Poetics of All Believers* (New York; Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008). See particularly chapter one, “The Poetics of All Believers: Or, Was Saint Paul Eloquent in Early Modern England?”

Jane Lead was born Jane Ward and christened on 9 March 1624 at the parish church of St. Andrew, Letheringsett, Norfolk. Her father, Hamond Ward, was a moderately wealthy landowner and sometime Justice of the Peace, and her mother was Mary Calthorpe, the daughter of Sir James Calthorpe.¹⁷ Though her family does not appear to have been particularly “godly,” her life as a mystic began relatively early. During a family Christmas party when Lead was fifteen, as the young woman watched the festive dancing and carousing, suddenly and unexpectedly she found herself seized “by a sudden grievous sorrow” which “was darted as fire into her bowels, and she was made to consider that this was not the way to be conformed to Christ, or to remember his birth aright; and a soft whisper gently entered into her, saying, ‘Cease from this, I have another Dance to lead thee in; for this is Vanity.’”¹⁸ It has been suggested that Lead was inclined toward a rigorous form of Calvinism,¹⁹ and such a proposal might explain her revulsion at festivity on the Feast of the Nativity, despite her being “Baptized and Educated in the Church of England.”²⁰ Yet, to conclude such would be rather hasty. The 20th century Polish Catholic visionary and nun Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938) had an experience very close to what Lead encountered—and no one is accusing her of Calvinism.²¹ Perhaps it is better to conclude that certain religious dispositions are inclined away from “worldly” entertainments regardless of confessional allegiances.

¹⁷ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 13 – 15.

¹⁸ [Francis Lee], “The Preface of the Publisher,” to *The Wars of David and the Peaceable Reign of Solomon* by Jane Lead (1700), A3^v. I have modified the text somewhat, as in the original the spiritual admonition is given in black letter.

¹⁹ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 15 – 17. Hirst notes that Lead’s grandfather contributed £100 to Parliamentary cause during the Civil War years, which may support such a claim (page 15).

²⁰ Lee, “Preface of the Publisher,” *Wars of David*, A3^f.

²¹ “Once I was at a dance with one of my sisters. While everybody was having a good time, my soul was experiencing deep torments. As I began to dance, I suddenly saw Jesus at my side, Jesus racked with pain, stripped of His clothing, all covered with wounds, who spoke these words to me: **How long shall I put up with you and how long will you keep putting Me off?** At that moment the charming music stopped, the company I was with vanished from my sight; there remained Jesus and I. I took a seat by my dear sister, pretending to have a headache in order to cover up what took place in my soul. After a while I slipped out unnoticed, leaving my sister and all my companions behind and made my way to the Cathedral of Saint Stanislaus Kostka.” Diary entry for August 1925 in *The Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska* (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2010). Emphasis in source.

Following this vision, Lead did not pursue the life of a recluse or contemplative. In a Catholic religious culture, she very well may have entered religious life, but such was not an option in even the more conservative Anglican circles until the middle decades of the nineteenth century.²² Her primary option, then, was to marry, which she seems to have postponed as long as possible, as she refused several suitors proposed by her well-to-do parents. When she was twenty, she settled on a distant cousin, William Leade, a successful merchant, who seems to have been a man of a religious devotion compatible with Jane's.²³ In time, Jane bore four daughters, though two died in infancy. The Leades lived a sufficiently happy married life until William's untimely death in 1670. Due to the shady dealings of William's business partner, however, Jane was left nearly destitute. Following her husband's death, Jane found spiritual sustenance and comfort in the religious circle that had gathered around John Pordage (1607 – 1681). It was probably in this social milieu that she encountered the mystical writing of Jacob Boehme. It was also under the encouragement of Pordage and other members of his circle, such as Thomas Bromley (1629 – 1691), author of *The Way to the Sabbath of Rest* (1655), that Lead began to reawaken her own spiritual gifts and opened herself to the possibility of receiving visions.²⁴ She became particularly accomplished at it.

Pordage was a physician and Anglican priest with Ranter leanings even before he encountered the works of Jacob Boehme, an event that profoundly altered his own religious

²² Henry VIII, of course, had dissolved England's monasteries between 1536 and 1541. Three-hundred years later, Anglican religious orders arose as the outgrowth of the Oxford Movement. See Ralph Keen, *The Christian Tradition* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 304.

²³ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 21. For whatever reason, Lead dropped the "e" from her last name sometime after 1681, between the publications of *Heavenly Cloud* and *Revelation of Revelations*.

²⁴ Bromley became an associate of Pordage after he heard Pordage preach a sermon at St. Mary's Church, Oxford sometime after August of 1649 (Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, 51). Bromley's *Way to the Sabbath of Rest*, though it is, as Nigel Smith observes, to some degree "a paraphrase of Boehme's ideas," is nevertheless a spiritual classic in its own right. See Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 190. See also Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 116 – 17.

sensibilities.²⁵ He was installed as rector of Bradfield, probably in November of 1646,²⁶ and gathered around him an array of religious enthusiasts including the Ranter preacher Abiezer Coppe, the “Erburist” Richard Stockwell, and the “Anti-scriptural Quaker” John Tench.²⁷ The group was noted for its female visionaries: Ann Bathurst, Joanna Oxenbridge, and, especially, Pordage’s first wife, Mary Pordage.²⁸ They all seem to have been given to what some of their contemporaries considered eccentric behavior inspired by their enthusiastic dealings, and Pordage himself is reputed to have fallen into a trance while preaching one Sunday, finally “running out of the Church, and bellowing like a Bull, saying that he was called and must be gon.”²⁹ But this description, however invariably it is quoted in Pordage criticism, should not be taken at face value, seeing that it derives from a pamphlet *attacking* Pordage, the anonymously published *A most faithful Relation of Two Wonderful Passages Which happened very lately in the Parish of Bradfield in Berkshire*.³⁰ Pordage, due to the scandal, was eventually ejected from his living at Bradfield in December of 1654, though he defended himself in his *Innocencie Appearing Through the Dark Mists of Pretended Guilt* (1655). It is unclear how the issue was resolved. Anthony à Wood suggested Pordage was reinstated to his living at Bradford after the

²⁵ Nigel Smith conjectures that Pordage became interested in Boehme by no later than 1651, though he also notes that some of Pordage’s followers show evidence of Boehme’s influence before that date (*Perfection Proclaimed*, 189).

²⁶ Ariel Hessayon, “Pordage, John (*bap.* 1607, *d.* 1681),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22546>, accessed 25 Aug 2011].

²⁷ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 106 – 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 107 – 08.

²⁹ R. Coppin, *A most Faithful Relation of Two Wonderful Passages* (1650), 2. Quoted in Ariel Hessayon, “Pordage, John (*bap.* 1607, *d.* 1681).”

³⁰ *A most faithful Relation*, 2 – 3. Phyllis Mack, for one, fails to mention the dubious credibility of the source of this quote with which she attempts to champion prophecy and visionary experiences as a feminine demesne. See her *Visionary Women*, 60.

Restoration, but Wood's claim is highly suspect.³¹ Whatever the final outcome, we do know that Pordage remained at Bradfield for several years following the incident.³²

By her own account as set forth in the forward to Pordage's *Theologia Mystica*, Lead first met Pordage in 1663,³³ though Ariel Hessayon casts some doubt about this date.³⁴ He points to the fact that Lead's future son-in-law and assistant Francis Lee named August of 1673 or -74 as the time of Lead and Pordage's initial acquaintance and suggests that 1663 appeared in Lead's text as a mistaken transcription.³⁵ What Lee, in fact, says is that Lead started to *work* with Pordage at the time Hessayon specifies: "It being in August, 1673 or 74 (the date differently through mistake entered in two places) that they first agreed to wait together in prayer and pure dedication."³⁶ Lead had probably met Pordage by 1668³⁷ and became a member of his household in 1674.

In her work Lead often writes of Pordage, but she never mentions him as bellowing like a bull. Rather, the portrait she paints is of a John Pordage "ever more imployed and busied in an internal contemplative Life."³⁸ Pordage, at least initially, helped guide Lead's first steps into visionary experience once her visions began in earnest in April 1670. Lead admits as much in the "Lebensauff der Autorin" which was included as part of *Sechs Unschatzbare Mystische Tractlein* (Amsterdam, 1696), a Dutch edition of Lead's work:

The more I found myself in the service of this blessing and the prophecy and the revelation the more I lost hope of finding people who would understand of what had been revealed to me. Eventually, through my ceaseless looking out for such people I found

³¹ Hessayon, "Pordage, John (*bap.* 1607, *d.* 1681)."

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Jane Lead, "To the impartial and well-disposed Reader," in *Theologia Mystica, or The Mystic Divinitie of the Æternal Invisibles* by John Pordage (1683), A1^v (2).

³⁴ Hessayon, "Pordage, John (*bap.* 1607, *d.* 1681)."

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ [Christopher Walton], *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated Divine and Theosopher, William Law...* (London: privately circulated, 1854), 203.

³⁷ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 23.

³⁸ Lead, "To the impartial and well-disposed Reader," A1^v (2).

such a community whose leading men were Dr Pordage, Mr T. Bromley, Mr T. Sabberton. They were enlightened men who understood God's secrets.³⁹

When Francis Lee writes in defense of Pordage's character, indeed, he describes the synergy between the two mystics and their circle as characterized by prayerful union: "there was required to it, continual watching and praying, without interruption, for whole weeks together: while one slept, others watched and prayed in their turns."⁴⁰

In the first entry to her spiritual diary, *A Fountain of Gardens*, Lead, puzzling over her initial vision of Divine Wisdom, writes "I returned to *London* to my own Habitation, retiring myself from Acquaintance, saving one Person that was highly Illuminated, who encouraged me still to wait upon this Vision; for he was acquainted with somewhat of this kind."⁴¹ Though admittedly not conclusive proof, this passage strongly suggests Pordage. Indeed, the Anglican priest was indeed the kind of London figure with the visionary experience Lead sought for counsel in this instance, especially since his mysticism centers itself around his intuitions concerning Sophia, or Divine Wisdom.⁴² Later he and Lead attained what they felt to be a significant level of spiritual affinity to the degree that Pordage called himself Lead's "Fellow Traveller."⁴³

Pordage's and Lead's spiritual insights concerning Sophia were inspired by the sophianic mysticism of Jacob Boehme (1575 – 1624) whose work started appearing in English translation in 1648. Boehme, a cobbler, experienced at least three mystical awakenings which resulted in an original and creative mysticism that was to reinvigorate mysticism and religious philosophy, and

³⁹ Jane Lead, "Lebenslauff der Autorin," in *Sechs Unschatzbare Mystiche Tractlein* (Amsterdam, 1696), 420. Quoted by Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 23 – 24.

⁴⁰ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, 204.

⁴¹ Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens*, 1:20.

⁴² Sarah Apetrei identifies Lead's "Acquaintance" as Pordage. See Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion*, 191 – 92.

⁴³ "The Testimony of Dr. J.P. the Author's Fellow Traveller" in *Fountain of Gardens*, 1:506.

not only in Protestant contexts, for at least the next three hundred years.⁴⁴ The first event was when “whereby according to the *Divine Drawing and Will*, hee was in spirit rapt into the *Holy Saboath*; where he remained seven whole days by his own confession in the highest *Ioy*.”⁴⁵ The second event occurred in 1600, when Boehme found himself fascinated by light reflected from a pewter dish by which “he was brought to the inward ground or *Centrum* of the hidden *Nature*.”⁴⁶ Finally, in 1610 Boehme’s third mystical experience inspired him to commit his insights to writing, though “he wrote privately and secretly for himself, by small meanes, and no books at all but the *Holy Scriptures*.”⁴⁷ His literary output was by any standards immense: thirty-one substantial books in fourteen years.

Boehme’s mysticism includes elements that might be construed as “alchemical”—terminology such as “tincture,” for instance—but it is not anything like alchemical writing. He may have adopted the metaphorical language of alchemy, but he was not engaged in experimentation anything remotely close to that in which John Dee or Thomas Vaughan participated. Like alchemical writing, Boehme’s mysticism is concerned with regeneration, but this regeneration takes place primarily in surrendering the will to God. As opposed to the alchemical ethos, Boehme’s project is concerned less with what the believer (or operator) wills and struggles to effect than how the believer learns to place his trust in God’s will. As Boehme writes in *The Way to Christ*,

⁴⁴ Among those whose own religious insights Boehme inspired can be counted the non-juror William Law (1686 – 1761), the poet and engraver William Blake (1757 – 1827), the German Romantic poet Novalis (Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, 1772 – 1801), the German Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian Franz von Baader (1765 – 1841), the French philosopher Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743 – 1803), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775 – 1854), and the Russian religious philosophers Vladimir Solovyov (1853 – 1900) and Nicolai Berdyaev (1874 – 1948).

⁴⁵ [Durant Hotham], *The Life of one Jacob Boehmen, Who Although He Were a Very Meane man, yet wrote the most wonderfull deepe knowledge in Natural and Divine things...* (1644), A2^f.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, A2^f.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, A2^v.

The will of the creature ought to sinke wholly into it selfe with all its reason and desire, accounting it selfe an unworthy childe, that is no whit worthy of so high a grace, nor should it arrogate any knowledge or understanding to it selfe, or desire and begge of God to have any understanding in its creaturely selfe: but sincerely and simply sinke it selfe into the grace and love of God in Christ Jesus, and desire to be as it were dead to it selfe, and its owne reason in the divine life of God in love, that he may doe how and what he wishes with it, as with his owne instrument.⁴⁸

This notion is certainly consistent with Lutheran theology as well as with the petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."

Unique to Boehme's mysticism, though, is his insight into Sophia, the Wisdom of God. Wisdom (חכמה – *Hokmah* in Hebrew), however, is not a unique invention of Boehme's. She appears as the personification of God's wisdom in female form in several books of the Hebrew Bible, especially in Proverbs, as well as in the deuterocanonical books of Wisdom and Sirach. In Proverbs the theology of Sophia is laid out in imaginative form as she relates her history:

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.
I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.
When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains
abounding with water.
Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:
While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of
the world.
When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the
depth:
When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:
When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment:
when he appointed the foundations of the earth:
Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing
always before him;
Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.
(Prv 8:22 – 31)⁴⁹

Boehme passes on to Pordage and Lead an understanding of Sophia that transgresses the tropological domain of personification and takes Sophia literally as a divine person. This was

⁴⁸ Jacob Behmen [Jacob Boehme], *The Way to Christ Discovered*, [translation attributed to John Sparrow], (1648 [i.e., 1647]), 2.20 (page 85).

⁴⁹ Authorized Version.

new theological territory in early modern times, and potentially heretical. Boehme's notion of Sophia, though, is very complex. She is, in one sense, a spiritual analog for the Virgin Mary, who in turn becomes a kind of earthly Sophia-figure. As Mary's participation with God in effecting the Incarnation of Christ was necessary, according to the traditional Christian understanding of the event, for the salvation of the world, so, according to Boehme, is Sophia's participation in the individual soul necessary for individual salvation.

When Christ the corner-stone, stirreth himself in the extinguished image of man, in his hearty conversion and repentance, then Virgin Sophia appeareth in the stirring of the Spirit of Christ, in the extinguished Image, in her Virgines attire before the soule: at which the soule is so amazed and astonished in its uncleannesse, that all its sinnes immediatly awake in it, and tremble and shake before her. For then the judgement passeth upon the sinnes of the soule, so that it even goeth backe in its unworthiness, and is ashamed in the presence of its faire love, and entereth into it selfe, denying it selfe as utterly unworthy to receive such a jewell. This is understood by them who are our Tribe, who have tasted this jewell, and to none else. But the noble Sophia draweth neare in the essence of the soule, and kisseth it friendly, and tinctureth the darke fire of the soule with her Rayes of love, and shineth through the soule with her Kisse of love: then the soule skippeth in its body for great joy, in the strength of this Virgin-love, triumphing, and praying the great God, in the strength of the noble Sophia.⁵⁰

B. J. Gibbons has observed that in the abandonment of Marian devotion that was a feature of the Reformation an "emotional vaccum" opened up which Boehme and his followers filled with their sophiological speculations.⁵¹ There is certainly something to be said for such an opinion. Indeed, Boehme's sophiological considerations have more than a few similarities to Catholic Marian devotion, just as his Mariology is never far from the idea of Sophia. As he writes in *Incarnation of Jesus Christ the Sonne of God*, "And so the Outward Mary became *adorned and blessed* with the Highly blessed heavenly Virgin [i.e., Sophia], *among all Women* of this World. *In her*, that which was dead and shut up of the Humanity, became living again; and so she *became* as highly graduated or Dignified, as the first Man before the Fall, and became a Mother

⁵⁰ Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 57 – 58.

⁵¹ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 63.

of the Throne-Prince.”⁵² But what is important about this has even more personal and individualized ramifications—and just as significant. “Understand it right,” Boehme tells his readers,

The Deity, hath longed to *become* Flesh and Bloud; and although the pure cleer Deity, continueth *Spirit*, yet is it *become* the Spirit and Life of Flesh; and worketh in the Flesh; so that we may say, *when we* with our Imagination enter into God, and wholly give up ourselves into him, WE ENTER INTO GODS FLESH AND BLOOD, and live in God.⁵³

The notion of “God’s flesh and blood,” as we shall see, would eventually become very important to Lead.

Lead’s Pauline Community

Lead’s reading of the Bible, and Paul’s epistles in particular, impelled her to engage in her own missionary activity following her spiritual awakening in the early 1670s. Certainly, she quotes liberally from Paul, but there is more to Lead’s story than that. Indeed, Lead took Paul as a model deliberately and followed him conscientiously. First of all, Paul is the only figure from the Bible with whom Lead compares herself or her trials. In an entry from her spiritual diary dated 23 June 1677, for instance, she complains of the “secular concerns” with which she and her associates in the Portage circle are burdened that prevent them from a more earnest and focused participation in works of the spirit, and compares them to Paul’s trials as recounted in Acts 28:

Upon this my Spirit made application, with Soul-meltings, for Life-recovery and restitution to those wonted familiarities, and divine discoveries; wherein consisted all my peace, life, and satisfaction. Upon which my care now was, how we, who were under a peculiar obligation, should discharge our selves of all, and every weight that had beset us. For it was presented to me that while we were gathering together, what might accommodate our outward man, as *Paul* did the sticks to warm him after his perilous

⁵² Jacob Behme [Jacob Boehme], *The Fifth Book of the Author, in Three parts. The First; Of the Becoming Man or Incarnation of Jesus Christ the Sonne of God, That is, Concerning the Virgin Mary...shewing what True Faith is*, trans. John Sparrow (1659), 64.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 65. I have modified the text somewhat: that which I render here in all capitals is represented in a much larger font size in the text.

voyage; even so we upon necessary and lawful things being employed, were in danger of the poisonous Vipers, which would stick so close to our hands, as we should be constrained to awaken and call upon the Most Holy Adjuring Power of the Mighty God. Whereby we might be able to cast them off, before they infected our pure eternal Life-blood; that so we might proceed forward in our Spiritual Work. (*Fountain*, 2:275 – 76)

In the entry for 15 February 1678 she complains of the struggles she endures with her own flesh that “must be put off or changed, before the Soul can live with God joyfully or without interruption” (*Fountain*, 3.1:75). This predicament provides her with no small amount of anxiety and she asks, “Now what to do, but like *Paul* I cried out for riddence from a Sin Mortal Life, as the only present redress, in hope Christ our Life, would yet have Victory over that in us, which hath been such a bar to all our Fruitions and enjoyments with God.” Tellingly, Lead interprets Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7) as moral weakness as opposed to a physical ailment.

Secondly, Lead performs a Pauline role in the “epistles” she wrote to the Philadelphian Society as well as those with which she prefaced some of her works. The first two of the three Messages to the Philadelphian Society appeared in 1696. By “Philadelphian Society,” she did not mean only her associates and followers in London, but anyone who might be sympathetic to her message. The first message was proclaimed as “A CALL to the Several Gathered Churches among *Protestants* in this Nation of *England*,” including the Anglican Church, “the *Presbytery*,” the Congregationalists, the Anabaptists, the Fifth Monarchists, a church which claimed Perfection “visibly distinguishing themselves from all the rest,” and the invisible Philadelphians, who had the spiritual dispensation to be without an outward structure.⁵⁴ The *Second Message* (published bound with the first) announced to all Christians the regeneration of “the True, Perfect and Catholick Church, wherein Christ is risen, as the First-born from the Dead, in his Members; that is the Quickening Spirit, that will gather Persons out of all Formalities into

⁵⁴ Lead, *Message to the Philadelphian Society*, 7 – 9.

Power, Life and Substance.”⁵⁵ Like Paul writing from his prison cell in Rome, Lead wrote from her tiny room in London, imprisoned by her blindness, but no less able to preach the good news. In *The Messenger of an Universal Peace or Third Message to the Philadelphian Society* (1698), as we have seen, she extended her concept of “the Church” to include not only Protestants, but also Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Copts, and even Jews. Hers was a thorough-going ecumenism.

Even as early as her first publication, 1681’s *The Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking*, Lead engaged in apostolic mimesis in the salutation to “The Epistle”: “Grace, Mercy, Love, and Peace, from him who is the first begotten from the Dead.”⁵⁶ She followed a similar pattern in the paratextual “Epistle” (her title) to 1683’s *Revelation of Revelations* with the salutation: “To the *living Stones* gathered, and to be gathered to Christ, the Foundation Stone, (where-ever hid, scattered, and dispersed) who are elected in God for the *New-Jerusalem-Glory* and *Mount-Zion-Church*; all *Love, Grace, Peace* and *Joy* be multiplied from him who was, is, and is to come.”⁵⁷ She repeats this rhetorical move sixteen years later in 1699’s *The Signs of the Times* and that text’s “Prefatory Epistle”: “*To all the Love-Flock of Christ that are, or are to be Elected and Chosen at this Day, to wait for, and to bring in, and enter upon the Fruition of His Approaching Kingdom: Grace, Peace and Love be multiplied Abundantly.*”⁵⁸ While these salutations are not purely Pauline, having phrases also gleaned from Revelation (“Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come,” 1:4) and the Letter of Jude (“Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied,” 1:2), their apostolic tenor and appropriation of the lyrical cadences of the King James Bible surely resonate with the Pauline rhetoric. It is also

⁵⁵ Ibid., 106 – 7 .

⁵⁶ Lead, *Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking*, A2^f.

⁵⁷ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, A2^f.

⁵⁸ Lead, *Signs of the Times*, A2^f.

worth noting that Lead's "Marks of a *True Philadelphian*, according to the Description of the Blessed Apostle St. PAUL" are a paraphrase and elaboration of 1 Corinthians 13:4 – 7's definition of love.⁵⁹

Finally, it was not Lead alone who participated in this mimesis: her associates Francis Lee and Richard Roach also took part. Lee, who edited Lead's works and probably served as her amanuensis after she became blind, often added paratexts to Lead's work. Some, as that in the first *Message*, he left anonymous. For others, however, he signed himself "Timotheus." This happens in *Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message* (1697), and the first and second volumes of *A Fountain of Gardens* (1697). Roach, for his part, wrote a lengthy poem, "Solomon's Porch: or The Beautiful Gate of Wisdom's Temple," that serves as introductory matter for the first volume of *Fountain* and which he signed himself "Onesimus."

These names adopted by the two Philadelphians—or given them by Lead⁶⁰—have much in common with the religious names Catholic monks or nuns adopt when entering into religious life and carry symbolic, spiritual, as well as psychological significance. The biblical Timothy, of course, was the assistant to Paul mentioned in Acts 16 as well as the addressee of two Pauline epistles. Paul also mentions him in the salutations of 2 Corinthians, Philippians, both epistles to the Thessalonians, and Philemon. In both the Geneva and Authorized versions of the Bible, this name is spelled "Timotheus," the same variant used by Lee. Lee, Lead's assistant, is obviously identifying himself with Paul's assistant. Roach, on the other hand, with his adopted name "Onesimus," identifies himself with another of Paul's associates, the slave converted to the

⁵⁹ *Messenger of An Universal Peace*, 52 – 72.

⁶⁰ Roach wrote that Lead gave him this "mystical name." In Papers of Richard Roach, MS Rawlinson D832, fol. 58r, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Cited in Julie Hirst, "Mother of Love": Spiritual Maternity in the Works of Jane Lead (1624 – 1704)," in *Women, Gender, and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, ed. Sylvia Brown, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 164. We do not have any documentary evidence indicating how Lee received his mystical name, but it very well was given to him by Lead.

Christian faith mentioned in Colossians 4 and the Epistle to Philemon. Onesimus (whose name means “useful”⁶¹) had run away from his owner, Philemon. In adopting this name, Roach (or Lead) may have been pointing to his being bound to the Anglican Church as a priest who metaphorically “ran away” to Lead, and who proved very useful to her, indeed. Whatever the reasons for selecting their respective aliases, it is no accident that they associate both men by analogy with Paul’s assistants and infer Lead’s association with Paul.

The Pauline Mission, Part 1: The Event

According to Lead’s own account, her first vision of Divine Wisdom occurred in April of 1670. While on a visit to a friend in the country, she was preoccupied with religious questions, “contemplating the happy State of the Angelical World; and how desirous I was to have my Conversation there” (*Fountain*, 1:17). In this state of soul, Lead’s contemplation was suddenly interrupted:

... while in this debate within my Mind, there came upon me an overshadowing bright Cloud, and in the midst of it the Figure of a Woman, most richly adorned with transparent Gold, her Hair hanging down, and her Face as the terrible Crystal for brightness, but her Countenance was sweet and mild. At which sight I was somewhat amazed, but immediately this Voice came saying, Behold I am God’s Eternal Virgin-Wisdom, whom thou hast been enquiring after; I am to unseal the Treasures of God’s deep Wisdom unto thee, and will be as *Rebecca* was unto *Jacob*, a true Natural Mother. (1:18)

Three days later, Lead beheld the same figure “with a Crown upon her Head, full of Majesty.” Wisdom held a Golden Book closed with three seals, inscribed “Herein lieth hidden the deep Wonders of *Jehovah’s* Wisdom” (1:18). After six more days, Wisdom again appeared. This time she told Lead that she would no longer appear “in a Visible Figure” but assured her that “I will not fail to transfigure my self in thy mind....for I thy Glass for Divine Seeing shall evermore stand before thee” (1:20 – 21). Echoing the Virgin Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel’s

⁶¹ Introduction to The Letter of Paul to Philemon, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 314NT.

message in the first chapter of Luke, Lead told Wisdom, “According to thy *Word* let all this be fulfilled” (1:21).

Lead’s experience of Wisdom was not fully realized in the spring of 1670. Her understanding of what this event fully meant unfolded over the rest of her lifetime. Certainly, the foundation of her intuitions concerning Wisdom owes much to Boehme as well as to her spiritual colleague Pordage, but it would be wrong to dismiss her theological aesthetics as derivative. Lead’s insight was not a matter of reading material. Rather, it was due to experience, an event.

For Alain Badiou, the event is something one experiences, something impossible for one to deny, and, most importantly, something “which compels us to decide a *new* way of life.”⁶² Badiou argues that the event discloses “truth,” but by “truth” he does not mean a body of doctrine so much as “a real process of fidelity to the event.”⁶³ The unfolding of this truth initiated by the event, moreover, represents “an *immanent break*. ‘Immanent’ because a truth proceeds *in* the situation and nowhere else—there is no heaven of truths. ‘Break’ because what enables the truth-process—the event—meant nothing according to the prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation.”⁶⁴ In his book on Saint Paul, Badiou argues that the apostle is “a poet-thinker of the event.”⁶⁵ This proposal proceeds from an honest examination of the trajectory of Paul’s career: from zealous Pharisee persecuting Christians, through the event of his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus (“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”⁶⁶), to his apostleship, and to his eventual martyrdom. Badiou’s Paul is one who, “[t]urning away from all authority other than that of the Voice that personally summoned him,” stays faithful to the event

⁶² Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 41. Emphasis in Badiou. All subsequent emphases will be his unless otherwise noted.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 42 – 43.

⁶⁵ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Cultural Memory in the Present, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 2.

⁶⁶ Acts 9:4

to the very end.⁶⁷ In short, Paul wagered all on the Event at Damascus. It is hard to argue against Badiou's evaluation.

Badiou breaks down Paul's project into four categories, all of which he takes to be outgrowths of "the requirements of truth as universal singularity": 1) He states that the "Christian subject does not preexist the event he declares."⁶⁸ This concept includes the stripping away of notions of allegiance (Jew or Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised), class, and even gender. 2) Badiou upholds the absolutely subjective nature of truth, which undercuts—in Paul's case—the claims of either Jewish theological or Greek philosophical "laws" on the subject. Paul broke with both Jewish law and Greek learning in order to remain faithful to the event⁶⁹ ("For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles"—1 Corinthians 1:22 – 24). 3) Badiou declares "Fidelity to the declaration is crucial, for truth is a process and not an illumination."⁷⁰ 4) Finally, a "truth is of itself indifferent to the state of the situation," and particularly to the State, as such. As he explains further, "the subjectivity corresponding to this subtraction continues a necessary *distance* from the State and from what corresponds to the State in people's consciousness: the apparatus of opinion."⁷¹ I enumerate Badiou's points not because I think they represent the only way to read Paul, but because they offer an interesting way to read Jane Lead and to illustrate the parallels between her religious project and Paul's.

Lead, following Paul, entered into a religious consciousness that transcended categories of allegiance, class, and gender. Though critics often point to Lead's "occult" tendencies, the deeper one looks into her work the more one sees the mind of a generally orthodox, though

⁶⁷ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 18 – 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 – 15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

idiosyncratic, Christian thinker. Lead stayed true to this theological aesthetic, and it metamorphosed over the course of her career to become, one might say, *suprauniversal*, a religious aesthetic certainly in accord with Paul's.⁷² Indeed, Lead eventually came to embrace the theological concept of *apocatastasis*, the resurrection and glorification of not only the just but of all: sinful humans as well as the fallen angels. Apocatastasis was taught in some quarters of the early Church, particularly by Origen (c. 184 – c. 253) and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – after 394), though it was declared anathema at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553.⁷³ But it never really went away. Even in the twentieth century at least two more-or-less mainstream theologians, the Russian Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov (1871 – 1944)⁷⁴ and his Roman Catholic counterpart Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905 – 1988),⁷⁵ proposed interpretations of the idea. Nevertheless, this idea was regarded as heretical in Lead's day, and she knew it. But, like Paul, she remained true to her mission, ignoring official ecclesiastical doctrine and received opinion in order to remain true to her vision.

The idea of apocatastasis does not appear in Lead's writing from the 1680s. Nor does it appear in either Boehme or Pordage. This intuition, at least among Behmenists, is particular to Lead. She first mentions the concept in 1694 with her first publication following the appearance of *Revelation of Revelations* in 1683. In the intervening eleven years, her ideas had developed and matured. Pordage had died in 1681 and Lead's religious intuitions had been growing independent of his as well as of Boehme's, though her theosophical worldview remained in many ways sympathetic to theirs. In the opening pages of *The Enochian Walks with God* she first

⁷² Kneidel, *Turn to Religion*, 16 – 17.

⁷³ G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ: Studies in Dogmatics*, ed. Marlin J. Van Elderen, trans. James Van Oosterom (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), 402.

⁷⁴ See chapter eight, "Parousia, Resurrection, and the City of God," in Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002).

⁷⁵ See especially the sections concerned with "the Last Act" in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, V: The Last Act*, trans. G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

publicly broached this subject, writing “for GOD was, is, and so hath designed in CHRIST to reconcile all to himself which was at odds with him; for it is not to be the least doubted but the Efficacy of Christ the second Adam by the merit of his Blood-shed, and his Spirit given therein which will make all good again, which the first Adam made evil.”⁷⁶ The idea appeared in nearly everything she wrote thereafter.

Knowing that the idea of universal salvation was heretical, Lead defended her claim by invoking what she took to be a scriptural basis for it in *A Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message* (1697), where she points to several passages which indicate the necessity for a reexamination of apocatastasis. She lists Romans 5 as “very Emphatical” about the restoration of all⁷⁷ and emphasizes Paul’s claim in 1 Corinthians 15:22 that “As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall ALL be made alive” as well as 1 Timothy 2:6’s assertion that Christ was “given as a Ransom for ALL, to be testified in due time.”⁷⁸ As apocatastasis became increasingly important to Lead over the arc of her career, so it became central to the Philadelphian message at large. Indeed, her son-in-law and associate Francis Lee defended Lead and apocatastasis in his lengthy epistolary debate with the theologian Henry Dodwell. Lee, an Oxford-trained theologian so gifted in biblical languages that he was nicknamed “Rabbi Lee,”⁷⁹ was also a capable apologist. He methodically and painstakingly explores the ecclesial history and orthodoxy of apocatastasis, finally reaching an entirely rational conclusion:

The substance of her [i.e., Lead’s] doctrine as to this point, is plainly this, viz. angels and men were created by God, to be eternally happy, by loving and enjoying Him. That they might eternally love, and eternally enjoy God, they were in their creation made partakers of the Divine nature. This participation of the Divine nature, consisted in the

⁷⁶ Jane Lead, *The Enochian Walks with God, Found out by a Spiritual-Traveller, Whose Face Towards Mount-Sion Above was Set* (1694), A2^f.

⁷⁷ “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12).

⁷⁸ [Jane Lead], *A Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message...When by the Blood of the Everlasting Covenant, All Prisoners shall be set free* (1697), 4.

⁷⁹ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 90.

communication to them of the Divine Life, Divine Light, and Divine Love; whereby they were, as it were, branched forth out of the Deity: and were to have lived for ever in the Deity, as their root and fountain. God communicated himself to angels and to men in the unity of his life, in the variety of lights, and in the harmony of love. This He did, that they might love him, and loving him, behold him, and beholding him, be transformed into the express image of his life, which is life eternal, both to the angelical and human creation. By this communication of Himself, he did not design, that any angel, or man, should hate him for ever, or should be transformed for ever into a shadow of death. It was in the power of angels and men to interrupt this Divine communication in themselves, but it was not in their power totally to cut it off, any more than it was to create themselves, or to annihilate themselves; since it entered into their original constitution.

The original root of all spirits, is the Divine Being, and their beginning or root, must not be different from their end. Their author and finisher is God, their beginning and end is Christ, their first and last life is the divine Spirit in harmonious concord and blessed unity.⁸⁰

In order to justify her concept of apocatastasis, however, Lead also needed to justify another heretical idea, at least as far as the Protestant churches were concerned: Purgatory. She treats this idea most explicitly in *A Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message*, where she tells of a vision in which,

... my spirit was carried out to behold several Regions, wherein I saw the Dead numerously and variously in their Confinements, being in dark Centers, as bewailing and bemoaning their State, that they had, while in the Body, misspent their time, and lost their opportunity of taking hold of the redeeming Love of Christ.⁸¹

The vision proceeds and Lead sees “Spirits, as bright Flames flying as it were swiftly into [the Throne of Christ], being set free from the confinements they were in.”⁸² During the vision, Christ assures her of the veracity of what she has seen. Lead herself, she admits, was rather uncomfortable with the import of this revelation—she was a Protestant, after all—and she decided to “let it rest for some Years, after the *Vision* of it.”⁸³ Nevertheless, Lead knows she will need to explain herself to Protestants as well as to the authorities, even though the Licensing Act,

⁸⁰ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, 214.

⁸¹ Lead, *Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message*, 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 15.

which would have proscribed the publication of such heresy, had lapsed in 1695.⁸⁴ First of all, she claims, everlasting torment is inconsistent with “the Justice and Truth of God,” whereas purgation is not.⁸⁵ Furthermore, human assumptions about what God’s grace can or will accomplish put limits on God’s grace and “this is indeed very Injurious to the *Grace of GOD*.”⁸⁶ The fires of purgation are, for Lead, evidence of God’s love. In *Enochian Walks with God* she points to Paul’s assertion that “If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor 3:15) as justification for her claim.⁸⁷ In *The Wonders of GOD’s Creation Manifested*, she describes this purgation in terms of the “sea of glass mingled with fire” of Revelation 15:2, informing the reader that “this burning Sea is for Probation; there being none able to pass it, but they who have gotten a full, perfect, and thorough, Conquest over this Beast, and over his Image; so as they no thing of this Mark do bear.”⁸⁸ She realizes she needs to address the Roman Catholic understanding of Purgatory, and she does so in terms that would have made Luther and Calvin uncomfortable at the very least. “It is very obvious and clear to me,” she writes, “that what the *Romanists* have in this point owned to be their Faith, they have derived from the *Primitive Age*, which was in that time a pure Gospel-discovery: but since that time they have corrupted it, and mingled it with their Sorceries; and so have brought the thing into a disreputation.”⁸⁹ Lead knows that her depiction of Purgatory and the accompanying notion of apocatastasis of both men and angels will be hard for Protestants (and Catholics) to swallow, and she even stands in opposition to one of her spiritual masters, Jacob Boehme, in holding to it:

⁸⁴ Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion*, 11.

⁸⁵ Lead, *Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message*, 8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁷ Lead, *Enochian Walks with God*, A2^r.

⁸⁸ Lead, *The Wonders of GOD’s Creation Manifested, In the Variety of Eight Worlds, As they were made known Experimentally to the Author* (1695), 75 – 76.

⁸⁹ Lead, *Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message*, 13 – 14.

And whereas some highly illuminated, who have great Veneration for *Jacob Behmen's* Writings do object, That he in his Principles seems to contradict this Universality as to the apostatiz'd Angels; I must own, that *Jacob Behmen* did open a deep Foundation of the Eternal Principles, and was a worthy Instrument in his Day. But it was not given to him, neither was it the Time for the *unsealing* of this Deep. God has in every Age something still to bring forth of his Secrets, to some one Gift, to some another, as the Age and Time grows ripe for it.⁹⁰

In short, Lead claims for her spiritual vision and intuition a radical take on the Protestant return to the “Primitive Church” that also upholds—contrary to the prevailing Protestant theologies of the day—that the age of visions and the unfolding of the Christian message has not yet ceased. And rather than sheepishly try to introduce what many would have thought of suspiciously as theological innovation at best and heresy at worst, Lead asserts her project in the most blatant terms, boldly offering a challenge to received opinion and ecclesiastical authority.⁹¹

And, indeed, her proposal did initiate a long conversation on the topic. In Balthasar's opinion, the German publication of Lead's *Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message* was the impetus for a discussion of apocatastasis that lasted well into the twentieth century.⁹² Balthasar believes the issue's relevance in theological circles was “largely the product of a humanistic recalcitrance, an anti-orthodox feeling, a craving for philosophical system or simply an optimism in the Enlightenment manner” and observes that those who held to it rarely did so “undergirded by a sufficiently deep, Trinitarian theology.”⁹³ Nevertheless, Balthasar embraces

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹¹ The notion of apocatastasis was even debated in Philadelphian circles c. 1712 with Richard Roach supporting the idea while others rejected it as blasphemous. See the mention in “A Preliminary Treatise which may serve for an Introduction to the following Work” (i.e., an edition of Pordage's work—never published), Bod. MS Rawl. A. 405, 185 – 86. Quoted in Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion*, 228.

⁹² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, V, 318. Among those he sees in this theological stream are S. W. Peterson; the Württemberg Pietists Bengel, Oetinger, and Hahn; the German Idealists; Friedrich Schleiermacher; and the twentieth-century figures Albert Schweitzer, Ernst Troeltsch, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Karl Barth.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 319.

the notion in a permutation expressed by Thérèse of Lisieux's "blind hope in [God's] mercy," though he steps back from too explicit an endorsement of apocatastasis.⁹⁴

Finally, Lead regarded even gender as a distinction which would be transcended through the process of glorification, or "deification" as she preferred to phrase it. "And as to the outward Sex," she writes of the holy priesthood of all believers that will accompany the Parousia,

there shall be no distinction, though the Typical Priesthood admitted none but Males in its day: All of that is done away with, for Signs and Figures in this Ministration do fly away like a Cloud: Male and Female are alike here, therefore the holy Ghost doth include both in one, swallowing up all in the Newness, Strength, Power and Glory of his own springing new Birth, according as it is witnessed, *Where there is neither Male nor Female, but Christ is all, and in all.*⁹⁵

Lead's quote, really a conflation of Colossians 3:11 and Galatians 3:28, is particularly poignant here. Paul's text in Colossians reads: "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all." In Galatians, the message is that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Lead's intention is clear enough: the regenerated bodies of the resurrection will be androgynous.

Critics, of course, have more than once focused their attention on Paul's attitude toward women, often arguing that Paul's writings have served as "the prime movers of Christian misogyny."⁹⁶ But, as Erica Longfellow has noticed, the situation is not nearly this simple. Paul, it is true, did not like the idea of women preachers or women speaking out in the church,⁹⁷ but he also claimed that, in Christ, the distinctions "male" and "female" do not exist.⁹⁸ The preaching of women was certainly of cultural moment in early modern England, especially during the

⁹⁴ Ibid., 320.

⁹⁵ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, 105 – 06.

⁹⁶ Stephanie Merrim, *Early Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999), xviii.

⁹⁷ e.g., 1 Cor 14: 34 – 36.

⁹⁸ Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.

Interregnum and after the Restoration, and the Quaker preacher Margaret Fell (1614 – 1702) was compelled to write a pamphlet, *Womens Speaking Justified*, in order to defend the practice.⁹⁹ “Those that speak against the Power of the Lord,” she argued, “and the Spirit of the Lord speaking in a Woman, simply, by reason of her Sex, or because she is a Woman, not regarding the Seed, and Spirit, and Power that speaks in her; such speak against Christ, and his Church, and are of the Seed of the Serpent, wherein lodgeth enmity.”¹⁰⁰ Lead was well aware of cultural attitudes toward women’s preaching and she knew the writing of Paul very well, as she wrote in *Enochian Walks with God*: “For every Woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her Head uncovered dishonoureth her Head. 1Cor.11.5. *But Christ being my Head-covering, I have both Commission, and Munition-strength, upon which I shall proceed, and go forward.*”¹⁰¹ This claim, which to many of her contemporaries—both male and female—would have seemed audacious, shows Lead true to her spiritual vision and willing to throw over the law in order to remain so, much as Paul would have done.

Lead’s initial experience of Divine Wisdom as a person gradually unfolded and what eventually emerged from this event were Lead’s beliefs concerning deification, regeneration, and apocatastasis. This outline, this trajectory, also appears in the work of the Russian sophiologists Vladimir Solovyov (1853 – 1900),¹⁰² Pavel Florensky (1882 – 1937),¹⁰³ and the previously mentioned Sergius Bulgakov. Indeed, Lead’s spirituality has much in common with Eastern

⁹⁹ [Margaret Fell], *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures...* (1666).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4 – 5.

¹⁰¹ Lead, *Enochian Walks with God*, A2^r – A2^v.

¹⁰² Like Lead, Solovyov had visions of Sophia, whom he called his “Eternal Friend.” Unlike Lead, he was a professional philosopher and wrote philosophical as well as theological works. For his take on Sophia and apocatastasis see his *Russia and the Universal Church*, trans. Herbert Rees (London: Geoffrey Bles/The Centenary Press, 1948), especially Part Three: The Trinitary Principle and Its Social Application.

¹⁰³ Florensky, an Orthodox priest, theologian, electrical engineer, and mathematician often called “the Russian DaVinci” laid out his unique theological and sophianic vision in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Part emblem book, part mysticism, part theological treatise, and written in an epistolary form, it must be one of the most remarkable theological works of the twentieth century.

Christian¹⁰⁴ mysticism and theology, with her notion of Divine Wisdom, certainly, but even more with her emphasis on deification, known more properly as *theosis* in Eastern Christian thought.¹⁰⁵ Unlike Roman Catholic and Western Protestant theologies, both of which maintain vestiges of the awkward apparatus implicit in Scholasticism's desire to import philosophical precision and categorization into mystical and theological realms, Eastern Christian theologies do not, as a rule, feel impelled to impose too much rationality on that which they would prefer to remain in the realm of the *mysterion*. The Russian stream of sophiology which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is not too far removed from the Philadelphians' sophiology, owing a debt to Boehme's mysticism as it does. Both Solovyov and Florensky mention Pordage,¹⁰⁶ though Lead's name does not appear in either their work or in that of Bulgakov. Pordage's work, like Lead's, was published in German editions early on, and eventually saw publication in Russian and other languages. Most of his work, with the exception of *Theologia Mystica*, has never been published in English, save in excerpted reverse translations.¹⁰⁷ The original English manuscripts, originally intended for publication in England, seem to have disappeared over time.¹⁰⁸ Though not much has been done in the realms of serious scholarship, the connections between Philadelphian spirituality and Russian sophiology may

¹⁰⁴ By "Eastern Christian" I mean Eastern Orthodox, Eastern Catholic, Coptic, and Armenian Catholic spirituality and theology.

¹⁰⁵ On deification, see John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, 1969), 114 – 15.

¹⁰⁶ Solovyov admits to having read Pordage (probably in a Russian edition) at the St. Petersburg Public Library. See Sergey M. Solovyov, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, trans. Aleksey Gibson (Fairfax, VA: Eastern Christian Publications, 2000), 186. Solovyov also researched Sophia at the British Museum, but we do not know if he encountered the work of Lead while in London. Florensky mentions Pordage in *Pillar and Ground of the Truth* in several places, see especially pages 458, 466 – 67, and 560.

¹⁰⁷ See Arthur Versteeg, ed., *The Wisdom of John Pordage* (St. Paul, MN: New Grail Publishing, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ In *Fountain of Gardens, Volume I*, Lead's editor, Lee, advertised the forthcoming publication of a number of Pordage's works, including *Mystica Philosophica; The Angelical World; The Dark Fire World; A Treatise concerning the Incarnation of JESUS CHRIST; A Discourse concerning the Spirit of Eternity, in its First Being; Sophia: or Spiritual Discoveries; and Experimental Discoveries, concerning Union of Nature, of Essences, of Tinctures, of Bodies, and of Spirits* (C3^r – C3^v).

prove a fruitful area for interdisciplinary studies and the field of comparative literature in the future.

The Pauline Mission, Part 2: Flesh and Spirit

In Romans, Paul sets flesh and spirit in opposition to one another:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (Rom 8:1 – 13)

It is important to note here that the word Paul uses for flesh (*sarx*) is not identical with the word for body (*soma*), and that Paul is intent upon the relationship of flesh (not body) with spirit (*pneuma*). As Heidegger observed, for Paul, *sarx* “is the original sphere of all affects not motivated from God.”¹⁰⁹ That is, “flesh” in Paul has more to do with being than biology. One aspect of Paul’s mission was his emphasis on Christ’s emancipation of human beings from the

¹⁰⁹ Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, Studies in Continental Thought, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 69.

constrictions of the law—both Jewish ceremonial laws as well as Greek laws of philosophy. His argument against circumcision, for instance, was in opposition to the thought then prevailing in nascent Christianity that believers first needed to be Jewish and follow Jewish dietary and hygienic customs before they could properly be considered Christian.¹¹⁰ For Paul, the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of Christ abolished the law and, as such, Christians needed to be ruled by grace as opposed to law. To deny this would be to deny Christ: “for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). As Mark Strom argues, “Paul’s clarity about how the law fed the self-destructiveness of the conscience tightened his insistence on the end of the law in Christ.”¹¹¹

Nevertheless, a virulent strain of thought in Christianity originating from patristic times insisted on reading a spirit/body dualism in Paul that had more in common with Greek philosophy than with Hebraic tradition, let alone with Paul. We see this, for example, in Origen and Augustine—both of whom prior to becoming Christians were educated and grounded in Platonic and Gnostic/Manichean dualism. Dualism persisted throughout Christian history, often bursting out in forms so extreme they were condemned as heretical (Catharism in France and Lollardy in England, for example). Calvin’s dualism was quite resilient, and one could even suggest that the double-predestination he proposed shows that it was thorough-going dualism, an absolutely binary epistemology.¹¹² Luther, on the other hand, redirected (or tried to redirect) dualism in the direction of faith versus works—certainly an idea present in Paul, but Luther loses Paul’s nuanced correspondence of flesh to law.¹¹³ We can see how their respective takes on

¹¹⁰ As illustrated in Acts 11 and 15.

¹¹¹ Mark Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 92.

¹¹² On Calvin’s dualism see Paul Helm, *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 273 – 83.

¹¹³ For a discussion of Luther’s dualism, see William A. Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 51 – 52.

dualism are reflected in their views on the Eucharist. Calvin sees it as a sign, a divine sign, to be sure, but a sign nonetheless, whereas, in his doctrine of Consubstantiation, Luther upholds an idea of the Real Presence that is a bit more physical than Calvin's.¹¹⁴ That is, Calvin's Eucharist abides in transcendence, Luther's in immanence. Roman Catholic theology of the period also shows strains of dualism, particularly as they manifested in the debates over the supernatural. Perhaps the inevitable conclusion to this theological agon with dualism was finally realized in the dualistic worldview of Descartes, for after him the mind (or soul) and body were understood as completely divorced and only held together by perception. Lead, also, shows evidence of dualism in her theology, a dualism prompted by her reading of Paul, informed by Calvinism, and reinvigorated by Descartes.¹¹⁵ But it was not always internally consistent, and it changed over time.

Lead's dualism is most noticeable in her four volumes of spiritual diaries, *A Fountain of Gardens*. The diaries were published between 1697 and 1701, though their contents only cover the years 1670 – 1686. The diaries can be considered the raw materials from which Lead's spiritual vision unfolded, not as absolutely divine documents to which Lead felt bound. In her works explicitly written with publication in mind, the dualism is much more subdued, often entwined with her discussions of deification. By contrast, the diaries are startlingly dualistic at times.

¹¹⁴ On the Eucharist in Luther and Calvin, see chapter ten of Owen F. Cummings, *Eucharistic Doctors: A Theological History* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005).

¹¹⁵ Erica Harth has suggested that Cartesian dualism was attractive to seventeenth-century women because it implied that "the mind has no sex." Harth interprets this as "a feminist rallying cry" during the period (page 81), in Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime*, Reading Women Writing (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 81. Apetrei cites recent scholarship that calls Descartes' dualism into question, at least as far as feminist enthusiasms for it are concerned, as "his metaphysical split between body and mind reinforced the gendered distinction between (feminine) physicality and (masculine) rationality." See Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion*, 35.

In volume one of *Fountain*, for example, Lead has a vision in which Jesus tells her she “should not always Married be with Beasts, which out of the Wild Forrest of Nature doth spring.”¹¹⁶ Later in the same volume, she observes that human beings can never behold Wisdom “till we do withdraw out of gross Corporality, that so cloathed we may be with Jesus, that Celestial Body” (1:244). Still, in another place, she is told “to put all things in order hereunto, and be most free for the Unbodying of your selves; that I may see no more a vile Nature upon you, who am come myself to be your Body” (1:300). This rejection of the body would help to explain why feminist critics have generally kept Lead’s discourse at arm’s length. Nevertheless, there is present in Lead a *care* for the body, as she wrote after a bout of illness “upon my outward man” when she concluded that a “hail Body is of a necessary connexion to a sound Spirit, for the Lord’s Service, whereby the Heavenly Calling may be perfected” (1:352 – 53). This is quite a different commitment from that Julian of Norwich (1342 – c.1416) avowed when she *prayed for illness* so that she might draw closer to Christ.¹¹⁷ For Julian, the body and the spirit worked synergistically; for Lead, they tended to work antithetically, with the body only being a tool, and a not altogether reliable one, for the spirit to use.

In the second volume of *Fountain*, Lead continues to privilege the spirit over “the vile reproachful Body of the Flesh” and suggests that it was through the “Eternal Spirit” that “Jesus offered up his Body visibly: as by a violent Death, so yours by a voluntary, mystical Transformation, working invisibly” (2:16). Here, the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection which Paul so vehemently defended nearly disappear entirely, as Lead turns to an intensely

¹¹⁶ Lead, *Fountain*, 1:133.

¹¹⁷ “These Revelations were shewed to a simple creature that cowed no letter the yeere of our Lord 1373, the eighth day of May, which creature desired afore three gifts of God. The first was mende of His passion. *The second was bodily sekenesse in youth at thirty yeeres of age.* The third was to have of Gods gift three wounds.” Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings*, ed. Georgia Ronan Crampton (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS – Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 39. My emphasis.

transcendental view of even Christ's taking-on of the flesh. We can also see here how Lead does not possess the distinctions between body and flesh that we find in Paul. For Lead, "body" and "flesh" are synonymous and sinful, while the spirit is the locus of perfection. She goes even further in this transcendental direction in the first part of *Fountain's* third volume. There she speaks of the glorified body as diaphanous: "Wherein it was given me to understand the way, how possibly Mortality should sometimes disappear, and be as Anatomized as to material grossness, and changed into a thin, subtle, pure Æthereal Vehicle" (3.1:35), an idea hardly consistent with the resurrected Christ asking for fish to eat in Luke 24:41 – 43.¹¹⁸

Despite the dualistic character of some of her visions in the nearly two-thousand pages of *Fountain of Gardens*, Lead's religious experiences occasionally move away from such strict dualism and toward a deeper appreciation of the significance of the physical world. On 15 May 1677, for example, while she and Pordage were at prayer Lead heard a voice utter a different message: "Being together met, for the mutual enkindling of the Life and Power in each other, while the Doctor was breathing out what was given him from the Spirit: This voice uttered it self in that time, *All flesh shall see the Glory of the Lord*: several times it passed through me" (2:246). Unlike at other times when a vision opened up a new kind of insight to Lead, no illumination followed to explain this audition, which is actually a quote of Isaiah 40:5. Yet, though Lead seems to have been unaware of it at the time, this was the ultimate direction in which her spiritual journey would lead her.

The notion of "all flesh seeing the Lord" took on a significant level of importance for Lead, one which developed and grew as her career developed and grew. On the first page of her

¹¹⁸ In *Paradise Lost* the angel Raphael touches on the subject of bodies becoming spiritualized, "Till body up to spirit work" (5:478). But Milton's point is that Paradise is a place where effort takes place—Adam works, after all, and Raphael eats—and not compatible with Lead's more dualistic view of spirit v. matter. John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

first publication, 1681's *The Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking*, Lead speaks in Eucharistic metaphor: "*I am commissioned, as both Servant and Friend to my Lord, and Heavenly Bridegroom,*" she writes, "*to invite you to the great Supper of God, and the Lamb.*"¹¹⁹ But she does not mean that which is served at the Communion Table. What Lead has in mind is a completely *spiritual* Eucharist, as in many other places she writes of purely spiritual expressions of marriage or feasts such as Pentecost.¹²⁰ Some manifestations of Protestantism from early in the Reformation had removed Communion to a spiritual locus. Anne Askew, for example, when she was interrogated on charges of heresy, answered that though she did not believe in the physical presence of Christ in the sacrament "in sprete I received never the lesse, the bodye and bloude off Christ."¹²¹ Such an idea certainly lurks in the background of Lead's ideas concerning the sacrament. The Eucharist Lead describes is intended for "*four ranks, and degrees of Persons and Spirits,*" none of which occur in the physical world (A2^r). For the partakers in Lead's Eucharist, "*great Things are prepared in the New Jerusalem, there to have Communion in one Spiritual Body at one Table*" (A3^r). Furthermore, "*This is proper Food for dying Saints,*" she assures the reader, "*who by eating of the spiritual Flesh, may come to have their own Flesh to die, and moulder away; for it is known, and experienced, as we do daily feed upon a Crucified Christ, it devours, and gradually works away the life of Sin, and all the evil Effects of it*" (A2^r). And finally, "*the Table is again spread as for such, who are risen from the Dead.*" Her entire discourse here is metaphorical: nowhere do we get the impression that she means the bread and wine administered in the Sacrament.

¹¹⁹ Lead, *Heavenly Cloud*, A2^r.

¹²⁰ For example, her promise of "*a New and Second Pentecost*" in *The Messenger of An Universal Peace* (A3^v) and her repeated references to spiritual marriage or an "inner" resurrection.

¹²¹ *The Examinations of Anne Askew*, ed. Elaine V. Beilin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 22.

Of special interest here is the Lead's oxymoronic term "spiritual flesh." This is not the only time she employs it. In *Fountain of Gardens* she also uses the term. In a dream of 7 September 1676, she records that she heard a voice which told her "Here are the Children of the Bride-Chamber, who do to me cry for stronger Meat; they have weaned themselves from the nutriment of the Breast, telling me they can digest Spiritual Flesh" (1:340 – 41). Lead then beheld "a Lamb that had been slain," an obvious allusion to Christ, and the voice directed her in patently Eucharistic language to "Take hereof, and eat, this is Paschal Meat." On 13 July 1677, Lead attained to a further insight pertaining to "spiritual flesh" while at prayer with Porlage:

We being met together in Prayer, owning and presenting our many deficiencies as to Spiritual Abilities; This word was spoke to me, Apply your selves to Christ your Treasure, who is made of that Lineage and Nature, that he might consider the better those, who are of his own Spiritual Flesh: For none else could so naturally care for them, as he, who had assumed that Nature, which was liable to weakness, temptation, and all distresses. And as your Lord Jesus did out-grow all this, and swallowed up mortality, and all infirmities, by attending thereupon; so changing his Corporeity into an Ætherial Spirituality, whereby a Translation was obtained by him into Mount *Sion* Glory: So was it advised me from that Spirit, that standeth always in the Spirits Council, That an express charge was given by the Father unto the Lord Christ, to take care and provide for us also after the like manner. (2:299)

Lead was surely flirting with heresy by suggesting that Christ's Transfiguration was due to merit, though her main point is clearly the importance of the believer's participating in Christ, a wholly orthodox concept. Lead's spiritual flesh here speaks to two different but related ideas: 1) a participation in a transcendent Eucharist, uncontaminated by the physical world; 2) the spiritualization of human flesh, a participation in Christ that results in the glorification of the body that will "swallow up mortality."

"Spiritual flesh," however, is not a term unique to Lead, but one which she borrows from Boehme. In the seventeenth-century English translations of Boehme, it occurs at least twice. One instance appears in the dialogue "Of the super-sensuall life" included as part of Sparrow's 1648

English edition of *The Way to Christ*. There Boehme writes of regeneration as a process in which “this good virtue of the mortall body shall come again and live for ever in a kind of transparent Crystalline material property, in spiritual flesh and blood.”¹²² The term also appears in *The Incarnation of Christ* when Boehme explains the unique nature of the glorified body: “For we shall be presented in a *spiritual* Flesh and Blood; not in such a form or manner, as here.”¹²³ Obviously, Lead is not only appropriating Boehme’s language, but also his theology. Interestingly, though, Boehme’s “spiritual flesh” does not imply the Eucharist. The Lutheran mystic, for whom Consubstantiation was a reality, does not seem pressed to sort out his Eucharistic theology in his discussions of spiritual flesh, whereas Lead, the Calvinist-Anglican Philadelphian reared in a Church whose theology was purposely vague about the Real Presence, conflates both deification of the body and the transformation of the Eucharistic elements and in the process transfers her anxieties about the Real Presence to a safely transcendent realm.

Apetrei has observed that Boehme’s notion of the spiritual flesh was derived from the German radical theologian Caspar Schwenkfeld and she further notices what she calls an “Origenist network” which held to the idea as well as to apocatastasis and consisted of Lead and Roach as well as the non-conformist minister Jeremiah White (1629 – 1707) and the Cambridge Platonist Peter Sterry (1613 – 1672).¹²⁴ While “network” may imply more cooperation than actually existed, Apetrei is nevertheless correct in noticing the currency of the ideas of both deification and apocatastasis in late seventeenth-century English religion. Apetrei, however, is more concerned with the deification implied in the idea of spiritual flesh and its resolution in

¹²² Boehme, “Of the super-sensuall life” in *The Way to Christ*, 35 (NB: pagination restarts at the beginning of “super-sensuall life”). A translation of this work by Lead’s associate Francis Lee appears in the 4th volume of the “Law Edition” of Boehme’s works. See *The Works of Jacob Behmen, The Teutonic Theosopher*, ed. George Ward and Thomas Langcake, 4 volumes (London, 1764 – 81).

¹²³ Boehme, *Incarnation of Christ*, 165.

¹²⁴ Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion*, 246 – 47.

erasing gender than she is in the Eucharistic aspects of Lead's discourse, which she ignores. But what is important in Lead, I think, is the way in which we see her working out the information she received in her visions and tries 1) to assimilate it with what she already knew through both her reading of the Bible and Boehme as well as from her religious upbringing, and 2) to synthesize it and see where it was leading. There are two kinds of flesh in Lead: the spiritual flesh we have been discussing and the human flesh, Paul's *sarx*.

In his book *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, Jean-Luc Marion considers "flesh" in the light of "the givenness of the self." Marion recognizes a phenomenon of the flesh that Lead seems to miss: that it is only by virtue of the flesh that we experience ourselves, that we become egos. As with Paul, Marion's idea of the flesh is not to be confused with the body (Paul's *soma*). There can be no possibility of a self without the flesh for Marion. "Birth, original taking flesh, does not therefore have a biological status but rather a phenomenological one," he asserts before adding words that Lead would have found of interest: "And if there must be an eternity, it will only be a resurrection of the body."¹²⁵ The manner in which Descartes misses the importance of the flesh in relation to our experience of self is, argues Marion, a fundamental flaw of Cartesian dualism,¹²⁶ and Lead, as was the case with many of her contemporaries, seems to have internalized Descartes' dualism as it was disseminated through late seventeenth-century English culture. In Pauline terms, one first needs to have a "me" before one can hope for a "Christ in me,"¹²⁷ or, as Paul has it elsewhere, "that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (1 Cor 15:46). Through her attempts to reconcile transcendence with the Eucharist and corporeal with spiritual flesh, Jane Lead strove

¹²⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Forham University Press, 2002), 98.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹²⁷ Gal 2: 20. In her *Living Funeral Testimony, Or, Death Overcome and Drown'd in the Life of Christ* (London, 1702), Lead quotes this passage three times (pages 7, 9, and 13).

for a religious (and perhaps psychological) synthesis consistent with her dedication to the Johannine promise that “all might be one.” At this micro-level, however, she would not be able to realize this ideal. So she ultimately focused instead on the macro-level: at the ultimate restoration of apocatastasis, where all would indeed be one. For these reasons, her spirituality is ultimately a spirituality of the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ.

The Pauline Mission, Part 3: Parousia

The theological aesthetic of Thomas and Henry Vaughan, which saw God as implicit in the natural world, is absolutely foreign to Lead. Yet, Lead needs to reconcile the physicality of the resurrection she finds in the Bible—in the resurrection narratives, but above all in Paul—with her inclination toward removing all that is godly to a purely transcendent locus. As a result of this conflict, in Lead, God is not immanent in the world, but immanent in time.

God, or more properly Christ, is also immanent for Paul—and he is also, and more pressingly, *imminent*. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul exhibits no small amount of anxiety, what Heidegger has called “a peculiar distress, one that is, as an apostle, his own,”¹²⁸ over the (Paul thought) imminent Parousia, as he writes to his congregation,

...to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,
 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:
 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;
 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.
 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:
 That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thes 1:7 – 12)

¹²⁸ Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 67.

As Lead was to do later, Paul feels it is incumbent upon him to make sure his congregation is ready when “that day” arrives. This is why, in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul recommends a life of celibacy—not because he esteems celibacy above married life, but because the Parousia will happen, he thinks, very soon and therefore marrying would prove superfluous.¹²⁹ Biblical scholars believe 1 and 2 Thessalonians are the earliest of Paul’s epistles (c. 52 AD), though there is some disagreement about which was written first.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, in both we can see how Paul was still coming to terms with the significance of the Parousia and its arrival. In 1 Thessalonians, for example, he steps away from committing to a Parousia that will occur at any second—although it might: “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thes 5:1 – 2). Because of the unknown time of the Parousia, Paul relies instead on encouraging the congregation at Thessalonica toward a spirit of preparedness: “Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thes 5:16 – 22). Heidegger interprets this move away from focus on the Parousia as a genuinely religious gesture. “Here lies a point against enthusiasm,” he writes, “against the incessant brooding of those who dwell upon and speculate about the ‘when’ of the *παρουσία*. They worry only about the ‘When,’ the ‘What,’

¹²⁹ “For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn” (1 Cor 7:7 – 9). On the implications of the coming Parousia in 1 Corinthians, see Gail Corrington Streete, “Discipline and Disclosure: Paul’s Apocalyptic Asceticism in 1 Corinthians,” in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse*, ed. Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999), 81 – 94.

¹³⁰ On the debate concerning the date of composition of the two epistles, as well as debates concerning their authorship, see Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (1959; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 25 – 29.

the objective determination, in which they have no authentic personal interest. They remain stuck in the worldly.”¹³¹

Lead also discloses a “peculiar, apostolic distress” concerning the Parousia, and in this she reveals what is a decidedly Pauline attribute. This is particularly telling in the difference between the paratexts found to the two editions of *Revelation of Revelations*. In the first edition (1683), she warns her readers of the impending arrival of the Lord:

*Now the things yet to come, is that the Lord will suddainly be upon us, to take unto him his Kingdom, which nothing of the Beasts Reign shall mingle. Oh! Holy, Precious and Elect, let us not Sleep, but set our Morning-Watch, for Tydings are come to make all things ready for him.*¹³²

Lead’s anxiety here is that of Paul in 2 Thessalonians. But in the second edition of the text (1701), her tone is quite different. She starts defiantly:

But it is not at all to be wondered if there be many that mock at the *mystical* and *hidden Wisdom* of God; and some that scoff at the Promise of the FATHER concerning the Kingdom of His Son, as foretold by His holy prophets, with the highest contempt and derision of them that obey a most clear, express, and even inculcated command of Christ, still crying out, *Where is the promise of His coming, and of these glorious things which you tell us of?* For they are foolishness to the natural and carnal man, and to the wise of this world; but they are the power of God to such as are taught in His school, and will not be rejected, but justified by all the true disciples and Children of Wisdom. And let the despisers say what they will, it must still remain an infallible and an unchangeable truth what the Holy Ghost has said, *Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy* (which is called the *Apocalypse* or *Revelation* of Jesus Christ) *and keeps those things that are written therein.*¹³³

The quote here, “*Where is the promise of His coming, and of these glorious things which you tell us of?*” comes from 2 Peter 3:4, written well after either of Paul’s epistles to the Thessalonians (late first or early second century)¹³⁴ and at a moment when the Christian community was

¹³¹ Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 74.

¹³² Lead, *Revelation of Revelations* (1683), B2^f.

¹³³ Jane Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, 2nd edition, ed. Diane Guerrero from the 1701 (London) edition. [/www.janelead.org/writings/Jane_Lead_Revelation_of_Revelations_1701_Edition_SDV.PDF](http://www.janelead.org/writings/Jane_Lead_Revelation_of_Revelations_1701_Edition_SDV.PDF) [RR:N3]

¹³⁴ Introduction to The Second Letter of Peter, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocryphal / Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, NRSV (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 344NT.

rethinking the meaning of time in the context of Christian eschatology (and not, as before, Christian eschatology in the context of time). Lead defends her earlier position against scoffers like Dodwell who pointed to the non-arrival of the Parousia as proof that Lead was a religious fraud. Like Paul over his career, Lead, too, in the period intervening between the first and second editions of *Revelation of Revelations* also had had time to rethink things. She admits as much: “And it is to be observed that herein is laid the foundation most clearly, of a certain doctrine which the Author was then very little acquainted with, and seems not to have been established in, till about fourteen years after. And this not being so much as suspected by the Author, may be a stronger motive for consideration.”¹³⁵ The “certain doctrine” of which she speaks here is clearly apocatastasis. Because she came to the realization of the importance of apocatastasis to her religious vision, she needed to rethink her eschatology.

In *Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message*, Lead indicates, like Paul, that the *imminence* of the Parousia is better thought of as the *immanence* of the Parousia. During a revelation of the Final Judgment, when “All Worlds would give up, both Living and Dead,” Lead recorded “that this Last Dissolution...is not to be, till after some Numbers of Time be pass’d over beyond the Thousand Years Reign.”¹³⁶ For this reason, Lead began to foreground an idea that had certainly been present in her earlier work, but which became more central to her message. She framed it in metaphorical terms as of “the Lamb having been slain in me, gives a Resurrection of a New Life.”¹³⁷ That is, the Parousia should no longer be considered only as a manifestation of the *eschaton* and as the end of time, but it should—more practically—be considered as an internal event in the soul of the Christian. “*He will appear*,” Lead assures the reader, “but to Those whom he hath by his Spirit, quickned, and raised up in his own Inward

¹³⁵ Ibid., [RR:N5]

¹³⁶ Lead, *Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel-Message*, 17.

¹³⁷ Lead, *Tree of Faith*, 89.

Spiritual Body; to Them he will first appear, and go forth as Lightning every where.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, Christ is coming not “for the condemning and destroying” of sinners, but for the destroying of “the Sin in the Flesh” with the final result that “shall each one become a Christ, (or an Anointed) from this Deified Root opening within their own Soul.”¹³⁹ The goal of the Philadelphian Society—“wheresoever dispersed over the Earth”—was to act as this agent (i.e., “as Lightning”) of Christ in igniting an inner renewal of Christianity that would spread out into the world.

The Parousia is an event that takes place within time, yet is free of time. This was an intuition Lead had as early as the 1680s, but it does not seem that she grasped its full import before she followed its traces into the doctrine of apocatastasis. In *Revelation of Revelations*, for instance, she explained how the New Jerusalem would work existentially. She was given

...a further discovery, to let me know the Royal Freedom of the spiritual Seed proceeding from the *New-Jerusalem*, as the Virgin Bride of God, who though come down into this visible Birth of Time, yet *was before all Time in the Substantiality of spiritual Essence*, by whom the renewed fruitfulness of this free Birth shall in this last Age of the World be made manifest.... It was thus laid before me, *That the Jerusalem from above hath been these many Ages travelling¹⁴⁰ to bring forth her first and freeborn, according to that divine Likeness, whose Descent is not to be found within the verge of Time.*¹⁴¹

She as yet thinks hers is the “last Age of the World,” but the gist of this passage is that there is a “time” not subject to time as we know it and within which God operates. This leads to a consideration of time as it appears in Paul.

Paul has two notions of time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* is time as we know it: the progression of years, seasons, hours, minutes, and so on. Paul uses *chronos* in 1 Thessalonians 5:1, “But of the times (χρόνων) and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.”

¹³⁸ Lead, *Enochian Walks with God*, 15.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31; 33.

¹⁴⁰ i.e., *travailing*.

¹⁴¹ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations* (1683), 8.

This time is simply a linear time. *Kairos*, on the other hand, is more difficult to define. One way to describe *kairos* is as “vertical and discontinuous,” something “that cannot be measured at all, since it occurs only in the moment.”¹⁴² Paul’s phrase “the now time” (οὐ νῦν καιροῦ) “connotes the time of salvation since and including the Christ-event” for he “clearly believes that the eschatological age has broken into human history through Christ.”¹⁴³ Paul invariably uses the word when speaking of the Parousia. Paul uses the term often, as in Romans: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time [οὐ νῦν καιροῦ] are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (8:18) and “Even so then at this present time [νῦν καιρῶ] also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (11:5). Likewise in 2 Corinthians 6:2, Paul invokes Isaiah and enacts the *kairos* of his gospel: “For he saith, I have heard thee in a time [καιρῶ] accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time [νῦν καιρὸς]; behold, now is the day of salvation.” *Kairos* is another way of saying “the event.”

Giorgio Agamben has argued that the *kairos* of Paul is in a kind of tension with *chronos*, and adopts the language of Jewish eschatology (“messianic time”) in order to explain Paul. Agamben thinks of this messianic time as “*the time that time takes to come to an end*, or, more precisely, the time we take to bring to an end, to achieve our representation of time.”¹⁴⁴ This assessment, while clever, seems a little erroneous. Paul, for one, would not be interested in “the time that time takes to come to an end,” as this time clearly belongs to the realm of *chronos*. Nor would the idea be congenial to Lead. The linear thinking Agamben displays here, no doubt

¹⁴² John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *God after Metaphysics: A Theological Aesthetic* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 59.

¹⁴³ Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 110.

¹⁴⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 67. Emphasis in Agamben.

informed by Derrida's meditations on the non-appearing of the Messiah, becomes its own eschatological trap. His problem is that he keeps thinking of *kairos* as "time" and not as *event*. This is how he differs from both Paul and Lead. He gets near to the truth (or at least to Paul and Lead) when he identifies "the paradoxical tension between an *already* and a *not yet* that defines the Pauline conception of salvation" in terms of the Parousia, but he still thinks in linear increments of chronology.¹⁴⁵ But Paul's "οὐ νῦν καιροῦ," "the now time," is not part of history or the future. The *kairos*, it can be argued, is the event that is always/already happening, and is perhaps best described as the "presence" that is central to religious experience. Indeed, "Parousia" is a word that means simply "presence." It is not something that lends itself easily to representation on a graph.

The language in which Lead wrote did not possess the nuance provided by the distinctions between *chronos* and *kairos*. As far as we are aware, she did not know Greek. Lead, then, had one word, "time," or a trope for it, for both concepts; so it should be no surprise that it is not always clear sometimes as to which she means—and often means both at once. When, in *The Ascent of the Mount of Vision*, she writes, "The day is already come, wherein these Prophecies begin to be fulfill'd" and promises that "the eternal Wisdom of God provokes for the recovery of that lapsed Age again," she has in mind both.¹⁴⁶ She wrote these words in 1699, but in 1701's *Living Funeral Testimony*, written when Lead was seventy-seven years old, blind, and her own demise must have been heavy on her mind, she confessed that "Albeit they do not live in the Body to such an Age, and Time, as to see him in his *Personal* Majesty and Glory, to set his Foot here again upon the Earth. For such as can say with that great Saint, *I Live; yet not I, but Christ*

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 69.

¹⁴⁶ Lead, *Ascent of the Mount of Vision*, 22 – 23.

lives in me; to such Death can be no Loss, but great Gain, and Advantage.”¹⁴⁷ Here, again quoting Paul, she acknowledges both the inevitability of *chronos*’ temporality as well as the transformative presence of *kairos* and the resilient effects of the event. Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 2:11, written while he was imprisoned and his death was impending, are resonant of Lead’s: ‘For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.’ And in chapter four, he writes of his coming death in terms, not of *chronos*, but of *kairos*: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time [καίρως] of my departure is at hand” (2 Tim 4:6). He speaks of himself as a sacrifice and his sacrifice as an event.¹⁴⁸ Both Paul and Lead, though they avow the Second Coming will be an actual historical event, nevertheless emphasize the inner Parousia in which they experience the truth event of God’s presence.

That Jane Lead realized her religious identity by a deliberate mimesis of St. Paul, considering how vilified the apostle has been at the hands of many, especially feminist, critics, is one of the ironies in the study of early modern religious writing. Nevertheless, that is precisely what she did. Lead did not let herself be bound by the attitudes of the religious establishment in her own time. Neither did she allow her devotion to her spiritual companion John Pordage to dissuade her from deviating from his own teaching. Nor did she let her allegiance to her spiritual master, Jacob Boehme, to place limits on the religious intuitions she received. And, finally, she followed Paul most authentically when she followed his spirit as opposed to his letter. That is, she maintained the Pauline ethos of allegiance to the event and internalized both his theology and elements of his biography while holding herself free from his injunctions about the place of

¹⁴⁷ Lead, *Living Funeral Testimony*, 9.

¹⁴⁸ The Greek word the Authorized version translates as “to be offered” is σπένδομαι (*spendomai*), which, more literally, means “poured out.” *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament: The Nestle Greek Text with a Literal English Translation*, trans. A. Marshall, 2nd edition (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited, 1958).

women in the Church. Slavoj Žižek has written that “the perverse core of Christianity” is that “either one drops the religious form, or one maintains the form, but loses the essence.” For Žižek, “That is the ultimate heroic gesture that awaits Christianity: in order to save its treasure, it has to sacrifice itself—like Christ, who had to die so that Christianity could emerge.”¹⁴⁹ Lead, certainly, would have a problem with the way Žižek overlooks the significance of the Resurrection. Likewise, she would probably not think much of Žižek’s binary. But she would agree with one thing: essence trumps form. But it cannot do without form. One of her favorite scriptures, and one which more than any other was emblematic of her religious aesthetic, was 2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”¹⁵⁰ Jane Lead’s magnanimous, ecumenical Christianity was emblematic of such a hope. She lived a life of joyful expectation, attending to the inner and historical possibilities of the Parousia, *kairos* as well as *chronos*, aware at all times of the presence of God.

¹⁴⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, Short Circuits (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 171.

¹⁵⁰ She quotes this verse in at least *Heavenly Cloud, Revelation of Revelations, Tree of Faith, Wars of David and Wonder of GOD’s Creation*.

CONCLUSION

In the same letter to Fr. Jean-Marie Perrin, O.P., in which she reveals the mystical experience triggered by her recitation of George Herbert's poem "Love (III)," Simone Weil, who had been raised in a highly educated, agnostic Jewish family, tries to explain that event within the broader contexts of her spiritual autobiography:

In my arguments about the insolubility of the problem of God I had never foreseen the possibility of that, of a real contact, person to person, here below, between a human being and God. I had vaguely heard tell of things of this kind, but I had never believed in them. In the *Fioretti* the accounts of apparitions rather put me off if anything, like the miracles in the Gospel. Moreover, in this sudden possession of me by Christ, neither my senses nor my imagination had any part; I only felt in the midst of my suffering the presence of a love, like that which one can read in the smile of a beloved face.

I had never read any mystical works because I had never felt any call to read them.... God in his mercy had prevented me from reading the mystics, so that it should be evident to me that I had not invented this absolutely unexpected contact....

Yet I still half refused, not my love but my intelligence. For it seemed to me certain, and I still think so today, that one can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of a pure regard for the truth.¹

The subjects of this study each in his or her own way contended with "the insolubility of the problem of God." Some of them—such as John Dee, Thomas Vaughan, and Kenelm Digby—attempted to solve this insoluble problem through scientific means. Others—such as John Donne, Henry Vaughan, and Jane Lead—attempted their solutions through recourse to the "unknowing" characteristic of mystical discourse: a reliance on faith and the truth of the event, albeit in ways informed by their cultural and historical moments. Some proceeded primarily by the way of the intelligence. Some proceeded primarily by the way of love. But these are inclinations rather than polarities: the intelligence and love are never completely absent from one another.

In our own cultural and historical moment, we still contend with this insoluble question. As we have seen in the recent polemics between the "New Atheists" and the so-called "Religious

¹ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), 69.

Right” (to name only one, highly-charged, example), the dialectic between intelligence and love (though both sides often slip away from these commitments) continues. The real dialectic, I think, is that between intelligence and love—and not, as some would have us believe, between science and religion. Nevertheless, though both sides attempt to settle the question from their respective rhetorical perspectives, the issue remains unresolved. It may be better, as the quantum physicists David Bohm and Basil Hiley have urged, to see that “All proposals are points of departure for exploration”² and not intractable political positions.

In recent decades, as we have seen repeatedly throughout this study, Continental philosophy has been reimagining its religious roots and with them the question of God. This reimagining is characterized by serious and thoughtful considerations of theology and metaphysics, but also by an acknowledgement of, and a respect for, the limits of human understanding. Continental philosophy’s return to religious questions is not an act of intellectual cowardice, as some might contend, but, in fact, is an act of courage. As Weil recognized, “one can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of a pure regard for the truth,” and Continental philosophy has tried to meet this challenge. Such an idea was not foreign to Jacques Derrida, who has confessed, “the constancy of God in my life is called by other names, so that I quite rightly pass for an atheist.”³ The subjects of this study also tried to meet this challenge and, through writing about them, in my own way, so have I. However, as we know, no one comes away from a wrestling match with God—whether as divine person or as idea—unscathed. And the only fitting response to such a struggle is that of Jacob:

“I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

² D. Bohm and B. J. Hiley, *The Undivided Universe: An Ontological Interpretation of Quantum Theory* (London: Routledge, 1993), 390.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Circumfession: Fifty-nine Periods and Periphrases*, in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 155.

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ABSTRACT**HALLOWED GROUND: LITERATURE AND THE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD IN
POST-REFORMATION ENGLAND, C.1550 – 1704**

by

MICHAEL MARTIN**May 2012****Advisors:** Dr. Arthur F. Marotti and Dr. Kenneth Samuel Jackson**Major:** English**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation examines the ways in which the encounter with God is figured in post-Reformation English writing between the years 1550 and 1704. The introduction contextualizes the ways in which individuals might encounter God within cultural and historical circumstances of the period: the gradual disappearance of the tradition of spiritual direction that accompanied the suppression of Catholicism in England during the period and the growing influence of more purely “scientific” modes of inquiry, especially after Descartes. Because of these changes, the ways the encounter with God could be experienced were also changing. The introduction also shows how developments in religious studies deriving from Continental philosophy can offer a fresh perspective when considering the phenomena of religious experience. Chapter one, “John Dee: Mysticism, Technology, Idolatry,” considers the career of early modern polymath John Dee and his conversations with angels as a kind of “mysticism” compromised by the technology of magic and early modern science. In chapter two, “A Glass Darkly: John Donne’s Negative Approach to God,” I explore the Anglican priest and preacher John Donne’s reimagination of negative and mystical theologies as both his way of approaching God and as a tool for the *cura animarum*, the care of souls. Chapter three, “Love’s Alchemist: Science and Resurrection in the

Writing of Sir Kenelm Digby,” considers Digby’s scientific researches into palingenesis, the attempt to raise a plant or animal phoenix-like from its ashes, as a kind of unconscious religious experience. In chapter four, “The Rosicrucian Mysticism of Henry and Thomas Vaughan,” I trace the influence of Rosicrucianism in the writing of the poet Henry Vaughan and his twin brother, the alchemist and priest Thomas Vaughan, as a symbiosis disclosing a kind of mysticism more consciously informed by scientific inquiry. Chapter five, “The Pauline Mission of Jane Lead,” argues that the seventeenth-century mystic Jane Lead, founder of the Philadelphian Society, deliberately modeled her career on that of St. Paul. It explores the way she follows Paul as one remaining true to the religious experience that initiated his conversion while she deviates when necessary from some traditional and Pauline teachings that do not cohere with her religious vision, much as Paul did in his own historical context.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Michael Martin teaches English at Marygrove College in Detroit, Michigan. He lives on a small farm halfway between Detroit and Ann Arbor with his wife and children.