Mindfulness of separation: an autistic a-theological hermeneutic

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Abstract

This thesis argues that a literary hermeneutic based on a mythology of autism offers a significantly validating reading of apophatic and a-theological texts. Instead of a disability, this mythologised autism is read as a valid and valuable poetic theological thinking.

The thesis argues that a mythological autism could be envisioned as a trinity, analogous to the three-in-one Godhead of Christianity. This means that each facet of the mythological autistic trinity is indissoluble from the others, are all are equally autism. The first element is termed Mindfulness of Separation, and this entails absence and unknowing as has been conceptualised in Baron Cohen's theory of Mindblindness. Thought theologically, Mindfulness of Separation is a privileged entry into the (non)spaces indicated by apophatic and a-theological discourse.

The second element is termed autistic fascination, and is drawn from the clinical conceptualisation of Restricted and Repetitive Behaviours and Interests (RRBI's) as described in the American DSM-5. The thesis argues that Uta Frith's explanation of repetitive, stereotyped behaviours as those of a 'sensory connoisseur' can be thought theologically as a capacity for reverence and wonder. Coupled with Frith's thinking of the sensory, the thesis argues that autistic special interests are equally part of autistic fascination in their sense of revelling in praise of their special objects. Theologically, this autistic fascination can be seen as a haecceic and poetic presence-in-absence made possible only within autism's particular separation, and this is a paradoxical *coincidentia oppositorum* which sheds a new light on the similar absent/present paradox of apophatic theology.

The third element is termed literal metaphor, and it can ultimately only exist when it is thought theologically, as what is termed incarnational metaphor. This draws on the autistic phenomenon of taking figurative language 'literally.' Theologically, this is a strength inasmuch as its stance towards language is not to decode it pragmatically, but to stay within the paradoxes of a poetic language expressing theological thinking. The thesis develops the term 'apophatic fiction' to express the way in which incarnational metaphor reads poetic, mystical texts by honouring them as simultaneously both poetic and theological thinking. The 'literal' meaning is the incarnational meaning of poetic sacrament, both absent (from pragmatic appropriation) and present (in the power of the word).

At the heart of this trinity, making it possible, is kenotic autistic affective empathy. This is drawn from Baron Cohen's thinking of autism as a 'zero degree positive' of unimpaired affective empathy within impaired cognitive empathy. It is kenotic because it pours itself out in affection which has no cognitive safeguards or conditions. It is the wisdom of the holy fool.

These are theological, not clinical concepts, although they are a mythologization of clinical constructs. They can be thought theologically in terms of what the thesis terms universal, conscious and absolute autism. Universal autism draws on Baron Cohen's model of the autistic spectrum as a continuum across human variations, and it is an autistic streak permeating existence. Conscious autism is the knowing adoption of autism as a theological strategy. Absolute autism is the theological thinking which imagines what a total autism would be, in absolute Mindfulness of Separation, absolute autistic fascination, absolute incarnational metaphor and absolute affective empathy. As such, the autistic trinity is the autism of God, offering a powerful way to understand apophatic and a-theological texts. In conclusion, readings of Hopkins' poetry and Pirandello's novels are 'case studies' for an autistic a-theological hermeneutic.

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Introduction

Aims and methodology

This is an inter-disciplinary thesis, situated in the territory of Literature, Theology and the Arts ('LTA'). It is grounded in the 'Glasgow School'[1] of thought, which could be described as having worked, from the mid-to-late twentieth century onwards, to explore theology poetically and poetics theologically. In effect, this creates possible new hermeneutics which are simultaneously both literary and theological. New, creative literary-theological hermeneutics can emerge in this arena. The agenda of this thesis is to bring autistic perception into this inter-disciplinary arena in order to argue for the legitimacy of an autistic-literary-theological hermeneutic.

The central argument of this thesis is a theological one. It is that an autistic literary-theological hermeneutic can function as a legitimate theological voice. From a consideration of the different facets of autistic perception styles, a possible autistic stance can be put forward as a way of understanding an equally particular literary-theological discourse. This takes on real discursive power as a new hermeneutic mode in its own right, by becoming a distinct theological thinking. It will be argued that 'autism speaks,'[2] as a powerful and

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[1] See below on Literature and Theology; because of the significant contribution of the Glasgow Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts, largely developed by David Jasper and following on from his pioneering 'LTA" work in Durham in the 1980s, the term 'Glasgow school' became current to describe a particular thinking of LTA.

[2] An ironic phrase, subverting the pathologising of autism; in 2006, the American charity 'Autism Speaks' notoriously, obscenely, even, campaigned for a view of autism as the 'enemy invader' of the archetypal happy family, to be eradicated (by 'finding a cure). See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UgLnWJFGHQ See also http://autisticadvocacy.org/2009/09/horrific-autism-speaks-i-am-autism-ad-transcript/
To see an articulate response from the autism community see
 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ez936r2F35U).
An undercurrent of a eugenic agenda has been attributed by many people to the organisation. The autist Cisco Bultron writes about Autism Speaks' distressing "I am autism" campaign (which portrayed autism as an enemy): ""I am Autism" painted our neurotype as an enemy, in no uncertain terms declaring war on the way we are. Make no mistake, they want us gone." (http://askcisco.blogspot.co.uk/2015/07/the-war-on-autism-is-now-crusade-autism.html)
The phrase "autism speaks," then, is used in this thesis ironically and subversively, because the intent in this thesis is completely opposite, namely to validate autism as a legitimate and insightful tool for reflection and mode of theological thinking.

insightful, divergent and creative mode of seeing, but at the outset it needs to be clarified how, and where, autism speaks in this thesis.

Crucially, in much of what follows, a theology of disability exists by means of discerning ways to a theology of sacred disability. Nancy L Eiesland's *The Disabled God*[3] and John Swinton's *Reflections on Autistic Love*[4] will be an important underpinning. This is because a theology of autistic validation is implicit in this thesis' reading of its interdisciplinary project. This is not a thesis, primarily, of disability theology in terms of politics or pastoral issues. It is rooted in questions about language, as theological language and poetic language. It becomes a theological politics of disability, only in the sense that it asks for autism's idiosyncratic, creative voice to be heard in the arena of theological thinking. Language itself is also, in fact, a deeply pastoral and political concern, as Swinton also makes clear in his writing on Stephen, a teenage boy with Down's syndrome:

> It is interesting to reflect on the possibility that it may be those of us around Stephen who have learning difficulties, in that our cultural, economic, rational and medical assumptions and priorities prevent us from prioritising the development of the forms of communicational skills that would enable us truly to begin to understand and learn the holistic communication that is natural to Stephen.[5]

Similarly, the theologian Christine Trevett has coined the expression "the autistic cruelty of the neurotypical"[6] to indicate that it is the non-autistic community who fail to empathise with the distinctive world view of autistic perception. The emphasis would be, in this vision, not initially on "talking to," but in "listening to" and "learning from." The conviction at the base of this thesis is that theology might be enriched twice over; by listening to the poetic

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[3] Eiesland, Nancy, *The Disabled God: Towards a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA; Abingdon Press,1994); see also Tataryn, Miroslaw & Truchan-Tataryn, Maria, *Discovering Trinity in Disability: A Theology for Embracing Difference* (New York; Orbis books, 2013)

[4] Swinton, John, *Reflections on Autistic Love: What does Love Look Like?* (Practical Theology vol. 5, 2012, issue 3), quoting John Swinton, Disability Theology, in Ian McFarland, David Fergusson, Karen Kilby and Iain Torrance (eds.), Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[5] Swinton, John, *Building a Church for Strangers* (Edinburgh; Contact Pastoral Trust,1999) p.4; see also Grainger, *Strangers in the Pews* and Simpson, *Troubled Minds,* for examples of Christian concern to relate meaningfully to people with mental health problems.

[6] Christine Trevett, Private conversation, ASPARRG UK conference, Cardiff, 2010

register, and by listening again, in that poetic space, also to at least the possibility of an autistic register.

To create this imaginary space, the following inter-related methodological approaches are used:

1. The creation of a mythological telling of autistic being, which can function as a sacred myth
2. The development of this mythic framework into a hermeneutic with distinct features
3. The bringing of this mythic autistic hermeneutic into dialogue with the thinking of the "Glasgow school" of literature and theology which has emerged during the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries
4. The use of the resulting literary-theological autistic hermeneutic in a radical re-visioning to critique and subvert norms, both of theological thinking and of narratives which pathologise autism.

The methodological approach is to develop an interdisciplinary conversation, where different perspectives reciprocally listen to each other to create a new, inter-disciplinary hermeneutic with possibilities for each to re-envision a coming together into something new. Poetic and mythological thinking will be the hermeneutical tool for the different perspectives to read each other. The three perspectives, or hermeneutic conversation partners, are the literary, the theological, and the autistic, each one metaphorically and mythically envisioned. This autism will, therefore, be a poetically and mythically thought autism, stemming from the clinical narrative but operating very otherly, as a mythic, literary-theological narrative.

Is this legitimate? A way to explain the inter-disciplinarity which creates hermeneutical conversations and syntheses is as follows.

An inter-disciplinary situation: ecceitas

One metaphor for this thesis is that of being on, and as, an interdisciplinary bridge[7] – in fact, stretching the metaphor, a three-way bridge. The bridge adds something in fact not only to each discipline but perhaps also something new in its own right. Certainly, LTA has done this. Creating this particular bridge is a venturesome exploration, and can also be considered as follows.

Another illustration of what the inter-disciplinarity of this thesis attempts is the rhetorical device of creative neologism, in particular, as discussed in chapter four, the poet-priest Gerard Manley Hopkins' term *ecceitas*.

The word *ecceitas* is used only once in the extant corpus of Hopkins' writing. Could it not be a slip of the pen, when he really meant *haecceitas*? Slips of the pen can often reveal more of the writer's real intent than the words that were on the surface intended, shaping poems in unexpected, deeper connections. Writing *ecce* when you mean *haec* would betray exactly such a meeting of two strands of thought at an unconscious level. So *ecceitas* emerges as a powerful neologism, fusing *ecce* ['behold'] with *haecceitas* ['this-ness'], and it becomes such a powerful concept that it can express an entire poetics, as chapter four will discuss.

However, this need not be only a 'happy accident.' *Ecceitas* can certainly be seen as a conscious word play. One of Hopkins' most distinctive rhetorical devices is his innovative creation of neologisms, formed by pushing two words together to form a new compound word. He does this frequently, to create new ways for paired words to inhabit each other. For example, in *The Candle Indoors,* the neologistic pairs "beam-blind" and "deft-handed" create new, polyphonous possibilities. Is "beam-blind" to be as blind as a beam of wood, or blinded by a beam of wood, or blinded by a dazzling beam of light, or the blindness of a beam of light which shines but is not shined upon? There is a new

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[7] Similar, in a way, to Elwood Reid's 2013-14 TV series The Bridge, where the autistic character Sonya Cross creates her own, idiosyncratic way of being on the bridge of personal relationships ("Showrunner Elwood Reid said that they have a specialist 'autism consultant' (Alex Plank) for Diane Kruger's character, Sonia. He is on set and will comment on every script and episode.") see http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2406376/

world of possibilities simply by bringing these two words together. *Ecceitas* as a 'behold-this-ness' could be read as an inter-disciplinary, revisionary new creation in Christ.[8]

Similarly, this interdisciplinary thesis is a speculative venture for new possible worlds. Hopkins' neologism "deft-handed" might suggest that "left-handed" has been transformed into a new deftness. Similarly, in the inter-disciplinary field of Literature, Theology and the Arts,[9] art is read theologically and theology is read as poetic discourse. This is not a 'definitive' project where art "is" theology, or theology "is" art, '*QED*.' Rather, it is the offering of one possible hermeneutic strategy, to be brought into the space which Robert Detweiler calls "reading religiously,"[10] where voices speak and listen in reverence to each other's perspectives. A literary-theological hermeneutic is a reading strategy which reads the theological and the poetic/artistic in mutual harmony to create a new literary-theological thinking.

The second level of 'speculative venture' in this thesis is to bring another voice, marginal and divergent, into the conversation. This is the voice of autism, to argue for a "deft-handedness" of an autistic perceptive style of thinking. The project imagines a new "deft-handedness" of a possible autistic-literary-theological hermeneutic. This is a creative speculation, and can only be a tentative suggestion for possible new directions. Its aim is to draw on threads from understandings of three sides of a triangle – art, theology and autism – to create a new tapestry. There are many discourses to choose from in each side of the triangle: aesthetic thinkings, theological positions, and ways to envision

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[8] 1 Corinthians 5.17; also, as chapter three will discuss, in terms of Heideggerian disclosure and Becoming; 'theo-poetic' refers to

[9] This venture of new conversations has been pioneered largely at the University of Glasgow's Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts: "Literature, Theology and the Arts at Glasgow (LTA) is an innovatory, multi-disciplinary space for the study of the intersection of religion and culture. … LTA was founded by Professor David Jasper. Although LTA's base is Theology and Religious Studies, within the School of Critical Studies, it has close links with other subject areas within the University of Glasgow, particularly English Literature and Art History. … has close ties with the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture … LTA was the inspiration for the founding of the Oxford University Press journal *Literature and Theology,* of which Professor heather Walton is the editor." [*Literature, Theology and the Arts at Glasgow,* http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/critical/research/researchcentresandnetworks/literaturetheologyandtheartsatglasgow/]

[10] Detweiler, Robert, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction* (San Francisco; Harper & Row, 1989)

autism. The author of this thesis has practised a creative art in selecting forms of discourse, in an attempt to listen sensitively ['reading religiously'] for possible ways of thinking which might be particularly hospitable to each other. The thinking is that each side of the triangle is informed by listening to itself and equally to the other two sides. Hopkins' neologistic synthesis is a transgression of the dictionary in creative 'erring,'[11] and choosing ways to bring elements of autistic, poetic and theological thinking is a similar, transgressive 'erring,' in the hope of 'travelling into' a fruitful new territory. Detweiler's 'reading religiously' has a gentle, playful quality, 'trying things out' to see what happens, and 'what happens' in the literary-theological-autistic hermeneutic developed in this thesis hopes to have listened, and perhaps also to be heard.

Why poetry?

Temple Grandin has created a dominant narrative as she describes a characteristic of her autistic relationship to the world as 'thinking in pictures.'[12] Similarly, Steven Wiltshire's astonishing line drawings replicate city-scapes in an amazingly accurate representational picture on the page.[13] The other narrative which has major currency is autists perceiving the world in terms of mathematics, computer code and systems.[14] However, autists known to the writer of this thesis find meaningful and creative interactions with the world in other ways –movement (roller blading), crafting (felt art) gardening (interaction with nature) – no doubt there are many other modes of autistic being in the world. What about words? Is it possible for autists to revel in words as a special interest and an inner mode of representing the world? In fact, contrary to the prevalent narrative of autists invariably as 'computer geniuses' or mathematicians, autists are often poets, and autism community websites often

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[11] This refers to the double meaning of 'erring' as a mistake or a wandering into new territory, as it will be discussed in reference to its use by Hölderlin, Blanchot and Mark C Taylor.
[12] Grandin, Temple, TED talk
http://www.ted.com/talks/temple_grandin_the_world_needs_all_kinds_of_minds?language=en, accessed 16/11/2014
[13] http://www.designboom.com/architecture/stephen-wiltshire-draws-manhattan-skyline-from-memory/).
[14] See Baron-Cohen, et al., *The autism spectrum quotient (AQ): Evidence from Asperger syndrome/high-functioning autism, males and females, scientists and mathematicians.* Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 31, 5-17

include poetry posted by members.[15] In her TED talk (see above), Grandin also mentions hyperlexia as another autistic trait, and Hermelin and Frith also discuss autistic poetry.[16] For the creative space of LTA to listen to autistic perception, and possibly vice versa, seeking creative possibilities to create a tapestry of autistic-poetic threads in Christian belief involves following tangled threads. The treads are tangled, because this is not an easy choice and not, in fact, for the autist herself, an easy situation to live in. This thesis will argue that it can, however, unlock a real and new creative potential. Autistic perception, 'taking things literally,' is an unchosen given which transgresses the rules of how language is received and expressed. Being autistic in the territory of poetry is difficult, and resisting its lure is all too easy, but if words 'call' to the autist, the effort to listen to them might yield an authentic fulfilment of being.

In what follows, it will be evident that examining metaphor as a rhetorical strategy is crucial in the thinking of this thesis. Immediately, this raises the question of how an autistic writer can negotiate metaphor. This is in fact precisely what this thesis itself sets out to examine. In the conclusion, the "I" of the text speculates on learning to read (and by implication, write). For now, it stands that some autistic people like words, and some autistic people have, or long to have, faith.

The faith of the autistic author

What about faith, expressed in a quest for theological vision? This is even more daunting and difficult. In terms of the theological journey of the "I" writing this thesis, an important distinction needs to be made, between a 'good autism' and a 'bad autism.' 'Good autism' is the integrity of autism seeking ways to respond to the divine, choosing, by faith, to inhabit (not ignore) the difficulties. In this thesis, a 'bad autism'[17] is a theological fundamentalism

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[15] eg, https://ravenswingpoetry.com/autism-and-asperger-poetry/

[16] See Hermelin, Beate, *Bright Splinters of the Mind: A Personal Story of Research with Autistic Savants* (London, UK; Jessica Kingsley Press, 2001), and Frith, *Autism: Explaining the Enigma* pp.121ff, discussing "Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater" and the delight in words.

[17] This is an echo of the autism writer Christine Trevett's expression 'the autistic cruelty of the neurotypical [non-autistic];' a 'bad autism' which ironically seems autistic through adopting a non-reflective stance, missing other possible hermeneutic dimensions. "Good" and "bad" autism

which 'takes words literally' without allowing for any need for other hermeneutic strategies, such as a poetic dimension of the text. Fundamentalist literalism is one of a range of hermeneutic strategies, but for the purposes of this thesis, which seeks to envision an autistic inhabitation of the literary-theological, it is rejected because it lacks the "three-dimensionality" of the holism aimed for here. A "good autist" would approach a literal reading of Scripture and say, "but this is nonsense; God didn't make the world in seven days – the earth formed over billions of years." A "good autist" would most likely resemble what Paul Tillich calls the "honest atheist,"[18] and this is, as will be seen, a key to this thesis' furnishing of the literary-theological-autistic room. Atheism can be an authentic response to theology when, as Tillich writes,

> In making God an object beside other objects, the
> existence and nature of which are matters of argument,
> theology supports the escape to atheism … the first step
> to atheism is always a theology which drags God down
> to the level of doubtful things. The game of the atheist
> is then very easy. For he is perfectly justified in
> destroying such a phantom and all its ghostly qualities.[19]

As a good autistic atheist, Christopher, the protagonist in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* debunks religion and the supernatural. After his mother's (apparent) death, he asks the vicar about God, heaven and the afterlife, and when his questions become too probing, the vicar is easily out-manoeuvred:

> And I replied, 'But where is God?'
> And the Reverend Peters said that we should talk about
> this on another day when he had more time.[20]

Discussing Spiritualism and the Cottingley Fairies photograph allegedly of "fairies," Christopher's logic leads him to conclude that "fairies are made out of paper and you can't talk to someone who is dead."[21]

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will be discussed further in the conclusion. They will also be compared, in the glossary following this introduction, to the "good" autistic zero degree of empathy as proposed by Baron Cohen.

[18] Honest atheism is a fundamental starting point for each chapter, and how they work as a whole; see Mindfulness of Separation in the glossary. Chapters one and three discuss Christian atheism, and chapter three discusses the absence of God encountered in mystical theology; chapters four and five see poetic presence as a freedom to absent itself from propositional narrative.

[19] Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* pp. 52-3

[20] Haddon, Mark, The *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (London, UK; Penguin/Vintage 2004) p.43

[21] ibid. p.113

There is, however, a literary-theological reading of Christopher's honest atheism which lifts faith into the realm of "fairies made out of paper," and this is to read his atheism in the light of poetic faith. Where the Reverend Peters has left in defeat (he never does find more time on another day), Haddon's narrative in fact offers a space for the reader to become the vicar. There are narrative possibilities which make it tempting to perform a slip of the pen (see below) and discern a "Curious case of the God in the Night-time," and in a real sense this could be a valid alternative title for this thesis.[22] "Fairies made out of paper" are the power of paper – the image, the book – to bring the image into being, not in a superstitious belief but in Coleridge's poetic "willing suspension of disbelief."[23] In fact Christopher himself does this, becoming poignantly and perhaps unconsciously contemplative and lyrical when he thinks of the molecules of his mother's cremated body: "Sometimes I look up into the sky and I think that there are molecules of Mother up there, or in clouds over Africa or the Antarctic, or coming down as rain in the rainforests in Brazil, or in snow somewhere.[24] He is, in fact, imaginatively creating an afterlife of his mother.

At another level, the reader can become a vicar by vicariously acting for the vicar, answering Christopher's question. The narrative resurrects his mother, when the deception of her death is unmasked, and her resurrection body is more glorious in their new relationship, mediated by the tenderness of her letters to him. Even, and perhaps because, of her disingenuously illiterate letters, she is able to forge a deeper bond with him. The reader, as vicar, answers "where God is," by replying that God is in the providence of the text. Fairies are made of paper, and seeing fairies correctly means seeing them in the paper. This is the enormous leap of faith demanded by a literary-theological hermeneutic, which operates from the conviction of honest atheism and yet affirms a kind of faith.

To use another metaphor, an autism-literature-theology hermeneutic strategy is a bridge-building exercise between these three modes of being and seeing. It is perhaps a supremely difficult bridge to build, given the "oddness"

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[22] A future project will develop this reading of a "Curious Incident" more fully, but it is only outlined here.
[23] Coleridge, S T (eds. James Engell & W Jackson Bate), *Biographia Literaria* in Collected Works vol VII (Princeton, USA; Princeton University Press, 1983) *part* 2.6
[24] *Curious Incident* pp. 43-44

of travelling from autism into literature and theology, or poetic theology. This writer approaches precisely these difficult territories, from a conviction that if brought to these places, precisely in and as its difficulties, autism could offer a radical new view from on the bridge – perhaps even a new place in its own right.

This 'place' is a discourse intended as a refuge for the autist-poet-believer who, like Hopkins and, in different but related ways, examined in this thesis, exists on the margins of mainstream poetics and theology and yet, are also on the bridge. For Hopkins, the bridge is the creative tension of his being, as poet-priest and priest-poet. Perhaps the Glasgow University CLTA would have been a refuge for Hopkins, and as a priest in an inner-city Glasgow parish, he might have been a frequent visitor. A refuge for autistic faith is, similarly, intended to be a space of discourse, a place of particularly comfortable hospitality. The 'room' designed for it aims to meet its requirements, and the thinking of these will be discussed below.

The refuge might find few autistic 'takers,' because it is so extremely hard to reach and so 'out of the way.' Even if so, it would still be of value. The voice of what this thesis calls a universal autism [see glossary], even were there no autists here (bar one) to speak it, would be offered to theological thinking, and specifically a poetic theological thinking, as a way of seeing what one can perhaps even learn from an autistic view. The reason for bringing these particular literary, theological and the autistic modes of seeing together arises from the uniquely situated perception of a situation where, this thesis will argue, "deep calls to deep."

"Deep calls to deep:" echoing metaphors

The locus for listening to autism in this thesis is the inter-disciplinary area of literature and theology. Before exploring the contours of this territory, it needs to be stated at the outset that the origin of this thesis is a sense of being where Psalm 42 says "deep calls to deep."[25] A 'depth' of the thinking where literature and theology have met in the twentieth/twenty-first centuries

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[25] "Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me" (Psalm 42.7); this is also a sense of overwhelming, which will be considered in terms of art/theology/disability.

meets a 'depth' of autism. Both are conceived in the double metaphoric meaning of depth; a place of descent ("I'm in at the *deep* end") and a place of value ("*deep*ly meaningful").[26]

Another metaphor, akin to this depth and overwhelming, ("all your waves and breakers have swept over me") is darkness, but it is also dually conceived, being a paradoxical darkness which is also dazzling light.[27] Autism will be represented as this 'darkness' which is paradoxically also dazzling light, but it meets with depth and darkness, primarily at least, not within the discourses of practical theology or theology of disability.[28] The particular understandings of depth and darkness which are invited into conversation are drawn from the inter-disciplinarity of literature and theology, because it is the thesis of this author that autism calls out to them, illumining them and perhaps also being illumined by them, but always, in this paradox.

A third metaphor for the common ground in this conversation is liminality. Together with the paradoxes of 'the deep end' being 'deeply meaningful' and the darkness being dazzling light, the third paradox this thesis wants to establish is that of the marginal being the true centre. This means that ex-centricity is in fact the true centre, and consequently, the 'eccentric' perception will be validated as both deep-end meaning and dazzling darkness. Metaphoric or mythic narratives of autism in these terms will be constructed. To contextualise this, the territory of literature and theology needs to be explored briefly, and then possible reasons for listening to autism can be explained. The aim is that each of all three: autism, literature and theology, should be honoured and validated in the light of each other.

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[26] This also echoes Tillich's existentialist sermon *The Depth of Existence*, where his texts are 1 Corinthians 2.10 (But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God) and Psalm 130.1 (Out of the depths have I cried to thee, O Lord) (Tillich, Paul, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (Harmondsworth, UK; Penguin, 1963 (1949) p.59

[27] This is the 'self-consuming' metaphorical language of Dionysius the Areopagite's mystical theology, which will be explored in chapter two.

[28] Practical theology and theology of disability are relevant, especially in the light of the 'Autism Speaks' controversy (see footnote 1). Practical theology and theology of disability will be discussed in the next section, but this thesis does not strictly operate within these disciplinary fields.

Literature and Theology – an inter-disciplinary space

If autism knows, *par excellence*, how to live 'on the margins,'[29] perhaps it is no accident that it enters conversation with literature-and-theology, as another discourse of marginality. David Jasper writes, perhaps not entirely humorously, that

> In recent times the study of 'literature and theology' or 'literature and religion' has been granted, if often somewhat grudgingly, its place in the curriculum of the academy, often uncomfortably suspended between academic departments of literature and theology.[30]

Being "uncomfortably suspended" is not an accident which should be too hastily dealt with by the administrative policies of the academy, at least in terms of how it is thought – although, of course, at that level, being given a place is very important. Glasgow University's Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts ['CLTA'] was an important and extremely fruitful development, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, as was the emergence of the journal *Literature and Theology*. Without this hospitable, creative academic environment, this thesis could not have been written.[31]

However, the creativity of this research space perhaps depends on the fact of being "uncomfortably suspended." The depth of the twentieth/twenty-first century 'Literature, Theology & the Arts' (LTA) conversation could be seen to stem from its conscious existence within the depth of an abyss of a post-Christian, paradoxical theological thinking. The American a-theological thinker of LTA, Mark C Taylor, uses two powerful images which express the nature of this abyss. Barry Moser's untitled lithograph,[32] as the frontispiece to Taylor's 1984 book *Erring: A postmodern A/theology*, shows a huge, underground, rugged crevasse, with widening fissures splintering out from it. The landscape above conceals this crevasse from view, if it were seen from the surface, but

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[29] In the sense that autists, with divergent thinking styles and difficulties in the social and communicative domains, are frequently 'on the outside,' as will be discussed.
[30] Jasper, David, The Study of Literature and Theology, in Hass, Andrew, Jasper, David & Jay, Elizabeth (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of Literature and Theology, published online http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/ DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199544486.001.0001, September 2009
[31] see http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/critical/research/researchcentresandnetworks/literaturetheologyandtheartsatglasgow/ and http://litthe.oxfordjournals.org/
[32] see frontispiece artwork, Taylor, Mark C, *Tears* (New York; State University of New York Press, 1990)

that landscape itself is being struck by a lightning bolt. The abyss, in theological terms, has always been there, as the mystics' apophatic writings indicate. However, it is the ebbing of the sea of faith might burst the landscape open to reveal it; and it is art which dis-closes it.[33] The abyss figures also in Taylor's second frontispiece art work, this time in his 1989 book *Tears.* This image is a black and white photo of Enrique Espinoza's art installation *The Silence of Jesus.* [34]

Espinoza's installation is of two jagged black shapes which, when seen from a certain angle, as in the photo, reveal a profile where the empty space between them is the shape of the crucifix. The statue could be called an anti-statue, since its object, the image of Christ, is a non-object: it is an absence, and a void. Christ is 'not there,' and in fact *is the* not-there. The moment you move, to walk around or walk away, "he's gone." The abyss is of Christ emptied into nothingness,[35] and, as Taylor writes, "in the postmodern world, the Disaster takes place (without taking place) *in* art *as* art."[36] It is understood as an absence, where Christ is 'not there,' yet the 'not there' is Christ, if seen from a certain viewpoint. This is a 'two-fold' abyss, as an abyss of theology and an abyss of literature and the arts; and this abyss offers a salvific (post-holocaust) space for their meeting.

David Jasper argues that the nature of this abyss lies in the way LTA (Literature, Theology and the Arts) inhabits the 'failure' of religion (but a 'failure' which remains at the heart of the Christian tradition itself, which will be a profound (deep, again) understanding of "the [salvific] foolishness of the gospel" [1 Corinthians 1.18]). Jasper quotes Terry Eagleton:

> In his book Literary Theory: An Introduction, Terry Eagleton offers as a 'single explanation' for the rise of the study of English literature in the nineteenth century, 'the failure of religion'. From the early twentieth century Eagleton (1996, p.20) quotes from the inaugural lecture of a Professor of English Literature at

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[33] The role of art is also the 'disaster' of the 'unpresentable before,' which Taylor also sees in *Paysage Foudroyé* (Taylor, *Tears* p.7)

[34] see frontispiece art, Taylor, Mark C, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1984)

[35] A kenotic Jesus of non-being is crucial to an absolute thinking of the disabled God which develops Eiesland's thinking by bringing it into the arena of a literary-theological sensibility of disability as abyss.

[36] Taylor, *Tears* p.10

> Oxford, George Gordon: 'England is sick, and … English literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State.'[37]

Eagleton's, and Gordon's argument for the apparent eclipse of "religion" and its replacement by the novel would suggest that LTA would more accurately be "LA-T" (Literature and Art minus Theology). However a "more nuanced" and thought-provoking mutuality of theological and literary thinking is traced by Jasper in the writing of Austin Farrer, in the early twentieth century. Farrer, Jasper argues, offers "a generally more sophisticated debate about the relationship between literature and theology," so that the recovery of an authentic LTA "has its roots in the work of an Oxford New Testament scholar and theologian, Austin Farrer." Farrer explores the relationship between "'the sense of metaphysical philosophy, the sense of scriptural revelation, and the sense of poetry.'"[38] This is an offense to theology, inasmuch as Farrer reads Scripture "as if it were *literature* rather than a record of historical facts."[39] However, when the critic Helen Gardner respects Farrer's 'profoundly poetic and Christian imagination'[40] the possibility of poetry thought theologically and theology thought poetically opens up. Jasper has already discerned this thinking in Coleridge.[41] Further 'heretical' creative moves such as Farrer's are argued by Michel de Certeau to be at work in the sixteenth century mystics, in the context of a similar ferment of creative writing.[42] In the light of Eagleton's thinking of literature in the context of the eclipse of theology, LTA can be seen in the light of the abyss of that eclipse where Scripture moves into *literature* rather than a record of historical facts."[43] It is also abyss in the sense of poetry itself, where

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[37] Jasper, David, *The Study of Literature and Theology,* 9

[38] Farrer's Bampton lectures for 1948, published as *The Glass of Vision* p.ix, quoted in Jasper, *The Study of Literature and* Theology (citation not given)

[39] Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Theology*

[40] Gardner, Helen, *The Limits of Literary Criticism: Reflections on the Interpretation of Poetry and Scripture* (1956), p.36, quoted in Jasper, ibid.

[41] see Jasper, David, *Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker* (Pittsburgh, USA; Pittsburgh Theological Monographs, 1985)

[42] In *The Mystic Fable,* de Certeau argues that in the thirteenth century the influence of the courtly love genre works for the "mythification of love," accompanying the "demythification" of religion (p.4). This could be seen as a parallel to Eagleton's confluence of the novel's advance and theology's erosion. De Certeau argues for a similar 'creative abyss' situation emerging from this, where finally in its shadow the sixteenth century mystics can write what this thesis will term apophatic fiction (see chapter two).

[43] Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Theology*

poetry can occupy the site of the disaster as witness. When theodicy becomes obscene in post-holocaust thought, and the demise of Christendom silences theological discourse, the bottomless claims of metaphor can become the powerful poetry of the cry of dereliction.[44] Heather Walton discusses this possibility in *When Love is Not True,* writing: "My own journey into interdisciplinarity was largely provoked by the inadequacy of theological responses to the age-old problem of evil."[45] Walton continues, quoting David Jenkins:

> The dreadful thing about so much theology is that, in relation to so much of the human situation, it is so superficial … Theologians need to stand under the judgements of the insights of literature before they can speak with true theological force of and to the world this literature reflects and illuminates.[46]

This is a real, kenotic and vulnerable 'disabled' theology; Walton writes elsewhere that "literature resists being assimilated by theology in order to communicate the insights of faith … it cannot be simply and effectively appropriated in this way and is as likely to confound our understandings of faith as to confirm them."[47] This is a vulnerability involving "wrestling long and hard with intractable problems and (recognising) that there is spiritual value in facing ambivalence without denying religious and political obligations … through discomforting processes of radical critique."[48] This is a discourse of a searching for authenticity, and the territory it leads to in this thesis is the a-theological and the apophatic, as will become clear. When theology becomes a-theology, the abyss of the a-theological text can be thought as a reading of this poetic

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[44] Maurice Blanchot writes that "The poem is the answer's absence." (*The Space of Literature* p.247) (Blanchot, Maurice (trans. Smock, Ann), The Space of Literature, (L'espace littéraire) (Nebraska; University of Nebraska Press, 1982 (Editions Gallimard, France, 1955))

[45] Walton, Heather (ed.) Literature and Theology: New Interdisciplinary Spaces (Surrey, UK; Ashgate, Surrey, England, 2011) p.45

[46] David Jenkins quoted in Jasper, David, The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture (Massachusetts, USA; Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p.4, quoted in Walton, Literature and Theology p.44; Jenkins, the scandalously radical bishop of Durham, gained infamy by stating publicly that he did not believe in the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection. The Bible was literature, not history, to Jenkins, and the gospel was at heart the compassion resulting in the concern for social justice. Uncannily, days after Jenkins' scandalously 'heretical' public remarks in 1984, Durham Cathedral was struck by lightning. Perhaps this was the backdrop (or the zeitgeist hand of God) when in 1990, Mark C Taylor C in the USA similarly wrote about radical theology in the figure of the Paysage Foudroyé (see footnote 11). Jenkins died as the final draft of this thesis was being written, in September 2016.

[47] Walton, Introduction, in *Literature and Theology* p.2

[48] ibid.

abyss.[49] In this sense, a theology of disability is shifted to a disability of theology, and a deeply theological disability, of the kenotic Christ. In all of this, authenticity in the face of the abyss is brought under the scrutiny of a particular autistic integrity, which will be developed as a paradoxical (dis)ability.

Liminality and abyss are two of the metaphors for this conversation. The third is darkness, and the paradox of a dazzlingly bright darkness will be an essential metaphor where LTA and autism can converse. In terms of LTA, this 'darkness' will be seen in the eclipse Michel de Certeau argues for, where writers of mystical theology become poets as an apophatic theological strategy. In the framing of 'deep calls to deep,' the liminal space of darkness will be explained, in the conclusion of this thesis, as lived experience where a thesis journey has been sited precisely in darkness, not negating or annulling it. In this darkness Dante's journey also begins, with its understanding of *Inferno, Purgatorio* and P*aradiso*, where

> nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,
> mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
> ché la diritta via era smarrita.
> [Midway in the path of our life
> I found [rediscovered] myself in [by means of] a dark
> wood
> Whose right path was lost][50]

In the light of LTA's liminality, abyss and darkness, the conversation with autism can now be framed. This will be developed in the following chapters, once the terms for understanding autism have been established. It begins with what will be seen as another intimately related metaphor, which is the narrative of autistic separation. To create a mythic framework for this, the paradoxical nature of all these metaphors can begin from the inversions at work in the 'holy fool' archetype.

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[49] Mark C Taylor performs these readings in *Erring: A Postmodern a-theology* (1984) and *Tears* (1989), and Taylor's thought will provide a vital narrative, which will appear in chapter one.
[50] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia [The Divine Comedy] – Inferno* 1.1 [this writer's own translation]; *mi ritrov*ai suggests, perhaps (another direction to be reserved for future research) re-finding the self is *as per* the wood, rather than by seeing the wood as an unfortunate error. This would be a Dantean forerunner of Taylor's *Erring*

Creating a mythical autism: "Making Fools of us All"

This thesis brings an autistic hermeneutic to bear on theological thinking. It argues that sharing marginal spaces with similarly "abnormal" narratives, an autistic theology can be viewed as "the wisdom of God [which] is wiser than human wisdom."[51] This draws on the holy fool narrative, where the "fool" ironically enacts God's narrative where "He catches the wise in their craftiness."[52] Autism, which seems foolish to the non-autistic world offers a narrative which enacts the wisdom of God.

Uta Frith describes this as the power to "make fools of us all," and the context of her remark is a good place to start, because it offers a way in to seeing dimensions of this power. Frith describes Peter Sellers' character Chance ('Chauncey'), in Hal Ashby's 1979 film *Being There,* as an "autistic hero,"[53] and speculates that his autism challenges the norm, exposing qualities of the non-autistic world, so that this encounter with autism "makes fools of us all."[54] This is a profound, ironic exposure of the folly of the non-autistic, which inverts the idea of foolishness. This thesis explores this inversion, to argue that autistic "foolishness" can be conceived of as the wisdom of the holy fool.

The title of Ashby's film is a reference to Heidegger's *Dasein,* which in English is translated as "Being there," and this authentic being of *Dasein* is a good way to approach how the autist as "holy fool" is viewed in this thesis.

Chance is a simple-minded gardener, unable to fend for himself when he thrust out into the world from a mysteriously sheltered life. He really is a fool, ignorant, naïf, and misunderstanding much of what he sees, but his simplicity and literal-mindedness is a liberation from the constructions of what Heidegger calls *Das Man,* the voice of conformity in a culture where people don't think for themselves. His exclusion from *Das Man* is Heideggerian by giving him the ability to think more truly. In front of the White House, looking in towards the epitome of worldly power, Chauncey turns away to look at a tree, and tells the guard at the gates "this tree is sick." This "true seeing" need not be (exclusively) a

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[51] 1 Corinthians 1.25 (NIV)
[52] Job 5.13 (NIV)
[53] Uta Frith, *Autism: Explaining the Enigma,* (Massachusetts, USA; Blackwell Publishing, 2003) p.106
[54] Ibid., p. 133

metaphorical, ironic social commentary on the 'organism' of political power, although this is an important good reading of it, as an early example of how Chauncey "makes fools of us all," repeatedly throughout the film. However, it can also be read, at a deeper level, as a reference to Heidegger's essay *What is called Thinking?* Heidegger also writes about what it is to gaze at a tree:

> when we think through what this is, that a tree in bloom
> presents itself to us so that we can come and stand
> face-to-face with it, the thing that matters first and
> foremost, and finally, is not to drop the tree in bloom,
> but for once to let it stand where it stands."
> Why do we say "finally?" Because to this day, thought
> has never let the tree stand where it stands.[55]

Heidegger's description of truly seeing the tree, beyond the constructions imposed by "thought," means an ability to outwit the thinking of Western metaphysics, to access the tree's pure "being there."

Sellers' character, then, operates as a "wise fool" in two senses. Firstly, his naïf truth-telling cuts through the artifices of the "sickness" of contemporary society, as represented by the tree. Secondly, his ability as a simple gardener truly to see the tree indicates a simplicity which is in fact the kind of deeply seen philosophical wisdom Heidegger is alluding to when he writes, "the day may come when someone will find the sentence ("being is") astonishing."[56] Everything is astonishing to Chauncey, who lives in a state of amazement of what to others is commonplace.

A third level of understanding Sellers' character is to consider him as a Biblical archetype. As the gardener who is cast out of the garden, he is Adam, then meeting his Eve (the temptress educating him in the ways of the world). However as Christ, the "second Adam," he is a mysterious figure, who, when he is evicted from his home, leaves the lawyers' questions about his identity unanswered.[57] Finally, establishing his Christ-like nature, the film ends with the image of him walking on water.

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[55] Heidegger, Martin (trans. Gray, G & Wieck, F), *What is Called Thinking? (Wass Heisst Denken?),* (New York; Harper & Row, 1968 (1954)), p.44

[56] Ibid., p.180

[57] "Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."" (John 8.19, NIV)

Social critique by the purity of autistic "naivete" is an important area worth exploring, and this will feature at points in this thesis. However, thinking of autism in terms of *Dasein* and the Christ-like holy fool narrative forms the basis of this thesis, which takes autism into the thinking of the marginal spaces of "foolish" narratives in literature and theology. The argument of this thesis is that an autistic hermeneutic can breathe new life into theological thinking, in its re-visioning of marginal narratives where the marginal figures of the autist, the mystic and the Christian atheist are mutually empowering.

1. Hear my voice: a theological approach to the margins

A Neurotribal Approach – Steve Silberman

The approach of this thesis can also be considered as asking the question, as a thought experiment: what would happen if theological hermeneutics were to make a conscious effort to re-focus as an autistic epistemology? Could this be an 'inter-faith' exercise in celebrating diversity? Could it even be, as this thesis argues, that the divergent perception style of autism offers a valuable theological insight? This is in keeping with the philosophy set out in Steve Silberman's 2015 '*Neurotribes*: *The legacy of Autism, and how to think smarter about people who think differently.*' Silberman defines neurodiversity as

> the notion that conditions like autism, dyslexia, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) should be regarded as naturally occurring cognitive variations with distinctive strengths that have contributed to the evolution of technology and culture rather than mere checklists of deficits and dysfunctions.[58]

Thinking about autistic people as a "tribe" who "think differently" with a "distinctive strength" would offer the possibility of moving autism out of a narrative of pathology into celebration of its contribution to a pluralism of world views. Silberman adds that "the idea of neurodiversity has inspired the

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[58] Steve Silberman, *Neurotribes: The legacy of Autism, and how to think smarter about people who think differently* (London, UK; Allen & Unwin, 2015) p.16

creation of a rapidly growing civil rights movement,"[59] and in accord with this recognition that 'being different is not being inferior,' a term used often in this thesis is 'validation;' affirmation of validity.

A theological approach: John Swinton

A theology of love, approaching the lived experience of autists, would seek to honour neurodiversity, and this approach is put forward in John Swinton's 2012 *Reflections on Autistic Love: What Does Love Look Like?* Swinton defines disability theology as a seeking "to give theological voice to people and experiences that have not been taken seriously in the construction of theology."[60] In the case of autism, this voice, for Swinton, "may be counter-cultural and perhaps counter-intuitive, but … nonetheless authentic.[61] The scope and aim of Swinton's research here is "listening to the stories of people with autism," so that this "may actually be the beginning of opening up a new discourse about the nature of love."[62]

Swinton puts this listening into practice, and as a result is able to challenge the perception that autists are "thin" people, lacking in emotional depth and incapable of meaningful forms of love. Instead, in listening to autistic people he discerns radically different ways of experiencing and expressing love. This is a powerful 'antidote' to the hateful rhetoric of attempts to silence and discount autism's very being. (As voiced, notably, in the "I am Autism" campaign of *Autism Speaks* [see footnote 1]). It is deeply theological, both as the practical thinking of the gospel in the loving act of listening to autistic people; but also, perhaps more deeply theological, in an open-ness to new modes of theological thinking which consider autistic love as a valid mode of human experience. This is a powerful statement, seeing autistic being as a valued part of creation and not an 'enemy.'[63]

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Swinton, John, Reflections on Autistic Love: What does Love Look Like? (Practical Theology vol. 5, 2012, issue 3), quoting John Swinton, Disability Theology, in Ian McFarland, David Fergusson, Karen Kilby and Iain Torrance (eds.), Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[61] Ibid. p.275

[62] ibid.

[63] As a literary-theological project, this thesis does not explore the politics of disability within the Church, but assumes that an authentic gospel honours diversity including disability. Although

Autism as gift

This thesis acknowledges that some aspects of autism function as a disability in the everyday life of people with autism, and that the clinical narrative is useful in elucidating how autism manifests itself, for diagnosis and designing appropriate support. However it also draws on the thinking of the autism advocacy movement which sees people with autism not as disabled but as differently abled.[64] Taking insights from both perspectives, it views autism as both a challenge and a strength. However, this is not simply challenge-and-strength, but challenge-as-strength. Autism as a challenge ('disability') is inverted by thinking the disability itself, theologically, as a gift, also as the gift of disability itself. Firstly, this is a spiritual gift because it offers insights into a theological understanding of 'disability' as a way of envisioning the human condition in terms of creaturely status and the Fall. Recognising this very disability as a universal truth (on the autistic spectrum) is a new form of thinking a Barthian *Krisis*, not as the separation of human sinfulness but as an existential need for grace in the face of a universal human autistic separation from God. This can engender a new level of self-knowledge and humility in the outworking of faith. Secondly, at a deeper level, however, it also speculates on an autism of God as transcendence. Thinking of an autistic God as disabled makes sense at Calvary, where total disability becomes total ability in kenotic sacrifice. Ultimately, this will be a separation within and from God, expressed in the mythological narrative of Thomas Altizer's gospel of Christian atheism.

This thinking of transcendence as mindfulness of separation co-exists, in the paradox indicated by apophatic theology, with a thinking of immanence as autistic fascination. Like two sides of a coin, these two modes of thought are envisioned together at a mythical, metaphoric narrative level. They co-inhere in the mythical personhood of autism, mirroring the paradoxical co-existence of

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Nancy Eiesland's *The Disabled God: Towards a Liberatory Theology of Disability* focuses more on physical disabilities and adopts a more sociological approach, her narrative to some extent underpins the kind of validation project of this thesis. For example, she criticises elements in Christian attitudes which "have treated people with disabilities as objects of pity and paternalism" (p.20); "the dissonance raised by the nonacceptance of persons with disabilities and the acceptance of grace through Christ's broken body necessitates that the church finds new ways of interpreting disability (p.23). Crucially, "In presenting his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends [Luke 24.36-39] the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the disabled God" p.100). This is echoed, in chapter three of this thesis, as the autism of God.
[64] For example, Steve Silverman's *Neurotribes*, as discussed earlier.

absence and presence in mystical theology. The giftedness of autistic dis/ability is expressed at the deepest level of poetics when absence and presence co-inhere in the thinking of an autistic abnormal literal-mindedness. Instead of being seen through a clinical narrative as a pathology, literal-mindedness is viewed as a theologically privileged way of seeing.[65] The term for this will be kenotic Incarnational metaphor which expresses both sides of the 'autism coin.' Its aim will be to read itself most profoundly in mystical theology. In summary, the aim is to argue for the marginal discourses of autistic being and mystical and a-theology to validate and support each other as legitimate theological thinking of the privileged status of dis/ability.

In an important sense, this thesis is built on Swinton's thinking of a listening to the voice of autistic love. The argument for a radical autistic hermeneutic rests on the conviction that honouring the modes of autistic perception can lead to a validation of a theological voice which attempts to listen to autism. Recalling Heather Walton's words about the need for authenticity, this would be an authentic listening to authenticity.

An autistic voice 'from the deep'

The aim of this thesis is deeply in sympathy with Swinton's, which is to listen to autism, to discern its value in all its unique and atypical glory. To construct a mythic hermeneutic is not however to ask about autistic people's religious experience, or even theological perspectives as such. Instead, it starts, as it were, from the other end. That is to say, it is to begin with an intuitive sense of autistic perception illuminate a kind of innate autism inherent in poetic, a-theological and mystical discourse. This is the attempt to address an intuitively felt need of a theological listening to autism, in this area, where deep calls to deep. Its aim is to explore how a literary-theological hermeneutic might work if it were to adopt a new perspective, using concepts drawn from the clinically observed traits which will be described in the introduction. It is a

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[65] This thinking of autism as a privileged theological epistemology differs in essence from the thinking of Olga Bogdashina and William Stillman, who view autistic being in terms of privileged spiritual experience. The two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but where Bogdashina and Stillman see perceptual/sensory traits as the mystical experience of spiritual gifts, autism and mysticism are brought together in this thesis at the level of discourse, where autism functions at the level of story, not lived experience.

'thought experiment' in how theological hermeneutics could adopt autistic epistemology at a theoretical level, not a practical one. This does draw on autistic people's constructions of experience, as a starting point for thinking of what autism is. However the point is for the theory of theological hermeneutics to consider autistic modes of seeing as a radically different *theoretical*-theological lens. An autistic hermeneutic might be taken by theological thinking as another strategy in its own array of hermeneutical possibilities. This could be expressed as an elucidation of a 'hidden autism,' not of the reader *per se,* but in the world of the text. To adopt this autistic hermeneutic would be a project to discern that inner autism in theology as a conscious strategy.

This project within the field of literature and theology works by seeking out narratives where an autistic perception might offer its strongest potential to amplify and elucidate. As the search has progressed, what has seemed most compelling has been to see a strange, divergent autistic perception as a theoretical embodiment of the radical and marginal spaces of mystical theology and a-theology. Put differently, a 'theoretical' autism of the text could be called a mythology of autism, seeing autistic traits as archetypes, present in the text, which can be discerned by entering into a theological autistic hermeneutic. This autistic perspective will be validated as a strength, and a legitimate, and even privileged hermeneutic, of real value to theology. Taking autistic perception as a privileged theological strategy means that an autistic search for authentic discourse leads to bringing atypical theological languages under scrutiny. The aim is to find a language in which an autistic theological hermeneutic can express its authenticity of 'being there.' This is an authenticity that "speaks to our condition" as we, as readers, enter into the workings of an autistic mode of being.

To do this, this thesis argues that a mythology of autistic epistemology can create a radical and legitimate hermeneutic, to elucidate and validate the discourses of absence, or more accurately, an absent presence, within mystical theology and a-theology. In a conversation between autism and its conversation partners of mysticism and a-theology, they read each other hospitably in a hermeneutical sympathy. Mythological autism's first aspect is termed '*mindfulness of separation,'* and it offers a privileged reading of absence in the text.

2. Stories of separation

Universal stories of separation

The Punjabi poet Batalvi's poem *Separation, You are King* begins and ends with the quatrain

> Let us speak of separation,
> Separation is king.
> A body that does not feel separation,
> Is dead body.[66]

Robert Scharlemann writes:

> The very universality of being is appropriable only not in
> the form of something common or general but in the
> form of the singular: inevitably, everyone asks the
> question of the meaning of being, but everyone must
> ask it as an "I."[67]

Batalvi's love poem and Scharlemann's essay express solitude, distance and difference as essential to all individuation and relationship. This is a universal separation. The essential basis of this thesis is that a particular theological thinking of a universal separation takes on a new power when it comes into dialogue with autism. Autism is the radical experience of separation; when "separation is king," in theological terms, an autistic hermeneutic can envision this universal reign as an autistic perspective.

Stories of autistic separation

The idea of the *autos* as an individual entity separated from the other is described in a reading of fairy tales by Lorna Wing:

> Perhaps they (ie, autistic children) were the reason for
> the ancient legends of 'fairy changeling' children, in

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[66] Shiv Kumar Batalvi (1936–1973), *Separation is King*, translated from Punjabi, Suman Kashyap, online access http://www.apnaorg.com/suman/batalvi_poems.html accessed 11/08/2013
[67] Scharlemann, Robert P, *Inscriptions and Reflections: Essays in Philosophical Theology* Charlottesville, Virginia; University Press of Virginia, 1989), p.33.

> which the fairies were believed to steal away a human
> baby and leave a fairy child in its place. In some
> versions of the story the changeling was remarkably
> beautiful but strange and remote from human kind.[68]

Similarly, Uta Frith sees in the fairy tales *Snow White* and *The Sleeping Beauty* a way of representing autism's separateness – the sleeping beauty is enclosed in a glass coffin, and Snow White is sleeping behind a hedge of thorns:

> The hedge of thorns or the glass coffin are perfect for
> representing the impossibility of reaching the child. In
> the case of autism, however much the child's
> appearance seems to indicate that it is normal and
> healthy ("awake"), the child's social isolation shows
> after all that it is not ("asleep").[69]

These archetypes form a story of autism that can be told as the myth of a cosmic, universal autism, which an autistic hermeneutic is in a privileged position to discern. A cosmic autism functions in this thesis as a radical and revivifying reading of the marginal theological, where separation asks demanding and important questions.

3. A trinity of mythological autism

The myth as hermeneutic framework

At its base this thesis argues that when stories of autism and separation come together they can provide a powerful framework for a new, mythically thought theological hermeneutic. This hermeneutic, drawing on an autistic mythical thinking, reads itself in hospitable discourses (which might be said to 'understand' autistic separation), and thinks in terms of an autism of the text. The power of this mythical autistic hermeneutic can give a radical, new reading of apophatic narratives of Christian mystical theology, and of a-theology. Reading these theological narratives in an autistic hermeneutic will be argued to create a new and legitimate way of theological thinking. Taking these stories of separation together, mystical/a-theological narrative becomes an autistic discourse, and autistic perception becomes a mystical/a-theological

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[68] Wing, Lorna, *The Autistic Spectrum,* p.17
[69] Frith, *Autism: Explaining the Enigma,* p.17

hermeneutic. Apophatic story-discourse and the autistic story-hermeneutic elucidate and validate each other. Operating as art/literature (with its own implicit separations from the propositional norms), a mythology of autism is drawn from new, poetic terms of reference for autism.[70] These are outlined in the glossary of original terms. The framework for developing these original terms is drawn from a range of clinical concepts of autism, and these are explained in the brief review of relevant terms which follows. The 'trinity' of mythical autism is as follows. Separation is fundamental to this story.

Mindfulness of separation: the hermeneutic of autistic separation

The archetypes given in the fairy tales above indicate that autism is isolation, and this is the first way the mythical autistic hermeneutic frames itself. By discerning narrative strategies which embody and convey distance, absence, isolation and fundamental separation, the autistic hermeneutic reads narratives of absence by using the term '*mindfulness of separation.*'

Autistic fascination: the hermeneutic of wonder

The second aspect of autistic being is the sense of wonder which is termed '*autistic fascination.*' This mythology of autistic fascination combines the wonder when autists are fascinated by the world experienced in abnormal sensory sensitivities with the wonder expressed by obsessive special interests. This is considered as a mythology of presence, and paradoxically this presence is possible only in the absence of separation: when the autist is in rapt communion "in a world of her own." This recalls the example of Chauncey Gardiner's ability of simply "Being There." Olga Bogdashina describes this as "Simply Being," and being "absorbed in" a flower or a leaf, "simply staring."[71] Ways of comparing this to poetic and religious contemplation will be important in subsequent chapters.

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[70] Later, the deeply counter-intuitive nature of this move will be discussed; for now, it stands as an experiment of art refiguring the spiritual (Mark C Taylor's term in his book of that title; Taylor, Mark C, Refiguring the Spiritual: Religion, Culture and Public Life (New York; Columbia University Press, 2012)) might listen to autism.

[71] Bogdashina, Olga, Autism and Spirituality: Psyche, Self and Spirit in People on the Autism Spectrum, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London/Philadelphia, 2013, p.191

Literal metaphor: the hermeneutic of 'foolishness'

A third, related mode of autistic being which gives the autistic hermeneutic its power is not only the interplay of absence and presence represented *in* language, but also the operation *of* language itself. Looking at the epistemological foundation of language, this third autistic mode of being comes into focus. This third autistic trait taken from the clinical narrative is what this thesis terms '*literal metaphor*.' This refers to the issue of interpretation, where autistic people encounter metaphor and 'take it literally.' In the clinical narrative, this is a pathology because it is disabling for people interacting in everyday conversation. However, taking the issue of literal mindedness into a mythological autism does the very opposite, seeing it as a powerful and radical asset. This is because in terms of a radical theological thinking of language, being 'literal' can become a poetic strategy for apophatic discourse. The particular theologically thought autistic hermeneutic developed in this way can approach discourse in a radical divergence from norms of propositional and pragmatic usage. This is an argument for an autism of apophatic theological thinking, which is a privileged reading of it. For ease of reading, and in an existential sense of inhabitation which will be explored in section 9, the 'abnormal autistic processing which interprets metaphor literally' is from now on described in the shorthand phrase 'literal metaphor.' As it is increasingly refined theologically, 'literal metaphor' will be rethought as 'incarnational metaphor.'

The autistic reader, who 'takes things literally,' will be discussed in terms of the holy fool tradition, where apparent foolishness is ironically true wisdom, in the sense that "the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of the ["normal"] world."[72]

The trinity of autistic being

These three inter-dependent facets of mythological autism, ie., mindfulness of separation, autistic fascination, and literal metaphor, work together as a reading strategy. This is a trinity following a theological Trinity of

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[72] 1 Corinthians 1.25

God, where Persons are named separately but work consubstantially, as follows. Firstly, literal metaphor operates as an absence from signification, which is a mindfulness of separation. Secondly, that absence from signification is, for that very reason itself, the self-enclosed (absent) site where presence can be realised in the wonder of autistic fascination. Fascination, divorced from the need for pragmatic signifying usage, delights in the image as presence. Both the attributes of absence and separation therefore engender and are engendered by literal metaphor. Absent-present-literal modes of this hermeneutic trinity will be considered in interweaving ways through each chapter of this thesis. At the heart of this trinity is Love, envisioned as the kenotic power of the 'zero degree positive' of autistic affective empathy.[73]

5. Mythical autistic metaphor as theological hermeneutic

The theological hermeneutic employed in this thesis reads mystical theology as a mythical narrative, working as poetic form. Similarly, it reads deconstructive a-theological thinking as a poetic telling of the myth of the death of God. With this mythological theological hermeneutic in place, the autistic mythological hermeneutic can enter into conversation with it. Autistic literal metaphor is an 'abnormal' or 'disabled' perception of figurative language, and this disability, ironically inverted into ability, will be able to act as a poetic hermeneutic of unexpected power. Investing autistic 'literal metaphor' with power means that this project can achieve its goal of bringing an autistic hermeneutic to bear on these narratives as poetic myth. Crucially, the autistic trinity operates most deeply by means of this abnormal autistic processing of metaphor. This 'literal metaphor' will be demonstrated as a powerful way to read the paradoxical language of mystical theology and a-theology. What is also implicit in literal metaphor is that myth, as 'literally'

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[73] This is to build upon Simon Baron Cohen's thinking of autism as a 'zero degree positive' of unimpaired affective empathy combined with impaired cognitive empathy. This is the converse of psychopathy, which is a 'zero degree negative' of impaired affective empathy and unimpaired cognitive empathy (Baron Cohen, Simon, *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty and Kindness* (London, UK; Penguin books, 2011).

true, is 'literal' in the sense of enunciating the phenomenological bracketing of epistemology by Mircea Eliade:

> In imitating the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic
> hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man
> of an archaic society detaches himself from profane
> time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred
> time.[74] [75]

In summary, literal metaphor is therefore an autistic re-mythologising epistemology where the literal truth of the sacred narrative surpasses the literal truth of post-Enlightenment epistemology. It invites autism to experiment with entering myth, and myth to experiment with entering autism. If this seems impossible, in fact it is, as an ultimate, radical ability of ultimate, radical disability.

This requires a new theological language to re-think theological discourses in terms of autistic perception, and the autistic-theological term this thesis has created is 'incarnational metaphor.' [see glossary of original terms]. Incarnational metaphor is the goal towards which this thesis' theological autistic hermeneutic travels, building a case for it chapter by chapter. It is a particular theological thinking, of an 'abnormal' autistic metaphoricity implicit in theological language and seen most powerfully in radical theologies which subvert theological norms, just as the autistic holy fool does. The sites where incarnational metaphor can be most fully discerned are those which can be seen as sites of conscious autism.

One doesn't need to be a woman or a gay person to assimilate the perspectives of feminist or queer theology. Similarly, a non-autistic reader can consciously enter the hermeneutic exercise of an autistic world view to learn how its revisioning of theological issues sheds a new light on questions of faith.

Whenever terms like '*autism of*' is used in this thesis, it is assumed that this means an autism *as seen by* an autistic hermeneutic. This does not mean that this is only the view of a minority, disabled group. This thesis claims that

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[74] Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, (trans Philip Mairet) (New York; Harper Row,1967), p. 23
[75] This understanding of myth as sacred in contrast with profane will be re-envisioned as the concept of Altizer's 'sacred profane' mythology in chapter four.

the perception of a literary-theological 'autism of' narratives is a legitimate hermeneutic in its own right. It has relevance for the neurotypical theological community. An absolute, most extremely envisioned autistic hermeneutic, interpreting theological thought autistically, sees autism in the world, and in particular in the text, in the light of an impossible, autistically gifted perception which demands the ultimate emptying of the self. The mythical autistic reader[76] would be no-one. The consciously autistic reader, however, could, in principle, be everyone or anyone. Crucially, it is not (necessarily, probably, or ultimately at all) the *hemeneut* who is autistic, but the *hermeneutic.* This is a conscious theological strategy, which operates only by means of a particular theological thinking of autistic categories of being.

At the heart of this thesis is also a strange double irony – the irony of "irony." Frith sees the autistic relationship to irony as one where "for autistic people the literal meaning of words does not change in different settings."[77] The irony here is that Frith herself is betraying arguably a 'bad' neurotypical autistic[78] naiveté. She is in fact "taking things literally" in the sense that she assumes that an unproblematic "literal meaning of words" can be intuited without taking cognizance of any hermeneutical issues. This is a heuristic complacency when it is interrogated at a level beyond the everyday and pragmatic. This is the crucial distinction which will be discussed in chapter one, when deconstructive analysis considers the naivete of a simple "change" of "literal meaning" (in fact, a puzzling term in itself, hermeneutically speaking). The crucial irony this depends on is the naivete of Frith's words about a "literal meaning" which can "change." The subversion of success/failure truly to understand "literal meaning" will mean, in chapter one, that at the deepest theological level, "literal meaning" is understood better by using the gift of autistic perception.

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[76] Thought in terms of Wolfgang Iser's 'implied reader' (see chapter one)

[77] Frith, Autism: Explaining the Enigma p.127

[78] Christine Trevett describes the "autistic cruelty of the non-autistic" as the unconscious prejudices of dismissive attitudes towards autism as an ironic "autism" lacking empathy to enter the world of autistic people's realities; [in private conversation, ASPARRG UK conference, Cardiff, 2011]. I term this a "bad autism" of thoughtlessness and indifference, in keeping with the UK National Autistic Society's slogan, "accept difference, not indifference." [Don't Write Me Off, UK National Autistic Society, 2015]. See also Baron Cohen in 'affective/cognitive empathy' discussed above.

6. Conscious autism

It is critical for the autistic theological hermeneutic that it operates by means of conscious autism. A good way to illustrate what conscious autism is, is to explain how conscious autism does and does not operate in a reading of *Being There*. Crucially, it must here be emphasised that this kind of conscious autism is *not* the autistic consciousness of autistic protagonists. The point of using Chauncey Gardener as an autism archetype is not to construct an identity for autistic people as imbued with spiritual wisdom, so that, in the final scene, the character Chauncey, walking on water, *is* Christ. This kind of reading would be akin to Olga Bogdashina and William Stillmann's thinking of actual, lived autistic experience as the site of spiritual giftedness.[79] Bogdashina and Stillmann's concern is with autistic people's lived experience, and ways in which it can feature a conscious, autistic spiritual giftedness. This is a very different approach. Instead, this thesis' conception is of an autistic hermeneutic which draws mythologically on archetypes, not the actual psychological content of lived experience. Lived experience is not the sphere where a literary-theological conscious autism operates. Conscious autism is a consciousness where the discernment can be made of autistic archetypes as used by the text. The character Chauncey is not (necessarily) Christ as a holy fool (although he might be). His walking on water can be read as a satirical game the text plays with the reader. At the end of the day, Chauncey's ability to walk on water is only a story, a game played between author (director) and reader. It is within this game that the possibility of conscious autism emerges, as the reader can appropriate a consciousness of autism. It is where the text, and not (necessarily) the protagonist, generates an autism to offer to the reader.

For example, when Chauncey says to the dying Ben "I'm sorry you're so sick, Ben," the reader can perform an operation where Chauncey's words are a

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[79] See Bogdashina, *Autism and Spirituality*, and Stillmann, William, *Autism and the God Connection: Redefining the Autistic Experience Through Extraordinary Accounts of Spiritual Giftedness* (Illinois, USA; Sourcebooks Inc., Illinois, USA, 2006)

metaphor for Ben's, and society's, greed and spiritual poverty. We as readers see Chauncey's words, as Uta Frith says, "making fools of us all," but it is we, along with the film's other characters, who create the power of Chauncey as an autistic seer. In fact Chauncey is only a gardener who mistakes television for reality, so that he imagines that he can use a remote control to make things and people go away. He is deluded, and his insight belongs to his audience, so that when, at the funeral, the pall bearers are plotting for him to replace Ben as the magnate king-maker, the film is setting him up to be the miracle-worker who can walk on water - according to their construction, not his.[80] And the act we make, as readers, of standing outside the ridiculous delusions of the pall bearers, is our consciousness of autism in the text. In other words, the text offers us a conscious autism.

Conscious autism discerns textual strategies at work in its conversation partners as opportunities for autism to offer spiritual and theological insight, but this may or may not involve an autistic protagonist. In the case of *Being There,* the title's allusion to Heidegger's *Dasein* alerts the autistic reader to a possibility of conscious, theological autism. The conscious autism of the text, not of Chauncey, is the real theological power. *Dasein* is not about being or imitating Chauncey, but about occupying the space which his simplicity opens for opposing and resisting the constructions of *Das Man.* The crucial distinction defining conscious autism is that it is the *film,* as *Dasein,* and not the character, which articulates a narrative where conscious autism becomes possible as a theological power. *Dasein* belongs to the text's ironic deconstructions of the fools who metaphorise Chauncey's words. So it is Heidegger really, and not Chauncey, who has made conscious autism a serious possibility. Conscious autism takes a strategy offered by reading the film's Heideggerian overtones to deconstruct metaphor. So conscious autism is much more theologically alert than if it were solely a social critique. It is a reading which seizes the possibility

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[80] Of course the character Chauncey is also very alluring as a Christ archetype. It's possible to read his walking on water as a game which teases the reader with the possibility that Chauncey really us Christ, and by implication Christ really is Chauncey. This draws on the holy fool archetype, but it falls short of a Christ who is truly insightful and not the constructions of insight create by his hearers. This reading would be a critique of religion. Another reading could see Chauncey as Christ who pretends to be the autistic fool, but in that case his simplicity achieves nothing because his hearers don't take his simplicity as detachment from construction, but merely distort it to validate these very constructions. Chauncey as Christ is also the truth-teller who, in Ben's words, "doesn't play games with words to protect himself," yet Ben misses the fact that he, Ben, then proceeds to use Chauncey's words and plays his own games with them.

of deconstruction offered by culture, here in the example of a Heideggerian awareness. The chapters of this thesis will each, in different ways, argue for certain narratives as hospitable environments where conscious autism can see itself emerging. In looking at the thinking of Mark C Taylor and Thomas Altizer in chapters one and three, the argument will be that a cultural evolution emerging in Modernist and Postmodernist awareness can be read as offering an ever clearer conscious autism, but only at the level of being discourse which is hospitable to a theological autistic hermeneutic. In looking at the mystics of chapter two and the poets of chapters four and five, similarly, it is in each case the text, not the writer or protagonist, which offers the possibility of conscious autism, however much its protagonists embody autistic archetypes.

7. Terms from the clinical literature

The following is an alphabetical guide to terms from the clinical literature, which will be relevant to developing a mythological autism.

Affective and cognitive empathy

Lorna Wing describes an autistic boy as not uncaring but unaware of the suffering of others. He is

> unable to acquire the skills necessary for social interaction. Nevertheless, he is kind and gentle and, if he realises someone is ill or unhappy, he will be most sympathetic and do his best to help.[81]

Cognitive empathy is the ability to 'read' the other person and understand what they are feeling. Affective empathy is the ability to care about how the other person is feeling. Baron Cohen argues that people with Asperger's Syndrome have a 'zero degree' of reduced cognitive empathy but unimpaired affective empathy.[82] It is suggested in this thesis that autists have high affective empathy, as part of Intense World Syndrome.

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[81] http://www.mugsy.org/wing2.htm accessed 21/10/2013

[82] People with Asperger Syndrome have 'zero degrees of empathy' (although this is not an absolute 'zero'), but they are zero-Positive for two reasons. First, their empathy difficulties are largely restricted to the 'cognitive' component (also called 'theory of mind').[82] Their 'affective' empathy is frequently intact. We know this because – when it is pointed out to them that someone is upset – it often upsets them. Unlike people who are type P (psychopathic personality

Asperger's Syndrome

The original conceptual model of autism as described by Hans Asperger, describing relatively high functioning autism. People with Asperger's sometimes call themselves 'Aspies.'

Autism

The UK National Autistic Society's definition of autism is that

> Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.[83]

The American Psychiatric Association's 2015 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5)* redefines autism as a dyad of impairments [see also triad of impairments] of

- social communication and interaction, [see also Mindblindness]
- restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities [see also RRBI's]. [84]

Autistic personality types

Uta Frith's categories of HFA/Aspergers people's behaviour types and styles, as aloof, passive or odd.[85]

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disorder), Someone with Asperger Syndrome is very unlikely to hurt their pet (Unlike type P). Many people with Asperger syndrome rescue stray cats or dogs because they feel sorry for them. I have met people with Asperger Syndrome who have ended up with a large collection of stray dogs (a dozen or more) because of their strong affective empathy. In an imaginative study, Berlin neuroscientist Isabel Dziobek and colleagues found that people with Asperger Syndrome did not differ in how much concern they felt for people who were suffering, compared to typical individuals, even though they struggled to identify what others were feeling or thinking, This suggests people with Asperger Syndrome are the mirror image of those with type P. Psychopaths have intact cognitive empathy but reduced affective empathy, whilst people with Asperger Syndrome have intact affective empathy but reduced cognitive empathy. The result is that people with Asperger Syndrome do care about others, whilst struggling to 'read' them. Those with type P don't care about others, whilst 'reading' them with ease. [see Simon Baron Cohen, Simon, *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty and Kindness* (London, UK; Penguin books, 2011), p.81]

[83] http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/autism-an-introduction/what-is-autism.aspx, accessed 16/05/2015. See also Baron Cohen, Simon, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (Cambridge, UK; Bradford/ MIT Press, 1995) pp.60ff

[84] DSM-5 quoted by autism UK http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/all-about-diagnosis/changes-to-autism-and-as-diagnostic-criteria.aspx, accessed 18/10/2014. A third aspect of autistic profile which is absent from DSM-5's criteria is extreme sensory sensitivity [see Intense World Syndrome].

[85] Frith, Autism: Explaining the Enigma, p.62

Autistic solitude

In Uta Frith's translation, Hans Asperger sees autism as "a disturbance (which) results in severe and characteristic difficulties of social integration."[86] Asperger makes explicit the gap which excludes the autist from the non-autistic world and indeed from all others:

> Human beings normally live in constant interaction with their environment, and react to it continually. However, 'autists' have severely disturbed and considerably limited interaction. The autist is only himself (cf. the Greek word autos) and is not an active member of a greater organism by which he is influenced and which he influences constantly. [87]

Leo Kanner describes an autistic child in the following terms:

> He seems almost to withdraw into his shell and live within himself … (h)e never looked up at people's faces. When he had any dealings with persons at all, he treated them, or rather parts of them, as if they were objects.[88]

Leneh Buckle writes "I was happier when I couldn't communicate," describing her childhood as an ASD person.*[89]*

Autistic spectrum

Judith Gould writes:

> The concept of a spectrum of autistic disorders fitted the findings better than the categorical approach. This does not imply a smooth continuum from the most to the least severe. All kinds of combinations of features are possible.[90]

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[86] Hans Asperger, '*Autistic Psychopathy' in childhood* (trans. Uta Frith), in *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, ed. Uta Frith (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press,1991), p.38
[87] ibid.
[88] Kanner, Leo, *Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact*, 1949 in *Acta Paedopsychiatra* 35(4): 100-36, 1968 at http://simonsfoundation.s3.amazonaws.com/share/071207-leo-kanner-autistic-affective-contact.pdf quoted in Baron-Cohen, Mindblindess p.61
[89] Buckle, Leneh K,   *Is increasing functionality always good?* (British Academy/ Kings College London Conference 'Autism, Ethics and the Good Life, London UK, 2 April 2012)
[90] Judith Gould, *The Triad of Impairments, Past, Present and Future*, The NAS Lorna Wing Centre for Autism: PowerPoint presentation, online access at http://www.awares.org/pkgs_files/librarydoc_869.ppt, 24/04/2012. See also Lorna Wing, "*The Autistic Spectrum*," (London, UK; Constable & Robinson, 1996)

Simon Baron Cohen has also argued that the autistic spectrum is a universal human category, with the general population existing on a normal distribution between autistic and neurotypical extremes.[91]

Black and White Thinking

Black and white thinking is both literal mindedness [see below] and the refusal to compromise – a thing is either true, or it is not, and similarly, it is either right or wrong.

Clinical narrative

The clinical narrative is the overall body of thinking supplied by the community of medical, psychiatric, psychological, pedagogic, and other disciplines. It is heterogeneous and evolving.[92]

Executive Dysfunction (ED)

Executive dysfunction, a theory of neural abnormality making independent living and functioning difficult.

Empathy/systemising quotient (E/SQ)

Baron-Cohen argues for a 'systemising versus empathy' phenomenon whereby autistic people who are poor at cognitive empathy have a high score at systemising (being drawn to, and extremely good at understanding systems.)[93] Effectively, this means understanding 'things' better than people.

High Functioning Autism (HFA)

High Functioning Autism, with impairment of communication, possibly also ED, WCC and Intense World Syndrome, but relatively able to function and live independently; sometimes with great success

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[91] Baron-Cohen et. al, *The autism spectrum quotient;* see also Baron Cohen, ed, *Uta Frith festschrift,* Online Article Only, *The Psychologist* August 2007. Vol.20, https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-20/edition-8/online-only-article-uta-frith-festschrift accessed 20th August 2016

[92] See Gil, Eyal et al., *The Autism Matrix - The Social Origins of the Autism Epidemic* (Cambridge, UK; Polity Press, 2010)

[93] See also *Attenuation of Typical Sex Differences in 800 Adults with Autism versus 3,900 Controls,* Baron-Cohen et al, PLOS One, July 2014 Volume 9 issue 7. Baron-Cohen identifies brain differences between males and females and plots an empathy/systematising/graph for males and females, both with and without autism. The results suggest that people with autism, male and female, are largely skewed towards the 'systematising' part of the graph; supporting his thesis of an 'autistic male brain.'

Intense World Syndrome

Makram & Makram[94] have coined the phrase "intense world syndrome" to argue for a new and controversial understanding of autistic sensory and relational abnormalities. According to their theory, autism is not a lack of empathy but an excessive empathy in terms of sensitivity.

Literal mindedness

"For autistic people the literal meaning of words does not change in different settings … autistic individuals need to make an intense effort to learn to recognise subtle or shifting meanings that depend on the speaker's attitudes and intentions."[95] Taking metaphors 'literally.'

Mindblindness and Mindreading

Simon Baron Cohen has conceptualised autistic social and communication difficulties as an impairment of what he terms mindreading. It is synonymous with impaired cognitive empathy.[96] Baron Cohen's argument for autism as Mindblindness is argued from clinical psychology, evolutionary biology and neuroscience, and his conclusion is that "in autism there is a genuine inability to understand other people's different beliefs."[97]

Neurotribal

The term used by Silberman, as discussed above. Thinking of the autistic and the non-autistic as different 'tribes' of the human race, with different cultures. This is to argue for the legitimacy of autistic modes of being, as a distinctive, neurally divergent and creative perception style producing a culture deserving respect and equality.

Neurotypicality

Neurotypicality, in contrast to the culture of the autistic neurotribe, means being 'neurally typical.' 'Neurotypicals' are non-autistic people.

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[94] Makram, K & Makram, H, *The intense world theory - a unifying theory of the neurobiology of autism,* in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience,* vol. 4, p. 224, 2010.
[95] Frith, Autism: *Explaining the Enigma* pp.127-8
[96] See Baron Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*
[97] Baron Cohen, *Mindblindness* p.71

Ostensive language

Ostensive language is language which conveys an intent to elicit a response from the listener. For pedagogical and clinical purposes, an autistic hermeneutic is an impairment of the 'normal' pragmatic hermeneutical ability to discern the ostensive intent and respond appropriately[98] [see also relevance theory, incarnational metaphor].

Pathologising

To pathologise autism means to see it in the medical model, in terms of a pathology, ie. a problem to be overcome, or a disabling condition to be cured.

Profound Autism

Autism which presents more severe difficulties in daily living and communication.

Relevance theory

Relevance theory is a model created by of how meaning is communicated. Whereas a 'decoding' model would see a semantic message to be coded in language, relevance theory argues that "the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough, and predictable enough, to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning."[99]

Restricted and Repetitive Behaviours and Interests (RRBI's)

Restricted and repetitive behaviours are patterns of repeated body movements such as rocking or hand flapping, and unusual attachment to and pleasure in specific sensory and motor activities, eg, stroking a piece of velvet, watching spinning shiny objects in a hanging mobile. Special interests are also considered as RRBI's.

Savantism

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[98] Happé, Francesca G E, *Communicative competence and theory of mind in autism: A test of relevance theory,* Cognition, 48 (1993) 101-119, p.103 (http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~lds/readinggroup/Happe%201993.pdf, accessed 25/04/2015

[99] *Relevance Theory,* Deirdre Wilson & Dan Sperber, pp.249-250, UCL Papers, http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/publications/WPL/02papers/wilson_sperber.pdf, accessed 25/04/2015

The autistic savant is a person with an incredible talent, often with numbers or memory but also art. This is exemplified in the 'Rain Man' archetype.[100] In the past the term 'idiot savant' was used, and now the term 'islet of ability' is preferred.[101]

Sensory connoisseur

Happé and Frith's Introduction in their 2010 *Autism and Talent* describes "the beautiful otherness of the autistic mind," and this beautiful otherness is suggested by their interpretation of RRBI's as something potentially beautiful. They write:

> Repetition is not repetition, for example, if you have expert levels of discrimination ... a connoisseur, seeing minute differences between events that others regard as pure repetition.[102]

Special Interests

Asperger's description of autists includes the observation that they display "egocentric preoccupation with unusual or circumscribed interests."[103] He gives examples:

> railroad telegraph pole line insulators, personal information about all the members of Congress, and knowledge of the passenger list of the Titanic, weather information, and various models of deep fat fryers.[104]

> Similar examples are:

> I could sit and stare at a drawing of a futuristic city all day long. Come to think of it, I have.[105]
> ... specific items ... the lids of tubes of Smarties ... the labels from bottles of beer ... butterflies or keyrings ... yellow pencils, vacuum cleaners or toilet brushes.[106]

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[100] *Rain Man* (director Barry Levinson, 1988)
[101] See Happé, Francesca & Frith, Uta (eds.)   *Autism and Talent* (Oxford, UK; Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, Oxford University Press/The Royal Society, 2010
[102] Ibid. p. xvii, quoted in Clarkson p.4.
[103] Hans Asperger, '*Autistic Psychopathy in Childhood. in Autism and Asperger Syndrome,* Uta Frith
[104] Ibid., p.37
[105]   http://thinkingautismguide.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/special-interests.html, accessed 25 April 2012.
[106] Attwood, Tony, *Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for parents and Professionals* (London UK/Philadelphia, USA; Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1998), p.89.

Theory of Mind Mechanism (TOMM)

Theory of Mind mechanism: a psychological mechanism proposed by Baron Cohen to explain Mindblindness.

Triad of Impairments

The triad model was developed in the 1970s by Lorna Wing and Judith Gould:

> The abnormalities of social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and imaginative activities so consistently occurred together (Wing & Gould, 1979) that they could be referred to as "the triad of social and language impairment."[107]

Weak Central Coherence (WCC) theory

Weak Central Coherence (WCC) theory is the model of autism which suggests that attention to fine detail takes precedence over perceiving the global view, and that this could be due to atypical neural connectivity. It is suggested (see Frith et al, *Autism and Talent*) that this fine discrimination could be linked to autistic talent, including savantism.

8. Glossary of original terms

The following are original terms which this thesis develops as ways to understand what its central argument for Incarnational metaphor means. They are not listed alphabetically, as the previous terms were above, but as progressions of logic. They form the basis on which the construction of a mythological autistic hermeneutic is proposed.

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[107] Wing, Lorna, *Language, social, and cognitive impairments in autism and severe mental retardation*, in *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* March 1981, Volume 11, Issue 1 p.17

Mythological autism

A conceptual model which uses aspects of autism as a way for theology to envision itself autistically in archetypical, mythological terms, using the thought experiment of an autistic hermeneutic.

Person-specific autism

The lived experience of autistic people, in ways that can be observed clinically.

Universal autism

The concept of autism as something which pervades human existence according to a question of person-specific degree. In mythical terms, the presence of the autistic trinity as an existential reality.

Absolute autism

In mythical terms, the naked phenomenon of pure autism as the absolute being of the autistic trinity.

Conscious autism

In mythical terms, an autistic potential which has been realised in discourse. This is thought of as an evolutionary journey of autistic awakening, not (necessarily) where a person or culture becomes aware of autism in clinical terms, but where the working of the autistic trinity can be evident in cultural discourse.[108] Where conscious autism is present, its resistance to neurotypical norms can be seen either as pathology ('inability') or power ('refusal'). Therefore the term 'inability/refusal' will be used to describe how conscious autism operates.

Autistic trinity

The inter-dependent facets of autistic being as envisioned for the purposes of a mythical theological autistic thinking; mindfulness of separation, autistic fascination and literal metaphor. Mindfulness of separation is the theological space where autistic fascination can realise itself, and as absence

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[108] This is akin to Altizer's thinking where he argues that Modernism made it possible for the death of God to come into view, although the death of God as a cosmic event has always been a latent mythical possibility.

and presence they co-inhere in absolute autism as a paradoxical *coincidentia oppositorum*. Literal metaphor exists as the embodiment of an autistic absence in metaphor, and an autistic presence in metaphor. Its inhabitation of the image is the pure love of costly autistic affective empathy.

Autistic hermeneutic

The conscious strategy of appropriating the mythological view of autism as a lens for interpreting discourse. The exercise of seeking to 'see through an autistic eye.'

Mindfulness of Separation

Conscious discernment of distance and isolation as absence in discourse, which take on the power of the archetypes of Mindblindness as autistic solitude. Applied to literal metaphor, the inherent Mindblindness of universal or absolute autism in discourse, in the breakdown of ostensive communication. A theologically and poetically privileged insight into apophatic discourse.

Autistic fascination

Conscious awareness of wonder and reverence, which is thought of as the embodiment of the sensory connoisseur's reality, but also as the delight of obsessive focus in autistic special interests. This is the realisation of presence in affective empathy, possible only, paradoxically, in mindfulness of separation. Also, in literal metaphor, fascination is the quality of pure presence, realised in poetic departure from pragmatic discourse.

Autistic integrity

Autistic affective empathy as a spiritual quality which loves the other unconditionally in the face of impaired cognitive empathy; as such, its extreme would be an autistic quality of saintliness. Also the refusal/inability to dissimulate or collude, because of seeing morality in terms of black and white thinking.

Incarnational metaphor

A theological understanding of literal, autistic metaphor. Literal metaphor as a poetic concept embodies autistic absent presence. Thinking this literal-absent-presence theologically, literal incarnational metaphor offers its

mythical autism narrative to the literal-absent-presence myths of a-theological and mystical theology.

The theological autism myth in this reading becomes the mythological kenotic death of God, which is the outpouring of the incarnate, crucified Jesus. This is an autistic Incarnation myth [see also literal metaphor].

Literal metaphor

Shorthand for the understanding of figurative language in a non-pragmatic sense, 'mistaking' the image itself for its conventional interpretation. This is the crucial concept which is inverted from pathology into privileged epistemology in this thesis, as chapter one will argue. [see also incarnational metaphor].

Ostensive metaphor

Ostensive metaphor is shorthand in this thesis for the successful, pragmatic reception of ostensive language. This is communicative activity which successfully reads both the intent of the other's communication and the pragmatic use of figurative language in everyday settings. Francesca Happé gives the clinical understanding of autism's 'failure' relating to ostensive language:

> If most autistic individuals cannot represent a speaker's intention, then communication should break down most noticeably where the speaker's attitude must be taken into account in modifying the literal meaning of the utterance. Without the principle of relevance to guide them, the transparency of intentions that allows humans to use language in a truly flexible way is not open to autistic communicators. In the face of the puzzle that ostensive communication must pose them, they may have no choice but to adopt a rigid interpretation - a default value of the propositional form of the utterance.[109]

Ostensive language is pragmatic, and "ostensive metaphor" in this thesis means the pragmatic stance which treats metaphor as a tool for conventional shorthand colloquial usage. It is essentially prosaic, lacking in poetic potential, and it will be contrasted with the idea of autistic literal metaphor's gifted

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[109] Happé, *Communicative competence and theory of mind in autism* p.103

divergence. Chapter one inverts the clinical narrative by de-pathologising literal metaphor and, in theological terms, pathologising ostensive metaphor as lacking richness of theological insight.

9. Chapters as journey - summary

The narrative of this thesis is constructed as a theologically and poetically thought journey, through an autistic hermeneutic, towards the mythological concept ultimately of an absolute, autistic incarnational metaphor. It is written so that each chapter is a stage on this journey, arguing for the validity of both the destination and the means of travel towards it.

The categories outlined above in the glossary of original terms have provided the basis of how theological thinking can be attained in this autistic way. In principle, these categories all apply universally, at least to a degree. However not all narratives are equally hospitable to an autistic hermeneutic seeking insight into an autism of the text. Some narratives are simply too neurotypical, offering little space for the creative thinking of an autistic envisioning.[110] Most narratives, however, hold the potential for autism within them, as this thesis will discuss, according to the autistic categories which are explained below. Some narratives are so rich in autistic potential that an autistic hermeneutic can be argued as a special form of insight into what makes their character problematic and challenging. The key argument of this thesis is that these narratives receive a strong validation from being read as an embodiment of autistic categories. Autism, as a mythologically thought insight in its own right, revivifies these particular forms of theological thinking.

It is no accident that the narratives richest in autistic potential are, like autistic perception, also marginal ways of seeing. They are departures from

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[110] In practice, an autistic hermeneutic will be on constant alert for traces of autism in textual worlds, but recognises that some 'autisms' are more profound than others. For example, the self-contained worlds of the community in a Jane Austen novel could be read as an autistic archetype of mindfulness of separation in its complete isolation from the harsh realities of the world outside. However, the world of her novels is less amenable to an actual autism of the text, because it is too tightly woven as illusion to admit of gaps where, for example, the implied reader would break open the text. There is little possibility for a theological reading where the world of the circumscribed milieu is all. Its drama is psychological, and one could read *Emma* as an exercise in Mindblindness; there is always potential for an autistic hermeneutic. However, relative to novels like Pirandello's [chapter six] this is not as fruitful.

common sense norms, creative and original. They make demands on the reader. Similarly, seeing autistically is difficult and demanding, accepting disability as ability without discounting that it remains disability. This demanding hermeneutical project is explored in the chapters of this thesis as a journey towards realising its full theological potential in the concept of autistic, literal, incarnational metaphor.

Chapter one lays the foundation by examining what autistic literal-mindedness could bring to poetics. It defines a concept of literal metaphor as an autistic hermeneutic, arguing that it might be more deeply poetic than neurotypical reading. It also sets out the way in which literal metaphor operates as absence and presence, when they are thought of as the mythical attributes of an autistic hermeneutic. An autistic literal-absent-present hermeneutic can then critique metaphor and argue for an autistic quality of radical, authentic poetic reading. Literal metaphor, thought as a deeply 'abnormal' poetic power in this way, can then be capable of approaching theological thinking. Its strange power becomes a way to envision theological language as poetic excess. This re-envisioning thinks of an excess inherent in religious language and reads it as the 'oddness' of autistic metaphor. In this light, it then takes this autistic oddness of language as a reading of deconstructive theology. It argues for a deconstructive theology of literal metaphor as a move towards a conscious autism in cultural discourse. An autism of culture does not mean that people are becoming more autistic, or even necessarily that there is a greater awareness of autism.[111] It means that, in Postmodernism, a cultural discourse developing towards both emancipation and collapse is a way in which autism can read increasingly powerfully in terms of mindfulness of separation. This (post)modern moment means that, increasingly, an autistic theological hermeneutic can not only validate its own perspective in Postmodern narratives, but also, reciprocally, speak truth to these narratives and elucidate them. The autistic

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[111] Gil and Eyal, and Silverman, discuss the so called "autism epidemic" of people receiving an autism diagnosis in terms of increased awareness of autism. So the idea of an emerging autistic consciousness is valid, for example in the way that this thesis has emerged from conscious awareness of autism by the writer. However it is the theological and mythical journey of autism which is being envisioned, as a way to express a cosmic autism unfolding mythically. A parallel with Altizer's thinking would be that Altizer sees Modernism as a cultural and historical moment which enables the death of God to be envisioned, but the death of God is an eternal and cosmic myth, beyond the confines of a Modernism in which it is articulated. Similarly, the diagnostic moment of twenty-first century awareness of autism enables an autistic hermeneutic to be heard, but does not create the cosmic event of a universal autism.

hermeneutic travels towards incarnational metaphor by tracing the emergence of deconstructive theology and reading it autistically. This makes a deconstructive theological thinking of literal metaphor a step closer towards the emergence of a fully theological thinking of incarnational metaphor in subsequent chapters.

Chapter two is an archaeological project, travelling back from chapter one's destination in deconstructive theology, to trace its theological roots in apophatic theology. In this chapter, the journey again takes a step closer to the goal of incarnational metaphor, by considering it as the paradoxical absent presence of the sacred in mystical theology. This is particularly the case because a reading of the poetics of apophatic discourse opens up a way for literal metaphor to recognise its own absent presence, in terms of the poetic metaphorical strategies of apophatic discourse. As this theological poetic strategy is increasingly brought into contact with literal metaphor, by the end of the chapter a more explicitly theological incarnational metaphor can be indicated. Again, this is a reciprocal reading. An autistic hermeneutic can discern articulations of its myth in an apophatic poetics, to validate its insights. Equally, this theological autistic hermeneutic elucidates and can even rehabilitate mystical theology.

Chapter three draws on the postmodern thought of chapter one and the mystical theology of chapter two to consider how they combine in the a-theological thinking of Thomas Altizer. Altizer's a-theological narrative is read in an autistic hermeneutic which can now offer a way to conceptualise a fully theologically thought incarnational metaphor. Altizer's myth of the death of God will be read as the myth of the autism of God. Again, the argument is for a reciprocal validation of both discourses.

Chapter four approaches incarnational metaphor by considering how a theological poetics (which is equally a poetic theology) can outwit propositional discourse to 'catch' the kenotic incarnation of a sacred autism. To achieve this, this chapter examines the concept of Gerard Manley Hopkins' *ecceitas* in the light of an autistic hermeneutic, to emphasise the poetic nature of the autistic theological hermeneutic's incarnational metaphor.

Chapter five is a case study in how the autistic hermeneutic reads the a-theological and mystic theological potential in two anti-religionist novels by Luigi Pirandello. It is an example of an autistic thinking of Altizer's myth of the sacred profane.

The conclusion summarises what the autistic hermeneutic has achieved to bring incarnational metaphor into being as a way to think theologically. Its post-script reflects on the process of the thesis and its destination.

10.   Literature Review

Constructing the three-way bridge has necessitated literature reviews in each camp. In terms of theology, radical theologians were reviewed (see overview, chapter three) and Thomas Altizer and Mark C Taylor were selected as strong exponents of a literary-theological narrative which seemed strongly faithful both to Christian theology and to literary sensibility. Both these writers also showed promise as a hospitable environment for an autistic hermeneutic, inasmuch as their narratives of absence and abyss might speak to autistic mindfulness of separation. This happened in the context of the supportive and creative environment of the Glasgow University CLTA, where seminars and conversations opened out views of the diverse potentialities of LTA. The concept of theo-poetics as developed by Catherine Keller and Roland Faber was another possibility, but its political, pragmatic context in process theology removed it from the immediate focus of developing a particular theological poetics not, in itself, political.[112]

In terms of autism, Uta Frith's *Autism: Explaining the Enigma* and Simon Baron Cohen's *Mindblindness* were foundational, opening out into the research directions of work such as that of Happé, Wing, and Gould. Also useful as a historical overview was Gil and Eyal's *The Autism Matrix*. Thinking of metaphor and autism drew on research by Baron Cohen and Rundblad et al[113] to clarify the

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[112] Hulbert, Steve & Slettom, Jeanyne, Poetics, Post-Structuralism, and Process, in process perspectives Volume 29 Number 1 Summer 2006
[113] Rundblad, Gabriella & Annaz, Dagmara *The atypical development of metaphor and metonymy comprehension in children with autism* in *Autism* 2010, DOI:10.1177/1362361309340667

pathologising narrative regarding autism and metaphor. Frith's and Attwood's clinical accounts of autistic everyday dealings with metaphor also established how autism and metaphor are related. This clarified the contrast between these clinical and sociological hermeneutics and the mythical hermeneutic adopted by this thesis.

At the same time, ways into thinking of definitions of autism were strengthened through involvement with ASPARRG, AJC, SWAN, AAT, and ARC,[114] where supportive contacts helped to guide a rigorous literature search. From ASPARRG, an appreciation of disability theology became focused on Swinton, exemplifying the concept of validation of the autistic person's mode of being, perceiving and relating. Reading Bogdashina's *Autism and Spirituality,* it was clear that her thinking suggested that religious concerns are relevant and in need of consideration, and that this is possible. Equally, it also was clear that this thesis was doing something different. Here, the project is a literary-theological one which aims to listen to autistic perception, whereas Bogdashina's project is to construct a phenomenology of autistic religious experience. Paul Howell's thinking on autism and metaphor[115] considers how in film and TV, autistic characters feature as a metaphor for the human reclamation of mathematical intelligence from a threatening dominance of AI. This is a territory in one aspect similar to this thesis, in that autistic characters become champions so that autism is validated. This thesis also aims for a validation of autistic being, through the use of metaphor. However this thesis is also different. Howell takes autism as a metaphor 'for,' but this thesis investigates metaphoricity itself in autism, using literary theory and theological thinking.

Rowan Williams' Gifford lecture *Intelligent Bodies: Language as Material Practice* discusses the severe impairment of communication in profound autism, and is disturbing, challenging reading. His point is not dissimilar to that of this

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https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dagmara_Dimitriou/publication/41399590_The_atypical_development_of_metaphor_and_metonymy_comprehension_in_children_with_autism/links/0fcfd50de1d32c131e000000.pdf   http://aut.sagepub.com/content/14/1/29

[114] UK ASPARRG (Autistic Spectrum People Religion and Research Group); AJC (University of Glasgow department of psychology & Neuroscience Autism Journal Club); SWAN (Scottish Women's Autism Network); AAT (Greater Glasgow Health Board Adult Autism Team);

[115] Howell, Paul, *From Rain Man to Sherlock: Theological Reflections on Metaphor*, in *Practical Theology* vol.8, 2015, issue 2, pp.143-153

thesis; that what this thesis terms a universal autism uncovers, by its example, the inherent challenge in language and relationship which he calls impenetrability,[116] and which this thesis terms mindfulness of separation. Like Williams,

> Our consideration of both the excesses and the gaps in language will underline the importance of acknowledging "learning difficulties" in our unfolding sense of what language is – and also the importance … of learning difficulty itself as a key to much of this.[117]

For the aim of developing incarnational metaphor, a radical, literary theological thinking led to death of God theology as supreme absence. To look for mythical thinking to bring to a mythical autism, de Certeau's work on the Sixteenth century mystics. Turning to mysticism as a possibility of 'heretical' idiosyncratic literary-theological form led to considering atypical uses of metaphor, and this was found in Denys Turner's thinking of mysticism as an apophatic literary form, and de Certeau's reading of Teresa of Àvila, whose work then looked back to Dionysius the Areopagite and forward to John of the Cross. From there, the Postmodern reading of an implicit apophatic theology by Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature* could be seen as a link to the death of God theologies of chapters One and Three, which offer rich potential for the autistic a-theological hermeneutic.

These sources, when combined, constructed the case for, and nature of what became the fully thought literary-theological autistic hermeneutic of the mythical incarnational metaphor. The remaining stage was to select case studies, one focusing on presence and the other on absence. In theory, literary writing offered an unlimited array of possibilities. To some extent, narrowing down the field was to rely on this author's experience of hospitable narratives. For a hospitable environment for chapter four, where autistic absence could recognise itself in an autistic hermeneutic, theologically minded poets suggested the possibility of the kind of presence Blanchot articulated in chapter two. The metaphysical poets such as Donne and Herbert were theological but lacked a texture of image and sound instantiating poetic presence. In contrast,

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[116] Williams, Rowan, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London, UK; Bloomsbury, 2014) p.116
[117] ibid. p.125

the poet-priest Gerard Manley Hopkins was selected. For chapter five, the modernist and postmodernist literature discussed in chapter one was similarly drawn on to focus on absence. The theatre of the absurd, and quintessentially Beckett, might have been a choice, but the author decided that Luigi Pirandello, as an idiosyncratic, proto-postmodernist, would yield perhaps a novel and particularly rich environment to match creative, idiosyncratic autistic reading.

Primary Sources

All sources are listed with publication details in the bibliography at the end of this thesis.

Literature and Theology

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John of the Cross	The Ascent of Mount Carmel
Derrida, Jacques	White Mythology
Hopkins, Gerard	Collected poems (ed. Bridges)
Pirandello, Luigi	The Late Mattia Pascal One, No-One and One Hundred Thousand
Teresa of Àvila	The Interior Castle

Autism

Baron Cohen, Simon	Mindblindness: An Essay Zero Degrees of Empathy
Frith, Uta	The Sensory Connoisseur Autism: Explaining the Enigma
Gil Eyal et al	The Autism Matrix
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Baggs, Amanda	In my Language
Bogdashina, Olga	Autism and Spirituality
Gould, Judith	The Triad of Impairments, Past, Present and Future
Kanner, Leo	Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact
Wing, Lorna	The Autistic Spectrum

Chapter One: The Autistic hermeneutic - pathology or privilege?

Introduction

This chapter develops the concept of autistic 'literal' metaphor to argue that it can function as a radical hermeneutical strategy. For ease of reading, autistic 'literal metaphor' and 'incarnational metaphor' are used as shorthand for 'the autistic perceptive style of processing or relating to metaphor. Throughout, autistic 'literal metaphor' means 'that realisation of metaphor which is created in the autistic hermeneutic.' This means that an autistic hermeneutic, which interprets the text 'literally,' will produce a 'literal' metaphor. This 'literal' metaphor will be developed as living metaphor, with implicitly theological consequences termed incarnational metaphor. It needs to be emphasised, again, that this autistic hermeneutic is a particular theological one, as an experiment in bringing the tropes of autistic perception styles to bear on particular, hospitable discourses. This experiment in no way rests on claims that this is 'the only' definitive autistic hermeneutic, but it does rest on the premise that 'the' autistic hermeneutic suggested by this thesis can work theologically. In fact, ultimately it will be a hermeneutic which only works theologically. Its aim is to bring out the potential of its particular autistic reading for theological thinking. It will be seen that, in the end, this literal metaphor is a theological one, which will be termed incarnational metaphor.

To work towards this goal of incarnational metaphor, this chapter will discuss firstly how an autistic hermeneutic style contrasts with neurotypical norms, and in particular with the 'common sense' neurotypical relationship to metaphor. Secondly, literal metaphor will then be demonstrated to be a mode of theological thinking, and thirdly, one which works most fully as a mode of deconstructive theology.

The introduction presented Frith's work on Grice's relevance theory, and suggested that Frith's distinction between neurotypical and autistic stances towards metaphor could provide grounds for a distinctive autistic hermeneutic. It was suggested that this hermeneutic could offer a radical new perspective on literary-theological ideas of absence and presence. This chapter now develops

this idea of a 'literal' metaphor which, in a theological reading of its nature, holds radical theological power as the '(non)sense' of incarnational literal metaphor.

'Literal' metaphor with a theological 'incarnational' potential, as it is developed in this chapter, also embodies the duality of absence and presence which was described in the Introduction as Mindfulness of separation and fascination coexisting in autistic perception. Mindfulness of separation is the awareness that there is no union of communication. It is apparent 'failure' in the cognitive inability to configure meaning by the pragmatic decoding of metaphor. This is the awareness of the ultimate lack of adequate relationship between the writer's intent and the reader's reception in order to create a definitive configuration of meaning. In terms of presence, Fascination is the intuitive realisation of otherness as a literary space. Presence is realised where the image itself is inhabited in an enhanced way by 'literal' reception. Similarly, presence is realised autistically by affective empathy which relates to the image in an excess of erotic devotion, and this is in precisely the same moment in which the 'zero degree' of cognitive empathy involves the greatest separation.[118] The qualities of absence and presence in these terms are completely interdependent. Absence and presence are both part of the 'pathology' of literal metaphor. Before considering the 'pathology' of autistic metaphor, it is worth asking to what extent autistic perception and being are, or are not, a pathology, when thought theologically.

1.1 Who's missing the point? Holy Fools and Autism

The narrative of this thesis is to develop an argument that autistic thinking of metaphor can be a legitimate, even privileged literary-theological hermeneutic. To establish how this might be a privileged view point, Gernsbacher and Pripas-Kapit's argument in their article *Who's missing the point?* gives a way in. They subvert the pathologising of autism:

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[118] This will be the theological underpinning of an absolute autism of incarnational metaphor in chapters two and three, where apophatic and a-theological discourses envision the mystical *coincidentia oppositorum* of total absence and total presence. Total, affective empathy in the moment of a zero degree of cognitive empathy will be an autism of saintliness. It is a privileged theological thinking of these terms.

> We imagine that most non-autistic people tend to find social situations with autistic people "confusing;" that non-autistic people also "find it hard to know what to do in a social situation" populated solely by autistic people; that non-autistic people are not very "good at predicting" what autistic people will do; and that non-autistic people can't always "easily work out" what an autistic person might want to talk about. Should we deem that a lack of empathy?[119]

Like Silverman, they argue that different is not inferior, but their concern is with language. Their article reviews studies which suggest that the received wisdom about autism and figurative language could be mistakenly attributing autistic divergence to inability. They see autism as a different ability. This different ability has been conceptualised by a number of writers who compare the autist to the holy fool.

The 'Holy Fool'

Russian and European traditions of the Holy Fool

Philip Gorski writes about examples from the Russian Holy Fool tradition[120] through his reading of Nikolai Leskov. Leskov recounts the story of Alexander Afenas'evich Ryzhov, the police chief who refuses to take bribes and is described as "*having gone as far as Christ*" in his literal-minded honesty, and therefore receives the verdict from the archpriest that "*it's all up with him.*"

Christine Trevett comments that

> The Russian traditions of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries in turn owed much to the Byzantine traditions. Those texts used holy folly with its ascetic pretence of foolishness as explanation for gullibility, oddity, and shocking unconventionality (see Challis and Dewey, 1977; Kobets, 2007; Lunde, 1995; Thompson, 1987). More than 30 such saints are to be found in the canon of Russian Orthodoxy and St. Basil's cathedral in Moscow has as its patron one such "blessed" person'—a

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[119] Gernsbacher M A & Pripas-Kapit S R, *Who's Missing the Point? - a Commentary on Claims that Autistic Persons Have a Specific Deficit in Figurative Language Comprehension*, in *Metaphor and Symbol* 2012;27(1):93-105. doi:10.1080/10926488.2012.656255.
[120] www.incommunion.org/2007/02/02/holy-fools-in-russian-literature/ accessed 2012.09.25

practitioner of yorodstvo, i.e., he was a fool of the holy kind. [121]

Thinking of the Holy Fool as an archetype for autistic 'oddness,' Trevett surveys both the Russian tradition and the Western Church's use of the idea:

> Christian Holy Fool literature developed in late antiquity as a tradition of deviant piety that was not for direct imitation. Laurence Freeman in his introduction to Rowan Williams's 2003 work described the Desert Fathers of the late-third century onwards as "monastic oddballs" and as "not very well-adjusted individuals" (Williams (2003, pp. 42–43). With their rags and narrow food preferences, they had been concerned with simplicity, regardless of whether those who encountered them were disconcerted by their non-communication and did not want to be left alone with them. The earliest references to holy folly came out of the setting of such desert monasticism.[122]

Peter Happé's article, *Staging Folly,* looks at how the trope of the fool was used in early sixteenth century English language theatre. He notes that in response to Erasmus' contemporary publication *In Praise of Folly* (1511), the ambiguous status of the fool becomes more complex, as Erasmus' ideas of universal folly within a humanist framework can be seen, and the tension between fools as evil and as innocent leads to greater complexity and ranges of satirical possibility: "... the idea that fools are innocent, and as such they are embodiments of divine grace and protected by it, but also the belief that they are ignorant and that this ignorance may be a form of sin and potentially damnable."*[123]*

Happé sees in Heywood's plays, particularly *Witty and Witless,* that folly "may be part of a more positive and perhaps specifically religious conception of the universe."[124]

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[121] Trevett, Christine, *Asperger's Syndrome and the Holy Fool: The Case of Brother Juniper, Journal of Religion, Disability & Health*, 13:129–150, 2009, DOI: 10.1080/15228960802581537, accessed 10/12/2015
[122] Ibid.
[123] Peter Happéé, *Staging Folly*, in *Fools and Folly,* ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA; Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University,1996), p.105
[124] ibid.

Trinity Stores and 'jongleurs de Dieu'

Trinity Stores comments of the 'holy fool' tradition:

> St. Paul speaks of foolishness for Christ's sake in his letters to the first Christian churches. Holy foolishness, at its heart, is a prophetic path. It names the lifeless idols we worship in place of the living God--things like our possessions, our social status, and anything else we use to prop up our egos[125]

and places St Francis within this tradition:

> Francis of Assisi embraced holy foolishness when he began his life of penance. Having once admired the elegant troubadours of southern France, he now called the motley band of his first followers jongleurs, instead. The jongleur did somersaults, stood on his head, and juggled assorted objects to entertain royal folk in between the troubadour's songs. Francis and his followers were to be jongleurs for God's people and the heavenly court.[126]

Saint Francis and Brother Juniper

Finally, Chesterton shows the power of the 'holy fool' nature of St Francis, and how an (autistic?) holy fool can have great influence on the world:

> ... the coming of St Francis was like the birth of a child in a dark house, lifting its gloom; a child that grows up unconscious of the tragedy and triumphs over it by his innocence. In him it is not only innocence but ignorance ... it was such an amnesty and reconciliation that the freshness of the Franciscan spirit brought to the world.[127]

Christine Trevett speculates on the similarity between Francis' early follower Brother Juniper and autistic traits, while cautioning against too ready

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[125] https://www.trinitystores.com/store/art-image/st-francis-jongleur-de-dieu, accessed 20/11/2014
[126] Ibid.
[127] Chesterton, G K, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, p.178

equating the two. Trevett is developing Frith's idea of Brother Juniper as an autistic holy fool,[128] to consider the role of autists in the Church. Trevett writes:

> Holy Fools afflicted the comfortable and the AS-ish[129] Juniper did the same. His person and his actions challenged fear-driven choices. He made manifest everyone's horror of being labeled "abnormal" and the stories about him were a question mark over excessive regard for the regard of others. Juniper challenged people's desire to see themselves reflected back when they engaged with someone. He offered no such reflection and in his peculiarity he was iconic. So just as the Franciscans' message implied that there should and could be no grounding for the Christian in humanly-based security, so the Juniper stories implied, in addition, that there should and could be no grounding in the security of others being predictable and conformist.[130]

Trevett explores brother Juniper's abnormalities and see many features which could have similarities with autism. Like trinitystores, she points out that the 'foolishness' of divergence is in fact spiritual wisdom. If this is so, then there might be also the quality of innocence, which Happé suggested earlier: "fools are innocent, and as such they are embodiments of divine grace."[131]

Autistic 'foolishness' as 'innocence'

On innocence in autism, there are numerous accounts. For example, in the autism community website wrongplanet.net, the blogger JustElliot – Snowy Owl writes:

> So I've been told most of my life that I am naïve in a lot of ways …I've also been told that I come across as so innocent, like someone who would never hurt a fly.[132]

and the blogger Webster comments, in aspergersthealien.blogspot.co.uk:

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[128] see *Frith, Autism: Explaining the Enigma*
[129] AS = Autistic Spectrum
[130] Trevett, *Christine, Asperger's Syndrome and the Holy Fool: The Case of Brother Juniper*
[131] Happé, *Staging Folly* p.165
[132] http://www.wrongplanet.net/postt166182.html, accessed 20/11/2014

> I am naive. And I know it. One of the conundrums of Aspergers is an almost childlike innocence and way of looking at the world.[133]

The parent of an autistic child gives this explanation, in her website autisticbean.wordpress.com:

> Bean isn't cunning, he has little or no guile and he does not manipulate others because he simply does not have the necessary theory of mind to do so. … But Bean has never even attempted (being manipulative) because his autism prevents him from making that very basic inference about how his action will affect another person's behaviour. So when Bean cries it is because he is hurt and that's all there is to it. This applies to other forms of manipulation as well, crying for attention is perhaps the most basic manipulation possible other more sophisticated types are completely beyond our boy. This purity of purpose and intent is actually quite beautiful if you think about it![134]

In fact, for an autistic hermeneutic, something similar and yet very different is happening. Bean, as a small child, lacks the theory of mind to develop the skill of manipulativeness. Webster, on the other hand, is 'innocent,' 'childlike,' and 'naïve,' and yet s/he knows it. Webster is capable of choosing to learn whether s/he might or might not choose to develop strategies to overcome this naivete. The autistically thought literary-theological hermeneutic is a conscious autism, a strategy adopted consciously, to enter into the spiritual nature of this 'innocence.' This conscious hermeneutic is adopting an autistic mode of being in order to explore, in a new way, the words and nature of Jesus regarding innocence and childlikeness.[135] When Webster says, 'I am naïve and I know it,' an autistic theological hermeneutic approaches the text in an acquired naivete (as will be discussed below) where the reader 'knows' perfectly well that s/he is learning' what s/he knows perfectly well to have already 'known.'

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[133] http://aspergersthealien.blogspot.co.uk/2011/11/naivety-innocence-of-aspergers-autism.html, accessed 20/11/2014

[134] https://autisticbean.wordpress.com/the-beautiful-and-dangerous-innocence-of-the-autistic-mind/, accessed 20/11/2014

[135] "Except ye become like little children, ye cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (Matthew 18.3); when Pilate declares Jesus innocent, is Jesus choosing an "innocence" which refuses to play the game of a court of law? (John 19.4-8)

This 'acquired naïveté' is the return to a 'childlikeness,' paradoxically anything but 'childishly naïve,' which Paul Ricoeur describes as 'second naïveté.' Ricoeur writes, regarding the problem of critical awareness of the hermeneutic circle:

> *In every way, something has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy of belief. But if we can no longer live the great symbolisms of the sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can, as modern men, aim at a second naivete in and through criticism. In short, it is by interpreting that we can hear again. Thus it is in hermeneutics that the symbol's gift of meaning and the endeavour to understand by deciphering are knotted together … the knot where the symbol gives and criticism interprets – appears in hermeneutics as a circle … we must understand in order to believe, but we must believe in order to understand*[136] *…*

> I believe that being can still speak to me – no longer, of course, under the practical form of immediate belief, but as the second immediacy aimed at by hermeneutics. This second naivete aims to be the postcritical equivalent of the precritical hierophany.[137]

In a different way, decades earlier, Gerard Manley Hopkins writes about it being 'a hard thing to undo this knot,'[138] and Hopkins is considering the 'knot' of a problematized poetic subjectivity. Yet there is a similarity, since Hopkins' subjective/objective dilemma is also a kind of circularity. As chapter four will discuss, Hopkins 'undoes the knot' through a literary-theological poetics.

Here, an autistic literary-theological hermeneutic might be suggested to 'undo the knot' of the hermeneutic circle by standing outwith it, consciously, as an 'honest atheism' of faith, where the symbol does not precritically fall short of interpretation, but the need for critical resolution is suspended by a second naivete of awe. This 'awe' is similar to T S Eliot's poetic moment where

> the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time."[139]

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[136] Ricoeur, Paul, *The Symbolism of Evil* (trans. Emerson Buchanan) (Boston, Massachusetts; Beacon Press,1969) p.351
[137] ibid., p352
[138] see chapter 4
[139] T S Eliot, *Little Gidding, The Four Quartets*

The nature of this autistic 'second naivete' can be seen in different lights. Bogdashina and Stillmann propose one mode for seeing autistic naivete, and this thesis' autistic hermeneutic argues instead for an autistic 'naivete' more like Ricoeur's second naivete, in the a-theological 'honest atheism' described earlier in this chapter. What this hermeneutic shares with Bogdashina and Stillmann's narratives, however, is to see the theological significance of Makram & Makram's 'intense world syndrome,'[140] as follows.

Autistic 'Spiritual Giftedness' and Intense World Syndrome

Olga Bogdashina and William Stillmann see an almost supernatural quality to autistic divergent perception, akin to a child-like 'innocence.' Stillmann writes:

> Every one of us is a spiritual being, and perhaps no one knows this better than parents of children with autism. So many individuals with autism seem to "vibrate" at a frequency different from others because they are inherently gentle and exquisitely sensitive. They may more readily perceive all things seen and unseen. [141]

In *Autism and Spirituality,* Bogdashina, in her reading of Stillmann, adds:

> It has been noticed that some people with what was once known as a 'mental deficiency' or mental illness have profound spiritual and religious awareness (Bissonnier 1965); people with temporal lobe epilepsy have strong emotional and déjà vu experiences (Mullan and Penfield 1959); people with psychosis are prone to powerful spiritual (whether positive or negative) experiences (Clarke 2010). Sensky and Fenwick (1982) reported a strong connection between epilepsy and religious experiences. Mysticism has often been linked to schizophrenia (Wapnick 1981) ... (and) individuals with autism.[142]

Although this thesis approaches the question of 'autism and spirituality' differently than Bogdashina or Stillmann do, there is a similarity of discerning value in the 'intense world theory' narrative Bogdashina develops from her reading of Makram & Makram. For the literary-theological autistic hermeneutic

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[140] Makram & Makram, *Intense World Syndrome* p.77
[141] http://www.williamstillman.com/autism-god-connection.php, accessed 15/11/2014
[142] Bogdashina, *Autism and Spirituality* p.51

at issue in this thesis, 'intense world' is part of how the fascination quality of literal metaphor works, so it needs briefly to be explained here.

Makram & Makram propose an 'intense world syndrome' model as an alternative theory of autism, and although it is very novel (at this time of writing, 2016), it accords well with the sensory issues which will be discussed below. They write:

> the world may become painfully intense for autistics and we, therefore, propose autism as an *Intense World Syndrome* ...[143]
>
> ... We, therefore, propose that the autistic person may perceive its surroundings not only as overwhelmingly intense due to hyper-reactivity of primary sensory areas, but also as aversive and highly stressful due to a hyper-reactive amygdala, which also makes quick and powerful fear associations with usually neutral stimuli. The autistic person may well try to cope with the intense and aversive world by avoidance. Thus, impaired social interactions and withdrawal may not be the result of a lack of compassion, incapability to put oneself into some else's position or lack of emotionality, but quite to the contrary a result of an intensely if not painfully aversively perceived environment.[144]

They conclude that

> The *Intense World Syndrome* suggests that the autistic person is an individual with remarkable and far above average capabilities due to greatly enhanced perception, attention and memory. In fact it is this hyper-functionality which could render the individual debilitated.[145]

Fascination in the autism literature

Bogdashina tests out intense world syndrome in the light of earlier (more 'canonical') clinical narratives and finds a great deal of supporting evidence from Bregman & Escalona, who record that "variations in sensory impression

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[143] Makram H, Rinaldi T, Makram K. *The Intense World Syndrome*
[144] ibid. P.33
[145] ibid. p.42

that made no difference to the average child made a great difference to (autistic spectrum) children." [146]

The twentieth century clinical narrative from Wing and Frith also records similar sensory sensitivities. Frith describes "sharply uncomfortable sensory and strong emotional experiences … out of the ordinary;'[147] and Lorna Wing also describes sensory abnormalities, using the language of fascination and distress as signs of intense reaction to the sensory:

> (an autistic) child may be fascinated by some sounds
> such as that made by friction drive toys or the ringing of
> a bell. They may find some sounds intensely distressing
> and will cover their ears and cringe away from, for
> example, the roar of a motor bike … or even some
> comparatively quiet sounds … odd responses to sounds,
> especially … oversensitivity. [148]

She makes the same observation about visual stimuli as either fascinating or distressing. In particular, she describes the fascination with bright lights which is the "most common." [149] Bregman records the same features, and also uses the word fascination

> Among those with a more classic form of autism, a great
> deal of sensory exploration may occur, often involving
> minor details of parts of toys or objects. Often there is
> a fascination with subtle physical characteristics of toys
> and objects, such as texture, shading and hue.[150]

The key word is fascination. He gives the example of "the intense visual scrutiny of light diffraction patterns when a prism-like stone is twirled in the sunlight."[151]

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[146] Bergman, P, Escalona, S.K, *Unusual sensitivities in very young children* in Phyllis Greenacre et al (eds), *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* (New York; International Universities Press, New York, 1949) p. 333, quoted in Bogdashina p.55; see also *Definitions and Characteristics of the Spectrum*, Joel D. Bregman, in *Autism Spectrum Disorders: Identification, Education and Treatment*, ed. Dianne Zager (London/New Jersey; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), p.13, where they are also using the language of sensory fascination.
[147] Frith, *Autism; Explaining the Enigma* p.14
[148] Wing, *The Autistic Spectrum*, p.50
[149] Ibid. p. 51
[150] Bregman, Joel, *Definitions and Characteristics of the Spectrum*, in *Autism Spectrum Disorders: Identification, Education and Treatment,* ed. Dianne Zager (London/New Jersey; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), p.13
[151] Ibid.

Fascination and Creativity

The argument in this thesis for a literary-theological autistic hermeneutic does not use the approach of Bogdashina's and Stillmann's 'spiritual giftedness,' but it does draw on this idea of fascination as an exceptional quality which enables this hermeneutic to draw on its enhanced perception. This can be seen as an intensely creative mode of being in the world. Frances Tustin gives an outstanding example of fascination:

> The controls of an autistic child are of an all-or-nothing variety … he is either devoid of sensation, or he is flooded by it. Such floods of heightened consciousness seem to have much in common with those produced by hallucinogenic drugs in which the subject feels that colours and shapes are apprehended with ultra-vivid clarity and there is the sense of being actually inside a colour or a shape. Autistic children who have become articulate have shown me that they experience things in this way. For example, an autistic child called Peter, as he left the therapy room, pointed to a tall yellow daisy and said, 'I'm inside that yellow flower – it's the yellowness I'm inside.' He was at a loss to describe his experience any further. His whole body was taut with heightened responsiveness, the pupils of his eyes were dilated and his eye shone with preternatural brightness.[152]

When Peter says "It's the yellowness I'm inside," he is in the territory of autistic fascination. Michael Fitzgerald writes:

> 'Hans Asperger wrote about 'autistic intelligence' and saw it as a sort of intelligence hardly touched by tradition and culture – 'unconventional, unorthodox, strangely "pure" and original, akin to the intelligence of true creativity."[153]

This "strangely pure" way of relating to the world can give rise to intense, immersive responses which are expressed as musical, artistic and literary sensibility [subverting the narrative of autists as 'prosaic' and 'pedantic;' although these qualities too will be discussed below]. The autist Temple Grandin speaks about 'thinking in pictures' in her Ted Talk and points out that autistic people tend to have particular fascinations and abilities with

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[152] Tustin, Frances, *Autistic States in Children* (London, UK; Routledge, 1992) quoted in Eyal et al, *The Autism Matrix*, p. 149

[153] Asperger, *Autism and Aspergers Syndrome*, pp. 37-92, cited in Fitzgerald, Michael, *The Genesis of Artistic Creativity* (London, UK; Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, UK, 2015), p.5

pictures (art), words (hyperlexia and reading/writing) or mathematics, and that these can generate particularly creative interactions with the non-human world.[154] Similarly, the autist Donna Williams describes a sense of oneness:

> It was this side of me that felt part of the things around me, not with them, but as them. In sensing them, yet sensing them without the selfhood of interpretation, significance and realisation, I became "one" with the things I sensed.[155]

Williams continues:

> Classical music poured out of me; music spoke the force and variation of wind and rain, sunshine through clouds, the contrast and magic of dusk and dawn and flying.[156] The city lights and reflections playing upon the river … statues, beautiful parks, old wooden cathedrals, and marble sculptures, paintings by Renoir or scenes by Monet, captured me and brought home the beauty of 'the world.' … The frosted trees and icy fields … the beauty moved me so deeply I found myself crying.[157] Some things hadn't changed much since I was an infant swept up in the perception of swirling air particles, a child lost in the repetition of a pattern of sound, or a teenager staring for hours at coloured billiard balls, trying to grasp the experience of the particular colour I was climbing into.[158]

The autistic artist Wendy Lawson also comments about fascination:

> I find colour simply fascinating and it stirs all sorts of feelings in me. The stronger and brighter the colour, the more stirred up I become. My favourite colours are rich in emerald green, royal blue, purple, turquoise and all the in-between shades of these colours.[159]

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[154]http://www.ted.com/talks/temple_grandin_the_world_needs_all_kinds_of_minds?language=en, accessed 16/11/2014

[155] Williams, Donna, *Autism - An Inside-out Approach: An innovative look at the mechanics of 'autism' and its developmental 'cousins'* (London, UK; Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004 (1996)) p.249

[156] ibid. pp.245

[157] Ibid. p.59

[158] Ibid. Spirituality p.52

[159] Ibid. p.67

"Useless" autistic fascination? Frith, Bregman, and autistic experience

Joel Bregman's language is dismissive of these phenomena:

> (with) Intense preoccupying interests ... such individuals literally can become world experts on such topics, yet resist suggestions to transform this interest and knowledge into functional, meaningful or marketable skills.[160]

This is 'fascination' which is not sensory; instead it is a focus of an extreme nature. Uta Frith describes the behaviour of autistic people with a narrow intense particular interest as follows:

> (Autistic people)'s special interest is often their sole topic of conversation ... (a)utistic repetitions and obsessions appear to be different from compulsions as the autistic person does not try to resist them, but apparently greatly enjoys enacting them ... (which) can lead to outstanding achievements.[161]

Tony Attwood records examples of autistic fascination he encounters in his clinical work: "the young child may develop an interest in collecting specific items ... the lids of tubes of Smarties ... the labels from bottles of beer ... butterflies or keyrings ... yellow pencils, vacuum cleaners or toilet brushes.[162]

The next stage of development is "fascination with a topic rather than an object. Common topics are transport ... dinosaurs, electronics and science. The person develops an encyclopaedic knowledge ... a common feature is a fascination with statistics, order and symmetry."[163] The autistic adults explains how this continues in adult life:

> "If you put two or more people together who have Asperger's syndrome, the question is bound to come up. Translated, it means, "So, what one single thing have you been focusing on all your life?"
> Not everyone with Asperger's syndrome will be able to relate to such a question, but when you take the repetitive nature of this unique group, along with their narrow, restricted interests, and mix that together with an intense curiosity or profound devotion to whatever strikes their fancy, a lifelong interest in one particular

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[160] Bregman (ed. Zager), *Definitions and Characteristics of the Spectrum,* p.14
[161] Frith, *Autism: Explaining the Enigma,* p.14
[162] Attwood, *Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for parents and Professionals,* p.89.
[163] ibid. p.90

subject is often the result. Even more amazing, this special interest typically begins at a very early age.

Without a doubt, my focus has been on all things futuristic. Robots are a big deal for me, along with architectural designs of a futuristic nature. I could sit and stare at a drawing of a futuristic city all day long. Come to think of it, I have.[164]

Another autistic blogger, Sunfell, relates that

My Special Subject is systems- any kind of system- ...   I have many other deep interests, too ... Life for me is one vast puzzle-box, a huge system to explore and exploit- and I have found a place of contentment in this world.[165]

The Sensory Connoisseur

A place of contentment suggests that Francesca Happé's 'sensory connoisseur' might be occupying a fascination which responds in delight, whether to colour, sound, touch, taste, or to collections or special interests. Happé writes:

Repetition is not repetition, for example, if you have expert levels of discrimination. Listening to different recordings of the same symphony might strike some as repetitive, but these sound entirely different to an expert. The child with autism who would happily spend hours spinning coins, or watching drops of water falling from his fingers, might be considered a connoisseur, seeing minute differences between events that others regard as pure repetition.[166]

Alistair Clarkson further develops this idea:

Within discussion of an alternative view of "pure repetition" in ASD, let us try to think more expansively regarding what is 'repetitive,' by considering behaviour within the neurotypical world. Can we form an alternative behavioural view of the neurotypical person who typically watches television for many hours a day – a person who may sit every day staring at a flickering

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[164] http://thinkingautismguide.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/special-interests.html, accessed 25 April 2012.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Happé, *Autism and Talent* p. xvi, quoted in Clarkson p.4.

screen, displaying limited communication with others as a result? Or can we consider the over-anxious and neurotic house-cleaner, repeatedly cleaning away invisible dirt? A key question remains: "how far is our notion of 'repetitive' actually influenced by sociological value systems?[167]

To return to St Francis, G K Chesterton's description of him 'strikes a chord' with a classic WCC attention to detail, as a glorious, holy fascination:

> St Francis was not a lover of nature ... as ... a sort of sentimental pantheism ... the hermit might love nature as a background (but) for St Francis nothing was ever in the background. We might say that his mind had no background, except perhaps that divine darkness out of which the divine love had called up every coloured creature one by one. He saw everything as dramatic, distinct from its setting, not all of a piece like a picture but in action like a play. A bird went through him like an arrow; something with a story and a purpose ... In a word, we talk about a man who cannot see the wood for the trees. St Francis was a man who did not want to see the wood for the trees. He wanted to see each tree as a separate and almost a sacred thing, being a child of God and therefore a brother or sister of man.[168]

Not wanting to see the wood for the trees is reverence for the trees, and holy disregard for the wood of the pragmatism of the 'normal' world. WCC is a 'pathology,' but holy autistic fascination recasts it as a gift.

And metaphor?

It might seem that metaphor has been a long way away from this discussion of foolishness and fascination, but in fact these are essential to the literary-theological hermeneutic which might be able to see itself as autistic. The important point at issue has been how very creatively different autistic imagination and creativity can be from the neurotypical, so that an autistic relationship with metaphor might be considered as equally creatively distinctive. This is a case which needs to be argued against much of the clinical narrative.

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[167] Clarkson p.11
[168] Chesterton, *Francis of Assisi,* pp.98 – 99

For example, Peter Hobson sees autism as an impairment which prevents the autistic child from "using symbols creatively," adding that "nor do their symbols transport them to a world of the imagination."[169] The argument of autistic fascination is that "symbols" do not "transport them to a world of imagination," but are, in themselves, the "world of imagination." It is easy to see why autistic modes of response could be seemingly unimaginative in spite of the accounts of Williams, Lawson, Grandin and Howson. Autistic 'special interests' can seem prosaic, but perhaps this is, to return to Gernsbacher and Pripas-Kapit's question, Who's missing the point?

Before exploring how this might work in practice, one short example gives a clue. God tells the suffering, barren woman who is Israel:

> behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your
> foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles
> of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your wall of
> precious stones. (Isaiah 54. 11-12).

An autistic hermeneutic of this passage from Isaiah might well delight in the images of these stones, and worship God for the bringing together of these shiny objects. A neurotypical hermeneutic might pass over the richness of this image as 'mere' allegory – the autist alternatively might delight in it more fully.

This delight in the image is a golden thread. Looking back to the a-theological thinking of earlier in this chapter, art as Taylor's "site of the disaster" offers an autistic reading the opportunity to find honest, atheist faith within the site of the art work. This delight, as a fascination which is presence, will run through the poetic readings in each chapter. Thought as presence, metaphor is in the inaccessible centre, and thought as absence, it is simultaneously utterly outwith, and both are modes of autistic literal metaphor's outwitting of the hermeneutic circle.

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[169] Hobson, Peter, *The Cradle of Thought: Exploring the Origins of Thinking* (Reigate, Surrey, UK; Pan books, 2004) p.122.

1.2. The 'privilege of pathology'

Towards an autistic theological hermeneutic

Unavoidably, 'taking things literally' when figurative language is used, often leads to misunderstanding and even bafflement. When an idiomatic metaphor is taken 'at face value,' it is ridiculous, and does not make sense.[170] However, if the introduction's *Dasein* embodied in Chauncey Gardener is borne in mind, perhaps the 'mistake' might make profound sense beyond sense. Thinking of an autistic 'Being There,' the strategy of an autistic hermeneutic might theologically be extremely 'coherent' (holding together) in the sense of entering two spaces, the autistic and the mystical/a-theological, and finding that they can 'read each other.' The coherence (co-inherence) of this chapter is its bringing together of two sites of 'bafflement,' where the autistic hermeneutic meets a theological bafflement of language.[171] This reading of each in the light of the other creates the possibility of a theological autistic hermeneutic, which creates the theological possibility of a particular kind of incarnation. The aim of creating a theological autistic hermeneutic is to develop it to be used as a fully incarnational autistic hermeneutic in subsequent chapters.

Neurotypical hermeneutics

An autistic hermeneutic, to the degree that it is autistic, will differ radically from a non-autistic ('neurotypical) hermeneutic. This section sets out the background for this distinction, with a brief overview of what constitutes hermeneutics as a discipline.

Werner Jeanrond defines hermeneutics as *'the theory of interpretation,'* adding that

> The word contains a reference to Hermes, the
> messenger of the Gods in Greek mythology. Hermes'
> task was to explain to humans the decisions and plans of
> their Gods. Thus, he bridged the gap between the divine
> and the human realm [so that] hermeneutics is

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[170] This section uses the word 'coherent' to describe a paradoxical sense beyond sense. However it is worth noting at the outset that, when the autist hears something which, taken literally, doesn't make sense, from an autistic point of view it is the neurotypical speaker who is actually being incoherent.

[171] Which also becomes an (equally coherent) language of bafflement.

> concerned with examining the relationship between the two realms, the realms of a text or a work of art on the one hand, and the people who wish to understand it on the other.*172*

Jeanrond gives a useful way to think about becoming hermeneutically self-aware:

> The hermeneutical problem may become clearer to us when we recall the odd experience of reading a book for the second time. Such a re-reading often opens up a new reception of the text. We may discover something new, something different in the text, and we may say now that we see the book with different eyes. ... our perspective has changed ... This experience teaches us that understanding is in fact not an automatic and unproblematic exercise of deciphering a set of consistently identical signs on paper ... it demands that we lend of our reality to the text so that it can become real for us.[173]

If we can "see the text through new eyes," by re-reading it, the implicit logic is that 'eyes' are always required, and that "text-understanding always demands our active participation in recreating the text in question. It demands that we lend of our reality to the text so that it can become real for us."[174]

If different eyes bring different realities to the text, different hermeneutics create different textual worlds. This is a question not only of technical approach but also of epistemology. For example, the purpose of a historical-critical hermeneutic of the Bible is to bring out the stylistic differences between different parts of Scripture, which make it possible to construct a redaction history. However, underlying this is an (implicit or explicit) set of philosophical, theological or epistemological assumptions. In this case, it might be that, for example, 'the word of God is a human construct,' 'the Bible contains the Word of God but is not itself the Word,' or 'we cannot postulate any divine authorship, but only what can be demonstrated in empirical historical terms.' The science of hermeneutics establishes that "we

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[172] Jeanrond, Werner G, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London, UK; SCM Press Ltd., 1994) p.1
[173] ibid.
[174] ibid.

never read a text 'objectively' or 'neutrally' … no human reader has an unlimited perspective."[175]

This awareness opens up the possibility of allowing, and celebrating, diverse hermeneutical approaches to the text. Theologically, interfaith conversations work to nurture a sense of reverence for the other whose approach to the text is different from our own. A neurotribal autistic hermeneutic will be presented in the following argument, as a legitimate strategy, resting on a legitimate epistemology. This will be autism giving itself permission to see the world autistically, with the ability to discern an autism of the text.

Towards incarnational metaphor: the trinity of attributes

Postulating an autism of the text requires a language to mediate theological thinking in terms of autistic perception, and this can be done in terms of the 'trinity of attributes' defined in the introduction: mindfulness of separation, autistic fascination, and their synthesis in literal metaphor. Seeing the synthesis of this trinity theologically is incarnational metaphor.

The introduction offered a model of autistic lived experience as absence and presence, in terms of Mindfulness of Separation co-existing with Autistic Fascination. Incarnational metaphor embodies this co-existence of absence and presence, incorporating it into a perceptual style which will see metaphor itself as the site of both absence and presence. A new understanding of metaphor is key to the autistic hermeneutic.

The clinical narrative rightly devotes considerable attention to metaphor as a problem, because of the disabling misunderstandings which happen when autistic people 'take things literally.' This is a question of interpretation ("what does she mean by that?"), and an autistic hermeneutic would be most distinctive in this 'problematic' relationship to metaphor. However, considering autism in the light of abnormal metaphor can be reframed as a creative divergence. "Getting it wrong" might actually be "getting it right" when the autistic mode of reading metaphor sheds light on theological hermeneutics

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[175] ibid. p.2

which focus on a poetic dimension of language. Here, where this literal-mindedness has been pathologised as a 'lack of imagination,'[176] the argument for a theology of incarnational metaphor as an autistic epistemology would be the very opposite. Theologically, it would be a privileged seeing of language as a 'real' embodiment, of the body of the kenotic incarnate Christ.

Mindfulness of Separation – this is not a 'conversation.'

Heidegger writes that "we – mankind – are a conversation. The being of man is founded in language. But this only becomes actual in conversation."[177] Here, the autistic hermeneutic works not as the conversation of language, but as the silence of language. To return to the metaphors used in the introduction, this is a silent conversation, between silences, on the bridge.

To see how literal metaphor works as a hermeneutic, firstly it will be considered here as mindfulness of separation. To distinguish between autistic and neurotypical hermeneutics in terms of a possible mindfulness of separation, a good place to start is Hans-Georg Gadamer's familiar metaphor of the fusion of hermeneutical horizons. Gadamer states:

> In the process of understanding there takes place a real fusion of horizons, which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously removed ...[178] Understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused.[179]

Werner Jeanrond expresses this meeting of horizons as being such that "language is the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object take place between two people."[180]

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[176] eg, Baron Cohen, Simon & Craig, Jaime, Creativity and Imagination in Autism and Asperger Syndrome, in Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders Vol. 29, No. 4, 1999, where children are 'tested' for creativity; see also Autism and Talent, Happé & Frith (eds.), where 'savant skills' are viewed as repetition by rote
[177] Heidegger, Martin, *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry* (Chicago; Henry Regnery, 1949) *Poetry* p.277
[178] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method* trans. Len-Doepel 2nd edn. (London, UK; Sheed & Ward, 1979 (1975)), pp.273-4, quoted in Jeanrond, *Hermeneutics*, p.66
[179] ibid. p.258f quoted in Jeanrond, *Hermeneutics*, p.65
[180] Ibid. pp.345-6, quoted in Jeanrond, Hermeneutics p.66

This is precisely what does *not* happen in autism. It is the first way in which Incarnational metaphor can be thought of as absence, because there *is* no effective conversation where metaphor is concerned. An autistic hermeneutic is not one which discerns the social context of a body of tradition so that horizons fuse. In autism *qua* autism, there *is* no "understanding and agreement."

If this is tantamount to saying that there is, then, no genuine hermeneutical fusion of horizons, attaining understanding and agreement, then it is in fact accurate to say that an absolute autistic hermeneutic is a non-hermeneutic. The words are ultimately, in absolute autism, *only* words, which do not achieve the fusion of horizons. However, the space of a non-hermeneutic becomes interesting theologically if this is thought of as the hermeneutic of the non. This is precisely how the autistic hermeneutic will come alive as a theological hermeneutic, by situating itself within the non-language of mystical theology and a-theology. In this sense, the pathology becomes a privileged theological strategy.

The autistic theological hermeneutic for which this thesis argues is one which takes the image, as it were, literally, straight out of the horizon without seeing "beyond the horizon" to the other's horizon. In that case, there is no "fusion of horizons," but only one horizon, seen through the autistic eye. Language is not a middle ground between two people, because there is only the autistic eye (in the sense of '*autos*' = self). The figurative image is not something shared between conversation partners, resulting in a new understanding, but simply 'is,' in solitude.

Fascination: Intuition divorced from conversation

There is no fusing of hermeneutical horizons to achieve union with the other, in the sense of a breakthrough to grasp the meaning of the other's intent. What there is, instead, is the union with the image itself, divorced from the intent 'on the other horizon.' This is an intuition of appreciating and inhabiting the image for its own sake. Being 'divorced' from conversation means being separated from the fusing of horizons of meaning. It is in that space, by definition only in that space, that an intuitive oneness with the image takes place. This works by the kind of intense fascination which stays with its object

in the terms Uta Frith attributes to the 'autistic connoisseur' discussed in the introduction.[181] This fascination, when thought theologically, is the union with the 'literal' image.[182]

Jeanrond points out that Schleiermacher, as "the father of modern hermeneutics," was "the first thinker who appreciated the universal scope of the hermeneutical problem, and as a result demanded a philosophical theory of understanding."[183] Jeanrond adds that for Schleiermacher, "the theologian as interpreter of the Scriptures enjoys no special privileges, rather he is bound by the hermeneutical rules like any other text-interpreter."[184] There is a difference between being ignorant of the rules and breaking the rules. Ignorance of hermeneutical rules means naively assuming that there are no rules, and lacking awareness of the array of possible hermeneutical strategies and their limitations. The consciously autistic theologian knowingly breaks the rules, in the sense that s/he knowingly disrupts and exceeds the boundaries of grammatical propriety. The text in effect is not 'interpreted' at all. There is only a one-ness of being 'in the text.' This glory of metaphor can be seen in this second "face of the coin," autistic fascination. This is, of course, impossible. How can a person 'meaningfully' read a text at all, if there is no attribution of meaning? It is impossible, it would seem, to call a lack of interpretation a reading strategy. Or is it? The child with echolalia repeats words 'for no useful reason,' but in her world, she is celebrating the musicality and pleasure of words at a higher level than merely 'using' them.

For example, reading the erotic language of the Song of Songs, there is no problem in applying this erotic love to the same word in John's gospel that 'God is love.' Whether this is '*storge', 'philia,' eros or 'agape'*[185] is irrelevant because God's love, as love, encompasses all, including all diverse images.

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[181] To recap, fascination a thinking of RRBI's in terms of Uta Frith's "sensory connoisseur" model. In this thesis, it also is pure affective empathy towards phenomena, manifest at times in intensity of sensory response as delight (or distress); and at other times as the affectivity of delight in the obsessive narrow interests common in high functioning autistic people.

[182] This paradox stands here for now, to be explored later.

[183] Jeanrond, *Hermeneutics* p.44

[184] ibid. p.49

[185] In terms of the distinctions which C S Lewis described in his study *The Four Loves* (London, UK; Geoffrey Bles Publishers, 1960)

Different images of God's love, such as father and mother *('storge'),* friend ('*philia*'), lover (*eros*) or provider (*'agape),* are all aspects of this divine love.

This is where the real nature of a theological autistic hermeneutic emerges, and why the introduction insisted that this is not at the level of everyday usage. The profusion of images where God is mother, father, friend, lover, provider, lion, lamb, are anathema to the literal-minded autist who wants to settle on one image of God, or even none, because this riot of plurality and paradoxical contradiction can't be logically coded and makes no sense.[186] An autistic reader, typically in real life, in many cases would avoid the baffling nature of imagery as much as possible, and avoid both poetic and religious language. However, for a theological autistic hermeneutic, the impossible task of 'making sense' of this as propositional logic is not the issue, because it operates, ultimately, is an impossible ideal. If a good logical positivist autist steps away from this chaos, it is understandable (and common, perhaps necessarily). However, staying in this chaotic glory is the challenge of an autistic theological hermeneutic.

This abnormal theological hermeneutic will now be developed by demonstrating what it is in practice, and how it works in different theological hermeneutic scenarios.

Literal incarnation of the theological metaphor

Another way to think about literal metaphor is as the autistic isolation of the image itself, when it is thought in a theoretical model of metaphor as self-contained. So, in the Song of Songs, for example, as opposed to the metaphor as a useful way to think *about* God and Church, there 'really is' a marriage between them, in autistic theological terms.[187] For this reason, an individual, real autistic person being theological in this sense will be baffled, trying to imagine how God and the Church could 'really' be carnally united (the Church is

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[186] This is exactly the point – do neurotypical readings pass over too lightly the phenomenal profusions and clashes of God-imagery in Scripture? How can it make sense for a loving shepherd to be a consuming fire?

[187] This is the perceived 'naïveté' of, for example, Origen or Bernard of Claivaux, who honour the image as 'literally' true, and this will be discussed in more depth later.

a plurality of people, and God is invisible). This is precisely the point, if faith is in 'what is not seen,' requiring faith in a different seeing of the figurative itself. The eye of an ultimate, absolute autistic faith can attain this, but, as subsequent chapters will argue, this is actually, finally, at the expense of sanity, which however becomes an autism of saintliness. The crucial point this chapter now proceeds to argue is that this insanity with the bafflement engendered by separation from the horizon of the other, is a genuine theological strategy. The claim this thesis makes is that this strategy of bafflement might be more authentic than a systematic theology which might be too quick to contain God in a doctrinal system. It will lead, in subsequent chapters, to a thinking of apophatic language as mindfulness of separation, fascination, and an ultimately incarnational literal metaphor.

1.3 Metaphor as normal and abnormal – autistic divergence

This section outlines how autistic processing of metaphor differs from the neurotypical norm.

The word metaphor's derivation from the Greek μετά (*meta*), "after, with, across" combined with φέρω (*pherō*), "to bear", "to carry" means that metaphor is a 'carrying across,' "a figure of speech, in which one thing … is referred to by a word or expression normally denoting another thing, so as to suggest some common quality shared by the two."[188] In normal language use, understanding the meaning involved in the 'carrying over' means decoding it by a 'carrying back.' So, for example, in '*the road of life*,' to understand the intent, the reader brings the (imaginary) 'image' of '*road*' back into the (real) '*meaning*' of 'life,'

This is a 'common-sense' neurotypical response to metaphor, but an autistic 'literal' metaphor offers a different response with potentially a new theological possibility. Literal metaphor resists the neurotypical common sense

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[188] Baldick, C. (2008). *Metaphor*, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford University Press at http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-712. accessed 2/07/2016

pragmatic reading. The argument for the power of literal metaphor is that it outwits neurotypical perception. 'Neurotypical, normal metaphor' (the non-autistic common-sense processing of metaphor) ironically fails, because it kills metaphor's power by reducing it to simile, as follows.

Autistic Resistance to a reduction to simile

In neurotypical common sense thinking, we know perfectly well that we are not 'really' talking about a road, but considering a possible imaginary road-ness in our concept of life. The image of the road might offer aspects which 'road' and 'life' share; progression, changing views, or destination, for example.[189] In fact, common-sense reading of metaphor to extract meaning is a posterior reduction of metaphor into simile, as will now be argued. A crucial indication appears here; not all readings of poetry are of the 'common sense' kind that denudes poetic space by reducing it merely into the question "what does this poem mean?" If an autistic reading resists this denudation of metaphor, then so too does a certain kind of poetic response which simply revels in word, sound and image. In fact, this will be the subject of chapter four, looking at the rich autistic potential offered by an autistic hermeneutic's response to Gerard Manley Hopkins' work. The claim which will be made there is that in a sense, true poetic response in fact has the embodiment of autistic privilege in it. This point is alluded to here, simply to make clear that autistic metaphor differs from a prosaic neurotypical norm. That neurotypical pragmatic norm 'fails,' as it resists staying in the space of something as meaningless, pointless and useless as the space of literature, which is being in the image.[190]

The *Oxford Dictionary* contrasts metaphor and simile:

> In metaphor, ... resemblance is assumed as an imaginary identity [my emphasis] rather than directly stated as a comparison: referring to a man as that pig, or saying he

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[189] Of course, the irony is that each of these common-sense words is in fact another metaphor – views, as metaphoric visual understood as opinions; opinions, etymologically traceable as o-pie, choice; the etymological roots are tangled, and this leads to Derrida's thought of the supplement, which will be discussed later.

[190] "The Space of Literature" is Maurice Blanchot's term, and it will be explored in chapter two.

is a pig is metaphorical, whereas 'he is like a pig' is a simile.[191]

To inhabit the metaphor is to be in the imaginary space where a man is a pig. Staying within the metaphor is absurd, because a man is not a pig. What the metaphor 'really means' is that, in some respects, by sharing pig-like attributes the man is 'like' a pig. Obtaining meaning from metaphor is only possible by effectively using 'common sense,' reducing it to simile, and this is to kill the metaphor. So a neurotypical 'common sense' reading which rescues meaning is an exit into the space described by Grice's relevance theory[192]. Reading the metaphor Neurotypically, the reader is perfectly well aware that resemblance is only that – resemblance – and a literal identification is 'non-sense' for the 'common-sense' point of view. So, by using Relevance, metaphor is contained and sealed off from its 'dangerous' potential of deferred referentiality and stable meaning.[193] Thinking of the 'pigness' of the man, or the 'roadness' of life, is rescued from an absurd confusion by thinking of 'pigness' as *like* the man, and 'roadness' as *like* life. This is the pragmatic avoidance of absurdity, through reducing metaphor to simile.

The autistic 'impairment' of an epistemology of metaphor, seen in terms of a clinical narrative, sees it as a disabling pathology, and in pragmatic, everyday terms, this is true. However the disability itself will now be considered as a radical a-theological possibility, which is that of resurrection.

Incarnational metaphor as a Resurrection (a)theological (im)possibility

If autistic epistemology is the impairment of Grice's relevance theory's cognitive mechanism, an autistic hermeneutic approaching metaphor is the failure to decode 'real' meaning from its 'entanglement' in the imaginary. In 'everyday' language use situations, this becomes a stumbling block for the

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[191] Baldick, *metaphor*
[192] see introduction
[193] Aristotle' *Logic* sees metaphor as a dangerous rhetorical strategy, leading both equivocal and analogical language astray

assumed conventions of ostensive metaphor.[194] In 'ostensive metaphor,'[195] an 'ordinary' or commonplace metaphor is 'taken as read.'[196] Because of its reduction to the commonplace, metaphor has moved out of poetic usage into pragmatic usage. This commonplace usage is so 'obvious,' that by being assumed as a 'normal' shorthand, it loses its status as living metaphor. The vehicle slides into propositional language, effectively losing the figurative power of an imaginative space. The original metaphor has effectively ceased to be metaphoric at all, with its origins of figurative reference changed into a shift into assumed literal meaning. Effectively, by being 'taken as read' in 'ordinary' decoding, it has become a dead metaphor. *So,* "much of our everyday language[197] is … made up of metaphorical words and phrases that pass unnoticed as 'dead' metaphors, like the branch of an organization."[198]

Thinking through metaphor as dead or alive raises interesting possibilities for an autistic hermeneutic of Incarnational metaphor. The 'dead' metaphor example given by Baldrick would be particularly pertinent to Frith's approach to autistic literal mindedness.[199] The "branch of an organisation" is exactly the kind of figurative language where autistic literal mindedness would fail to function with an appropriate response, because the "branch" would be envisioned as part of a tree. In fact, for Incarnational metaphor in its poetic and theological potential, what clinical narrative calls 'literal interpretation' is actually the opposite. It is a withdrawal from the social convention of dead metaphor as a propositional assumption where 'branch' has lost its poetic roots as imagery, and a rehabilitation, back into figuration. So the autist who is thinking of the branch of a tree when the branch of an office is "really" meant

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[194] 'Ostensive' metaphor in everyday, pragmatic use is very different to poetic metaphor. However, the argument for killing poetic metaphor by reducing it to simile is still the same in principle. Killing metaphor would be a reading which intends to extract meaning rather than enjoy the poetic space of the imaginary sharing performed by tenor and vehicle. In this chapter's reading of Blanchot's 'Space of Literature,' the argument is developed that true poetic reading can be viewed autistically, divorced from pragmatism, as an act of inhabiting Incarnational metaphor.

[195] See introduction

[196] Ironically, 'taken as read' means the opposite; it means 'reading something into it.'

[197] Paul Ricoeur, as will be discussed later in this chapter, argues that all language is at base metaphoric, as '*Métaphore Vive*' (living metaphor). This is an excavation and resurrection of metaphor which would interrogate dead metaphor to bring it back to life. This is another way of thinking of the resurrection power of autistic Incarnational metaphor, as will emerge.

[198] Baldick*, metaphor.* Again, this anticipates Ricoeur's *métaphore vive* and Derrida's *White Metaphor,* which will be discussed later.

[199] See Introduction

is re-entering the figurative power of metaphor, to puzzle over how an office can be part of a tree.

In pragmatic, ostensive terms, this is absurd in the same way that the inability to 'decode' metaphor into simile is absurd. It is, however, the resurrection of figurative power, from dead metaphor into living metaphor. Staying baffled at the absurdity of a space of pure living metaphor is the ability to inhabit an autistic space where language exceeds its containment in pragmatic, connotative meaning.

Autistic 'literal-mindedness' resurrects dead metaphor. The crucial point here is that by bringing back its figurative, imaginative potential, this absurdity can become a powerful theological hermeneutic. This is the logic which underpins the theological thinking of this thesis, as demonstrated in the subsequent chapters. This works, crucially, as a theological resurrection of metaphor, which chapter three will show to be at once incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. It is impossible outwith the foolishness of the gospel; the Gospel, the absurdity of the Christ event, 'doesn't make sense,' just as metaphor, purely unresolved ('solved') doesn't 'make sense.' In practice, autists often turn away from poetry because of an acute sensitivity to how 'it doesn't make sense;' the unresolved absurd leap of imaginative pairing is baffling, and demanding.

For this reason, when this 'odd' autistic hermeneutic is taken as a theological hermeneutic, Incarnation and Resurrection become clearly baffling, taking their full power of mystery seriously (this is also a question of autistic integrity, as will be discussed in chapter two). The Christ event in all its moments occurs as the baffling mysteries of Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. The next section explores religious language as bafflement, oddness and excess. Its purpose is to argue that this hermeneutic which reads the Christ event as baffling, odd and excessive, can be read equally as an autistic hermeneutic. This is because 'literal' metaphor can become a 'literal' presence which can be read theologically as Real Presence in a sacramental Incarnation of metaphor. This autistic theological language of the Christ event is one which offers an embodiment in 'absurd' language of the paradox of the God-man Incarnate Christ. The Christ of paradox is present by means of a literary-theological autistic baffled metaphor, enacting the baffling

theological potential of the events of Incarnation, Epiphany, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension.

In Incarnational metaphor, the process of decoding metaphor breaks down. Metaphor ceases to be a device which can be 'used' by the reader. Instead, there is no end point of 'use' in the writer-to-text-to-reader process. Metaphor becomes 'uselessly trapped' in an absurd hermeneutic.

This is an 'odd' reading, and the next section now explores how it sits sympathetically with Ian Ramsey's view of theological language as an 'oddness' of bafflement and excess. Whereas the clinical narrative pathologizes this inability/refusal,[200] in radical opposition a view of 'oddness' as a privileged epistemology becomes a theological strength. To do this, a journey into language as excess now moves through Origen, doxological language, Descartes and Derrida. The end point and purpose of this journey is to vindicate the autistic hermeneutic, so that its 'failure' is inverted into a 'pearl of great price,' ultimately and potentially, it will be argued, the most theologically useful.

1.4. Theological language as bafflement, oddness and excess

An early example: Origen

An early theological hermeneutic providing establishing a language of 'literal-mindedness' can be seen in Origen's commentaries. Origen writes about the *Song of Songs*:

> It seems to me that this little book is an epithalamium,
> that is to say, a marriage-song, which Solomon wrote in
> the form of a drama and sang under the figure of the
> bride, about to wed and burning with heavenly love
> towards her Bridegroom, who is the Word of God.[201]

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[200] Inability is Universal autism, and refusal is Conscious autism.
[201] Origen (184/185 – 253/254), *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*; Issue 26, Paulist Press, 195, P.21, e-book at
https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Mjxy0Fl7VMsC&q=love#v=snippet&q=love&f=false
accessed 14 July 2016

Origen is

> the originator of a 'dangerous' mode of interpretation (in the opinion of the Antiochenes) - the 'springboard' to 'higher and more spiritual' meanings than are on the surface of the text.[202]
> (With the Old Testament) to be read not as a historical record but as a kind of message in cipher to be interpreted by those fit to do so, that is filled with the Spirit of Christ, for only so could the spirit of the scriptures be understood …it is the narrative which receives meaning in the light of Christ.[203]

It might at first sight seem that an autistic 'literal-minded' reader would opt for a historical reading of Scripture, and this may be true. However this creates problems where the genre is poetic, as in this case. In fact, viewing Origen in an autistic theological light, it is the image which is real – the image does not so much "receive meaning in the light of Christ," so much as actually *be* in the light of Christ.

The 'image' is 'real'. So in this case, there actually *is* a wedding of Christ and Church. This hermeneutic speaks to autism as a possible Incarnation of the word. This is a poetic word, which in subsequent chapters will be thought of as poetic sacrament, so that Incarnational metaphor is Real Presence. For a traditional neurotypical reading, the divine wedding is based on the human wedding. For Origen, this is reversed. The human wedding is a copy of the divine wedding, and the divine wedding is 'more' real. It is baffling to see how a church can be carnally related to God; but staying in that bafflement is the strategy of the privileged autistic theological hermeneutic.

Doxological language: Ian Ramsay

In *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases, (*1974 (1957)), Ramsey describes the Christian revelation as a 'disclosure situation.' The word 'disclosure' in Ramsey's argument has the meaning of an opening upon something utterly other and utterly given. It is an enigma, not in the sense of a 'puzzle' to be solved but a mystery to be inhabited. In the 'disclosure

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[202] Wallace-Hadrill, D S, *Christian Antioch: a study of early Christian Thought in the East* (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press,1982) p.27; Wallace-Hadrill is referring to the early Church controversy between the historical hermeneutic of Scripture, by the church in Antioch, and the 'allegorical' hermeneutic of the church in Alexandria, with its Platonist influences.
[203] Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch* pp.28-9

situation,' both (Scriptural) kerygmatic language and doctrinal language operate outwith a 'normal' propositional epistemology. This is not a situation where logic can reason towards assent through reasoned understanding:

> Christian doctrine … can only be justified on an epistemology very different from that which lay behind traditional views of metaphysics. In no sense is Christian doctrine a 'super-science.'[204]

Instead, *'Prophetic language work(s) as disclosure language.'*[205] He describes this 'disregard' for logic in Peter's preaching in Acts:

> Peter's concern was first and foremost to evoke the distinctive Christian situation, and the logical behaviour of his words did not at all interest him. Here was the kerygma, the preaching, and its whole point was to evoke an appropriate situation of challenge and response.[206]

Ramsay argues that true religious language, then, is doxological, and the point is to inhabit divine mystery with reverence. [207] This is a (non) sense beyond (not beneath or falling short of) logic. It requires a language other than, and beyond logic. This is the "foolishness of the gospel" and the *skandalon (*scandal/stumbling block);[208] "neither Jews nor Greeks could formulate a credible language in which this preaching could be expressed."[209] This doxological language is a language of excess. Ramsey describes keygmatic prophetic language as:

> a riotous mixture of phrases … in effect a rough and ready attempt to secure that special logical impropriety needed to express the Christian message … St Peter's concern was first and foremost to evoke the distinctive Christian situation, and the logical behaviour of his words did not at all interest him. Here was the kerygma, the preaching, and its whole point was to evoke an appropriate situation of challenge and response.[210]

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[204] Ramsay, Ian, *Religious language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (London, UK; SCM Press,1957) p.17
[205] ibid. p.152
[206] ibid. pp. 154-5
[207] ibid. p.185; Ramsay also sees disclosure as dependent on a quality of discernment, which could be compared to Newman's concept of assent.
[208] 1 Corinthians 1.23
[209] Ramsay, *Religious Language,* p.155

[210] ibid. pp. 154-5

He describes the anomaly of the disclosure situation in the 'common-sense' world as 'odd,' and requiring an 'odd' language:

> Compared with 'what's seen' and our appropriate attitude thereto, the characteristically religious situation – characterised by a 'discernment-commitment' – (is) nothing if not odd … the currency for such an odd situation would have to be suitably odd language.[211]

Bafflement as doxology and literal metaphor

The 'odd' language of kerygma is not illogical but supra-logical. Encapsulating into doctrine what a poetic expression could describe "Our God contracted to a span/incomprehensibly made man"[212] is baffling. Ramsey discusses how in doctrinal controversies, when opposing doctrinal statements are not resolved, their co-existence, even contradiction, is valid "in order to understand, as best they can, a mystery which is bound to exceed both their attempts."[213] If 'odd' disclosure in prophetic language is "riotous" and "rough and ready," and 'odd' doctrinal language expresses "a mystery which is bound to exceed (its) attempt," both of these discourses are discourses of excess. Bafflement is the expression of being faced with what cannot be contained, and the response to this mystery is praise. Praise as reverence is an attitude which keeps mindfulness of this mystery open. In an autistic hermeneutic this necessary "oddness" of doxological language is precisely the reverence where mystery is incarnate in the bafflement of literal metaphor. Theologically, the autistic hermeneutic keeps open the possibility of literal metaphor as the mysterious discourse which is the site of the Incarnation.

The next step is to take autistic doxological bafflement as a way to outwit "the wisdom of the world."[214] To achieve this, language as this "odd" autistic incarnation will now be further explored in terms of post-Cartesian theology. This is the next stage of the journey towards deconstructive theology,

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[211] ibid. p.151
[212] Charles Wesley, *Let Earth and Heaven Combine* (1745)
[213] Ramsey, *Religious Language* p.171
[214] 1 Corinthians 3.19

which will work towards an autistic hermeneutic the mystical and the a-theological.

1.5. Incarnational metaphor and Wittgenstein

Kerr's critique of a totalising Cartesianism, thought as an autistic awareness

To work towards an a-theological language for this autistic Incarnation, the end of Cartesian representation can be seen as a possibility of theology after Wittgenstein. Fergus Kerr's *Theology After Wittgenstein* (1986) works towards this outwitting of the true theological foolishness of "the wisdom of the world." Kerr brings Wittgenstein's thought to bear on the philosophical underpinning of modern theologies. His argument is that Wittgenstein has been able to critique, disrupt and escape the Cartesian assumptions which create a totality which 'boxes in' theological thinking. Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am') is in Kerr's opinion theologically superficial, because this 'thought' is in fact a totalising consensus of subjective thought as deductive reasoning. This deductive reasoning leads to the scientific rationalism which can represent being, as if in a graph of Cartesian co-ordinates. Thinking theologically within this Cartesian rationalism would be to reduce theology to a science limited to the parameters of human reason, with no place for mystery or excess.

Autistic hell, and the temptation to turn back

Ironically, the Cartesian subjectivism of the *ego* is a communal consensus of the rules of scientific deduction, so that the isolated 'I' has become the consensus of the 'we.' The Cartesian co-ordinates used to plot a graph representing a mathematical formula are not only mathematical notation. In terms of representation thought in terms of a wider epistemology, Cartesian reason is an anthropocentric representational process where 'we,' the subject, create a world.

Thinking of Cartesian co-ordinates, there will be points in certain quadratic equations where infinity intrudes into the graph, so that co-ordinates cannot contain it. For example, it is impossible to calculate the precise value of π. Parmenides proves very simply that mathematically, infinity exists, because thinking of the largest possible number it is always possible to add one.

In the 'graph' of neurotypical subjectivity, assigned values could be considered as a function which assumes 'certainty,' side-stepping the points where impossible calculation disrupts the solution to the equation. The consensus of neurotypical reasoning becomes a totalising scientific 'box' which does not accommodate the radical otherness of autistic perception. Because it is the space of the incalculable, this stepping out of the box is ultimately an impossible, intolerable demand where absolute autism would inhabit the aporia of the parabola escaping representation. If I take the mathematical function 'literally,' I enter infinity. Small wonder that this autistic 'deviation' is the spectre which therapeutic interventions work to mitigate, in person-specific autistic lived experience.[215] Small wonder that as stated earlier, autistic people love science, where infinity can be contemplated and inhabited in the symbol ∞, but the 'limiting concept' of autistic literal metaphor is the destructive 'fatal step' of following logic to its ultimate conclusion. Interrogating Cartesianism 'too seriously,' probing its aporias to push outside the neurotypical box, calculating it too utterly beyond 'face value,'[216] is the descent into autistic hell of infinite regression, where to calculate the value of π relentlessly and obsessively leads to inescapable infinity.

Wittgenstein is a philosopher both of mathematics and language. His theory of language games exposes the 'box' for what it is – a game. It might seem logical that an autistic thinker would not participate in thinking of

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[215] For example, the personal stories in Voices from the Spectrum often, and painfully, give accounts of intolerable situations where the autist does not fit into norms and expectations (Ariel, Cindy N. & Naseef, Robert A. (ed.)

Voices from the Spectrum: Parents, Grandparents, Siblings, People with Autism, and Professionals Share their Wisdom (London, UK; Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006)

[216] 'Face value' is an idea that will be developed in section 2.3.3, to argue that the exclusion from a 'face value' consensus is the possibility of an autistic deconstructive hermeneutic.

language as a game – surely a game is not literal at all? Perhaps, on the contrary, fascinated immersion in the game is a truer autistic mode. High functioning autists can be highly able mathematicians,[217] and who is to say what kind of fascinating game is at work in the experience of RRBI's? [218] Thinking Wittgenstein autistically, this as such does not fit into the security of Descartes' *cogito*. Here it is necessary to think of two autistic scenarios. In one case, the security of the scientific method's calculable logic could be seen as one reason for the preponderance of autistic talent in the sciences.[219] It could be viewed as a refuge from the other autistic scenario.

The other autistic scenario is the storm of absolute autism, as the anguished awareness of a looming mental world of endless wandering in the aporia of the infinite value which disrupts Cartesian co-ordinates. To inhabit this game is the theological thinking of an absolute autism where presence is known only as absence. The following sections will argue that the demands of this faith offer not security but glory and pure erotic ecstasy. Theological thinking which is willing to face this ultimate 'marriage of heaven and hell' needs the courage to look outside the box, in divergent strategies of thought and discourse.

Kung and Cupitt

This speculation on a possible autistic disruption of Cartesianism can be thought theologically, and this section now returns to Kerr's thinking of possible theologies which might take stock of this disruption.

Kerr argues that Hans Küng and Don Cupitt's theologies attempt to escape the 'box' of Cartesian rationalism, but fall into difficulty by remaining in its subjectivity. Thinking of strategies for an autistic theological possibility here, initially, Küng's reading of Descartes, Pascal and Kierkegaard seems to offer a

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[217] See Fitzgerald, Michael & Walker, A, *Unstoppable Brilliance: Irish geniuses and Asperger's Syndrome* (Dublin, Eire; Liberties Press, 2014)

[218] See 'sensory connoisseur' in glossary.

[219] This concerns the discussion in the Introduction regarding WCC attention to detail, and fascination as repetition (Happé on practice, in *'Autism and Talent'*), WCC as difficulty 'forming the bigger picture', and 'black and white thinking' generate relentless obsessive thinking. Detail, pursued relentlessly, finds a 'safe haven' by its resolution in an unproblematic 'physics' which is not ensnared in the interrogation of 'meta-physical' critique.

promising theology of 'escaping the box' as autistic absence. Küng writes: "as there is no logically conclusive proof for the reality of reality, neither is there one for the reality of God."[220] This move away from "proof," in an autistic reading of Küng, would be an absence from the box in a radical unknowing. This is untenable if one is to live in any kind of rational world. However, Kerr points out that this untenable position[221] of utter doubt is escaped from only by a solitary 'king ego;' "the individual seems to be free to put what construction he will upon the surrounding world. The supposition is always that one is able to view the world from somewhere else – as if one were God, for example."[222]

Does this freedom of the individual to assert her/himself as a solitary creator of meaning not seem to answer to an autism of *autos*? It does, in fact, raise that possibility at the level of a 'simplistic' autism as considered earlier – but viewing the world as "from somewhere else" or "as if one were God" takes this solitary creator into another difficulty, which is a deeper autism.

Kerr argues that Don Cupitt also offers a theology where "individualist libertarianism of the self-conscious autonomous individual (becomes) a solitary individual with the God's eye view."[223] A Cartesian subjective systematisation, 'becoming God' with a 'God's eye view' in this emancipation of the subject, is in Barthian terms an idolatrous betrayal of the radical 'No.' It also raises the question of how the subject would in fact adequately attain a "God's eye view," "from somewhere else." Nobody can really do this – and so, what is required is a "nobody." This is the "nobody" which will now be explored.

Kerr's reading of Wittgenstein as Absolute Autism

Kerr's critique is of the Cartesian subject whose thinking *'ego'* can produce an *'ergo'* to secure assumptions of 'scientific objectivity.' Kerr's aim in

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[220] Footnote 28, ch. 1 in Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* p.16

[221] Untenable: un-tenable – what cannot be held (Latin *tenere*, 'hold'); as 'grasping,' this indicates a way towards Heidegger's ideas of receptivity where one cannot grasp, but only be 'grasped by.' 'Grasping' is also resisted in Jean Luc Marion's thinking of the gift, as the erotic phenomenon which outwits ontological difference (See Marion, (*God Without Being: Hors-Texte (Dieu Sans l'être: Hors-texte)* (trans. Thomas A Carlson), (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, (1982)) pp. 97-99, where in the parable of the prodigal son, the father's economy of gift surpasses the grasping quality of being as known by his sons' desire to possess.

[222] Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* p.16

[223] Ibid. p.17

this is to argue against it, to give a context for his project of *'Theology After Wittgenstein'*. This theology is based on a claim that "the most illuminating exploration of the continuing power of the myth of the worldless (and often essentially wordless) ego is to be found in the later writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein."[224]

This "myth of (a) wordless and … wordless ego" forms the basis of a language which might bring to a theological absolute autistic metaphor a potential realisation, as a 'post-Wittgensteinian theology.' To think of *ego* as "wordless and worldless" is to disrupt the subject's place, depriving it of voice and being in the world. This gives the possibility of a (non)ego, sliding, as it disappears, into what could be for an autistic hermeneutic a (non)ego which is *'autos.'* Thinking grammatically, *ego (*'I'*)* is the active, interactive self of the first person personal pronoun. 'I' speak. To render *ego* wordless and worldless is to displace 'I' from 'ego-ness.'[225] The autistic hermeneutic here can explore the possibility of reading (non)ego as *'autos,'* starting from this grammatical point of view. *'Autos'* is self, but as a noun – it is not a personal pronoun, let alone a first person one. Instead, it has the sense of the same isolation and wordlessness which might suggest it could be a reading of this (non)ego.[226]

This section will now argue that for literal metaphor, the 'worldless and wordless ego' offers this way to think of *autos* distinct from *ego.* A theological Wittgensteinianism, if thought in terms of absolute autism, loses even subject/object dualism in pure absent presence. To arrive at this claim, it is first necessary to establish what Kerr means by a theological thinking of the Wittgensteinian subject as a 'worldless and … wordless ego.'

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[224] Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* p.23

[225] In chapter two, the sense of Blanchot's writing that "the reader gives up saying I" expresses how this 'escape from the box' can be thought of as being in the space of poetic discourse.

[226] Elsewhere in this thesis it has been noted that the American charity *Autism Speaks* has been notorious for its stance which casts autism as the enemy to be not merely 'cured' but 'eradicated.' This is not only offensive but ironic. In this case, it is precisely not autism which speaks, but its 'enemies.' The pint made earlier in connection with this still stands here; pure, essential absolute autism does not 'speak' at all, and paradoxically, in theological thinking, speaks by not speaking, as will be considered later in chapters Three and Four.

Kaufman and ego

Turning to attempts at a post-Wittgensteinian theology, Kerr discusses Gordon Kaufman's project of 'transcendence without mythology' where the theologian can "learn to acknowledge his metaphysical prejudice and disclaim it."[227] Kerr explains how Bernard Williams' thinking undermines this claim. Eliminating prejudices is impossible. *Ego* cannot simply 'step outside itself' because we cannot escape our own personal mythologies.[228] Williams' critique of Kaufman therefore opens up the necessity for a (non)ego which could offer a space for a discourse for absolute absence. Kerr's reading of Williams reasons that since presupposition-less objectivity is impossible, it requires "the elimination of the observer ... To want the [Cartesian] absolute conception of reality is to aim at a description of things as they would be in our absence."[229]

This is an absolute irony and paradox, where Cartesian subjectivity deconstructs itself. Subjectivity (where the *ego* of the observer describes things) and objectivity (the description of things "as they would be in our absence") are both utterly necessary yet both negate each other.[230] Wittgenstein (like a good autist) thinks through this paradox by a thought experiment in the idea of absolute solipsism. Solipsistic total subjectivity would obliterate objectivity and therefore knowledge would both completely cease and yet simultaneously emerge in an absolute subjective realism, where 'my *cogito*' (think) becomes both '*sum*' ('I am') and '*est*' ('It is').

In fact, with the important caveat that it is only metaphor, however tempting a speculative identification would be, quantum thinking again appears attractive in thinking of this as a singularity.[231] This is a good illustration, because Wittgenstein describes the absolute knowing and absolute non-knowing

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[227] Kerr, Theology after Wittgenstein p.21
[228] This is the point Derrida makes in "White Mythology," which will be considered in the next section.
[229] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* p.24
[230] A quantum parable; subjectivity/momentum and objectivity/position can both be determined, but not simultaneously; see Hilgevoord, Jan and Uffink, Jos, "The Uncertainty Principle", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/qt-uncertainty/>.
[231] Another quantum parable; Infinite concentration of matter in a single point; see Curiel, Erik and Bokulich, Peter, "Singularities and Black Holes", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/spacetime-singularities/ .

as the elimination of self at the very moment of its fullest being: "The self of solipsism[232] shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it."[233] [234]

This is also Heideggerian because, as Kerr remarks, "as the self withdraws, the world in itself emerges."[235] World emerges only because ontological difference has been overcome in the withdrawal of metaphysical Being.[236]

This can be read as the thought experiment of Absolute Autism. An autistic hermeneutic of the self withdrawing is pure mindfulness of separation into being, in Happé's terms, 'in a world of her own.'[237] The emergence of the world in this (non)space is fascination. This is literal metaphor because Wittgenstein describes this reality as one where '*he will regard humans and beasts quite naively as objects.*'[238] Reading this autistically, in terms of a literary-theological hermeneutic, this is the inhabitation of metaphor in which connotative meaning is absent, and pure, absolute autistic perception relates to the 'object' devoid of signification. The literal metaphor as a reading of this world composed of objects devoid of interpretation is not 'stupid,' unless it is the 'stupidity' of the holy fool. This comes back to Ramsay's argument for religious language which was described earlier as overwhelming.

Similarly, the apparent 'stupidity' or absurdity of Wittgenstein's paradox of the logical conclusion of absolute solipsism is a way to express the aporia of

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[232] As a thought experiment, Wittgenstein's use of absolute solipsism in this example is useful as a comparison with absolute autism. They differ however: in solipsism, one believes only in one's own reality; but in autism, one knows that there is the other's reality, but that other reality is baffling, through Mindblindness.

[233] Ludwig Wittgenstein (ed. G H von Wright/ G E M Anscombe), *Notebooks 1914-1916*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1961, quoted in Kerr, Fergus, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1986) p.26

[234] This is a language which could interestingly link the (non)ego with Iser's virtual work of literature, discussed in the next section. as it is also rethought in Roland Bathes' assertion of the *coincidentia oppositorum* of absence/presence, death/life in his remark that "literature, like phosphorus, shines with its maximum brightness at the point of its extinction," and this connection will be explored later in this chapter where the literal metaphor of the *autos* is a paradox of both literary and theological thinking.

[235] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* p.26; Heideggerian *aletheia* will be discussed in a later section.

[236] This will be discussed in chapter two, as Blanchot's Space of Literature opens up the possibility of poetic being as *Dasein*.

[237] See autistic isolation and fascination, in glossary

[238] Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916* p.82, quoted in Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* p.27

the way in which Cartesian scientific thought undoes itself. Literal metaphor inhabits this space by rendering language incapable of representation *("quite naively as objects")* and holding 'object' as pure presence, paradoxically also the pure absence of giving or receiving meaning. A language which operated as pure autism would be total communication and total silence, 'communing' with the object in naïve reception of it as presence, yet also at the same time inhabiting the absence in which connotative meaning withdraws. This paradox would be expressed in the discourse of 'bafflement' and overwhelming of the holy fool discussed in the Introduction.

"Wittgenstein's Autism"

This is strikingly brought back 'down to earth' in a remark of Wittgenstein's which could be read almost as a definition of 'actual real, everyday autism.'[239] Baron Cohen's Theory of Mind mechanism, as was discussed in the introduction, is the inability to intuit the intentionality of the other person, which resonates with an account of Wittgenstein's approach, as reported in his students' notes. Kerr recounts:

> Wittgenstein sought to bring out the power of 'the strange illusion' which possesses us 'when we seem to seek the something which a face expresses whereas, in reality, we are giving ourselves up to the features before us.'[240] It is as if, when we look at a man's face, we had to check the outward expression against 'a mould made ready for it in our mind.' … We cannot take anyone at face value; the meaning is concealed behind the phenomena.[241]

Wittgenstein, for the autistic reader, is here offering a discourse in which a conscious autism can situate itself, to challenge the (absolute) neurotypical[242] assumption that there is no (innate) 'autistic-ness' in the world; that understanding the other is unproblematic in a perfect marriage of subjectivity

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[239] This is not to attribute clinical autism, as a speculative retrospective diagnosis as practised by Fitzgerald, Baron Cohen and others. Instead, it is to credit Wittgenstein with insight which sheds light on the perspective offered by the autistic theological hermeneutic.

[240] Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books, (*Oxford UK; Blackwell, 1958), p.166

[241] Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* p.164

[242] See absolute autism and autistic spectrum in glossary

and objectivity. This would be the (absolute) neurotypical assumption that total Mindreading can offer a genuine objective understanding to the subjective Mindreader. "We cannot take anyone at face value; the meaning is concealed behind the phenomena" reads as a classic conscious autism in its awareness of Mindblindness.

Kerr draws attention to another passage from Wittgenstein which could read, for the purposes of an autistic hermeneutic, as an invitation to become aware of universal autism (consciously understood or strategically adopted) in another sense. This is the issue of extreme attention to detail, resonant with autistic fascination manifest in savant talent.[243] As the introduction explained, Weak Central Coherence (WCC) theory sees this as a pathology where 'common sense' fails to integrate detail into a 'bigger picture,' but here Wittgenstein appears, to the autistic reader, to invite a celebration of this 'weakness' as another kind of awareness. Wittgenstein's remarks, and Kerr's comments on them, are worth quoting at length: Kerr writes that

> The voice of common sense assures us that we describe things as well as we need to; but the idea of a description that is infinitely finer than our clumsy powers can ever achieve is not as easily expelled. According to students' lecture notes, Wittgenstein once made the following suggestion:
> 'One often has the experience of trying to give an account of what one actually sees in looking about one, say, the changing sky, and of feeling that there aren't enough words to describe it.[244] One then tends to become fundamentally dissatisfied with language. We are comparing the case with something it cannot be compared with. It is like saying of falling raindrops, 'Our vision is so inadequate that we cannot say how many raindrops we saw, though surely we did see a specific number.'[245]

Kerr comments on this:

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[243] The 'Rain Man/Forrest Gump/holy fool' archetype as discussed in the Introduction.

[244] [Language as (social) cultural construction betrays the limiting power of social consensus. The 'Eskimo words for snow' example, although frequently exaggerated, is not totally discredited: '*In short, no matter the type of term it uses to refer to a particular type of snow or ice, Inuktitut has a far superior ability to distinguish between them than most languages.*' (http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/inuktitut-words-for-snow-and-ice/ (2015 edit)]

[245] *Wittgenstein's Lectures Cambridge 1932-1935,* ed. Alice Ambrose, (Oxford; Blackwell, 1979, p.63

> The fact is that, since it makes no sense to talk of the number of drops we see during a shower of rain (people would smile patiently if we did), we need not reproach ourselves for being powerless to say precisely how many we saw … it startles us into realising that we do have an ideal of exactitude or completeness at the back of our minds which very easily imposes itself inappropriately. (After all, I *must have* seen a specific number of raindrops).[246]

Kerr's language of 'common sense smiling patiently' at 'inappropriateness' echoes the neurotypical difficulty in appreciating the value of autistic fascination's attention to fine detail. The point here, however, is not to digress into the temptation of the 'retrospective diagnosis' genre, and to speculate on a notional 'Wittgenstein the autist,' but to think about how Wittgenstein's remarks about faces and raindrops make sense if appropriated in a specifically literal autistic hermeneutic. In the 'face' passage, the issue is that of the 'meaning concealed behind the phenomena,' which, in the last analysis, is unavailable. Again, this is bafflement, and language seen as phenomena with unavailable meaning, for literal metaphor, is the inscrutable face. In the raindrops example, the issue for Incarnational metaphor is to see the *'ideal of exactness'* (perhaps not of completeness, though) as absent presence made possible in a total seeing of phenomena as pure 'things.' This is theological as the autistic literal metaphor which is the Incarnation of Christ Crucified, absent presence in the text, as can now be explored.[247] The 'common sense' perception of a shower of rain is displaced by the absurd and impossible attention to each drop of rain as a fascination of reverence and communion.

Kerr expresses this when he states: "Philosophy, traditionally, begins in wonder. There is a sense in which Wittgenstein's work puts an end to metaphysics by inviting us to renew and expand our sense of wonder."[248]

Wittgenstein writes, in a letter to Paul Engelmann:

> The poem by Uhland is really magnificent. And this is how it is: if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then

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[246] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* p.165
[247] This will be also thought as' *haecceitas'/'ecceitas'* in Chapter Five
[248] Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* p.141

> *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be – unutterably! – *contained* in what has been uttered.[249]

There are three points to make about this comment. Firstly, it of course echoes the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Proposition 7: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," and this has been the assumption underlying the aporia Kerr has drawn on, as discussed above. Secondly, which Kerr finds hard to understand, it is not only the paradox and the holy place but also, surely, in the context of a personal letter, an appreciation of an economy of poetic style as exact, weighed, allusive and evocative.[250] Thirdly, and perhaps most usefully for what follows in thinking through Incarnational metaphor, it is (un)saying within poetic discourse,[251] which Kerr discerns in Augustine's sermon where he thinks *poiesis* as music:

> At the harvest, in the vineyard, wherever men labour hard, they begin with songs whose words express their joy. But when their joy brims over and words are not enough, they abandon even this coherence and give themselves up to the sheer sound of singing. What is this jubilation, this exultant song? It is the melody that means our hearts are bursting with feelings which words cannot express. And to whom does this jubilation belong? Surely to God, who is unutterable. And does not unutterable mean what cannot be uttered? If words will not come and you may not remain silent, what else can you do but let the melody soar?[252]

The setting of the vineyard betrays a conscious or unconscious permission for the Dionysian to disrupt Augustine's Christian orthodoxy, risking transgression,[253] and this excess of joy reflects, again, Ramsey's thinking of religious language as excess. Crucially, it is excess as musical/poetic language, which will be explored as Incarnational literal metaphor in more fully in the following chapters. In the a-theological thinking of this chapter, this is excess as

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[249] Paul Engelmann, *Letters,* pp.6-7, quoted in Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* p.167

[250] Poetic style as a means to indicating the site of the holy will also be discussed further in chapter five, with reference to Gerard Manley Hopkins's work.

[251] Not the common-sense perception of a shower of rain (dead, conventional metaphor) but the excess which counts the raindrops to observe and catch them poetically

[252] *On Psalm 32,* Sermon 1, 7-8, quoted in Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* p.167

[253] Elsewhere, Augustine, aware of the danger of music as a seductive force, wrestles with the difficulty of relating to the sensual as excess. [See *Confessions* XXIII.49-50]. Sensuality is an issue which will return in chapter three, as "experientialism."

an unsaying, which thereby escapes metaphysics. To make this deconstruction of metaphysics more explicit, the next section now following is an autistic reading of deconstruction.

1.6. Towards Incarnational metaphor as deconstructive a-theology

The previous section has examined how incarnational metaphor might be approached in Wittgenstein's thinking of the end of Cartesian metaphysics. This section now examines briefly how a deconstructive theology, building on this, can further approach a fully thought theological incarnational metaphor. To conclude this chapter as a groundwork for the following chapters, it is necessary now to explore briefly what is meant by the "trembling," as indicated by Derrida, with which this chapter began.

Disaster

Autistic disaster relates the sense of 'not making sense' of autistic bafflement to a similar sense of 'not making sense' described by Derrida: "The hesitation of these thoughts (here Nietzsche's and Heidegger's) is not an 'incoherence': it is a trembling proper to all post-Hegelian attempts and to this passage between two epochs." [254] This 'trembling' is a fundamental instability in the terms Mark C Taylor discerns in the binary oppositions which attempt to fix language in place: "foundational couples like constative/performative and mimesis/poiesis are unstable or "undecidable." Each passes into the other, thereby creating an irreducible obscurity that both beckons and frustrates thought."[255]

Frustration in the face of the world's norms is a hallmark of living with autism, where an "irreducible obscurity" of the social world is baffling and overwhelming. The aim of bringing an autistic hermeneutic into literary-

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[254] Derrida, Jacques (trans. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing,* in *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore/London; Johns Hopkins Press, 1997 (1974)) p.24
[255] Taylor, Mark C, *Tears,* p.215

theological hermeneutics is not to sanitize or heal this bafflement and overwhelming, but to listen to how it speaks to a kenotic (a) theology which embodies the wound that 'tears' and involves 'tears.' So where Taylor has written about "an irreducible obscurity that both beckons and frustrates thought," this is where an autistic hermeneutic honours this frustration and obscurity with the insight of its presence. This will be expressed in chapter two as an (im)possible (a)-theology.[256] The instability of language will be read as an autistic hermeneutic which finds itself in the writing which is the end of the Book, and for this reason, its 'inability to make sense' will be its strength, as it is read into Derrida's words about this undecidability:

> The very oscillation of undecidability goes back and forth and weaves a text; it makes, if this is possible, a path of writing through the aporia. This is impossible, but no-one has ever said that deconstruction, as a technique or method, was possible; it thinks only on the level of the impossible and of what is still evoked as unthinkable.[257]

Derrida's words are written in a memorial of Paul de Man, and this connection is relevant in two ways. Firstly, this is a kenotic hermeneutic of sacrifice and loss; de Man's post-holocaust writing precludes a simple resolution, and this is why frustration and bafflement persist. Secondly, de Man is celebrated as a poet, and this autistic hermeneutic works within the bafflement which is a universal poetry. This lack of sense will unfold in the subsequent chapters, but the reason for highlighting this now is to point out that any autistic hermeneutics will be utterly other than 'normal' thought would allow.

The Disaster of White Mythology

As this chapter has argued, neurotypical (non-autistic) metaphor operates by assuming a fixed and simple relationship between signified and signifier. This is so because it is straightforward to decode and appropriate the figurative ('my sister of stone') by effectively quarantining it (it is 'only' a metaphor). It does

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[256] Mixing a poetics and a theology, where in Aristotle's impossible possibility/possible impossibility, the latter is to be preferred.

[257] Derrida, Jacques, (eds. Avital Ronell & Eduardo Cadava), *Memoires for Paul de Man* (New York; Columbia University Press, 1989) p.135, quoted in Taylor, Tears, p.215

not perplex or disrupt the propositional ('my sister has is impassive/hard-hearted,' etc., results from assuming that metaphor pragmatically indicates some quality 'suggested' by 'stone').[258]

When metaphysics uses language, it also rests on this (neurotypical) distinction. Derrida argues that metaphysics' certainty as propositional language works by forgetting its origin in metaphor. This works by using linguistic constructions of the world and forgetting that they are subjectively thought models. Ricoeur uses the term *métaphore vive* to indicate the inescapable nature of metaphor. Ricoeur argues that onto-theology as a master narrative exists only by betraying its origin in language:

> [The Thomist doctrine of analogy's] express purpose is to establish theological discourse at the level of science and thereby to free it completely from the poetical forms of religious discourse, even at the price of severing the science of God from biblical hermeneutics.[259]

Derrida sees this complacency about language as a 'White Mythology:'

> What is white mythology? It is metaphysics which has effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being, and which yet remains, active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible drawing covered over in the palimpsest.[260]

Western metaphysics as a master narrative is a forgetting of the fact that it is also a mythology:

> What is metaphysics? A white mythology which assembles and reflects Western culture: the white man takes his own mythology (that is, Indo-European mythology), his logos - that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of

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[258] In fact these examples also demonstrate the inescapability of metaphor after metaphor in discourse: 'hard-hearted using the metaphor of 'hardness' and 'impassive' using the metaphor of passage, and this is Derrida's point, as discussed below.

[259] Ricoeur, Paul (trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, John Costello, SJ), *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of meaning in language (La métaphore vive)* (London, UK; Routledge, 2003 (1975)) p. 322

[260] Derrida, Jacques (trans. F C T Moore), *White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, in *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 1, *On Metaphor* (Autumn, 1974), pp. 5-74 Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/468341 p.11

that which it is still his inescapable desire to call Reason.[261]

The key point here is the metaphor Derrida uses of white mythology, relevant to an autistic hermeneutic in both its homonymic senses of 'white.' 'White' as race critiques imperialism and this will be considered in terms of capitalism in the next section. First, in this section, Derrida's use of the colour 'white' is examined in his sense of its being invisible ink on the page. White ink on a white page is the inescapable ubiquity of signs, with no black/white subject/object dualistic referential stability, playing in endless referentiality. The complacency with which language is used is critiqued by the idea of the trace, which is the continuous supplement, the inevitable step always backwards and forwards of linguistic reference in the endless tissue of narrative. There is no fixed place, because there is no anchor of the metaphysical God, as the transcendental signified. With no absent referent, presence is meaningless. The trace indicates the end of metaphysics.

Thinking of autism as the trace means that the suppression of absence can be articulated, much as the guilelessness of the boy in the folk tale *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Autistic literal metaphor resurrects the dead metaphor indicated by white mythology, actually by its very black and white thinking. A useful way to explain this is to refer back to the role of myth as it was described, in the introduction, in *Kubo and the Two Strings*. Kubo knows that the mythical power of ancestor worship is as the magical force of the singing of memory, and he also knows that the magical force of the singing of memory is as the mythical power of ancestor worship. White mythology reduces this pairing of myth and song into a play of signification which tries to equate; it looks for clarity (white light) to be the referee (adjudicator, and means of reference) – does singing 'mean' myth, or does myth 'mean' singing? The white myth is the myth of making a decision or a pronouncement, ironically having lost myth itself, as the spiritual discernment of the power of song as worship, and worship as song. Dead metaphor is the forgetting of metaphoricity, and autistic literal metaphor is the re-problematising of it, which will be seen to be the outwitting of white myth, keeping writing open.

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[261] ibid.

Coinage

Derrida draws on Nietzsche's metaphor of metaphysics as worn out coinage,[262] and this metaphor conflates the use of coinage, in white mythology, as capitalist imperialism with the use of the currency of words. He adds:

> Moreover, to "usage" we may append the subtitle "wear and tear," and it is with this that we shall concern ourselves. And first of all we shall direct interest upon a certain wear and tear of metaphorical force in philosophical intercourse. It will become clear that this wear is not a supervenient factor modifying a kind of trope-energy which would otherwise remain intact; on the contrary, it constitutes the very history and structure of philosophical metaphor. But how can we make it discernible, except by metaphor?[263]

The problem is that a 'worn out' metaphor can only be replaced with another metaphor, itself subject to usage as wear and tear. In anti-capitalist terms, in a capitalist society coins keep circulating, regardless of how defaced and defacing they are. The faceless consumer and the faceless producer lack value, because the only value is the worn-out face on the coin.

The autistic coin – resisting tokenism

In the introduction, mindfulness of separation and autistic fascination were described as two faces of a coin. This section returns that metaphor, in terms of autistic coins with autistic faces. This is useful because Derrida's writing on defaced coins can suggest a way for incarnational metaphor to be thought alongside Derrida's thinking.

The trope of the token minority representative in film and television indicates that the black, or gay, or disabled character has no value except as a token gesture to a politically shallow form of inclusivity which keeps the marginal other under control or appeased. Tokenistic autism now appears

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[262] *"What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins."* [Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* part 1, On Truth and Lie in a Non-Moral Sense, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform 2015]
[263] Derrida, *White Mythology* p.6

perhaps to have been overtaken by a genuinely neurotribal assertion of autism as valued in its own right, if Silverman is right.

In terms of white mythology, an autistic non-tokenism means that autistic metaphor has always absented itself from circulating defaced currency, and given that all currency defaces itself in its usage, this means that it has not used currency at all. Autistic people are drawn to shiny, spinning objects. When a coin ceases to be a coin, it becomes an object which can be polished to a (faceless) shine, and can be spun. A dead metaphor in endless circulation is 'polished up' and 'spun' by autistic value which sees the image of value only as itself. A £1 coin doesn't 'mean' £1, but only a coin, of value as a piece of metal. A transcendental signified which is dis-credited has never been taken on credit, because the transcendent is transcendent, and has always been, in mindfulness of separation.

The Emperor's New Coins

In the second sense of the homonymic 'white,' white mythology is an imperialist master narrative, and its use of coinage is capitalism.

In a Marxist reading, capital-ism decapit-ates itself by amassing capital without the value of the human face except as the face of a coin. The loss of the human face is the reduction of 'thisness'[264] into a mere pragmatic sign. Autistic metaphor resists capitalist decapitation by having always already been penniless in terms of pragmatic purchasing power. Joel Bregman, describing what this thesis terms autistic fascination, writes

> (with) Intense preoccupying interests … such individuals
> literally can become world experts on such topics, yet
> resist suggestions to transform this interest and knowledge
> into functional, meaningful or marketable skills.[265]

Fascination is cherishing "thisness," for its own sake, as chapter four will discuss. Incarnational metaphor as fascination inhabits the metaphor (the poetic) without 'cashing it out.' It escapes capitalist decapitation because it

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[264] Translating *haecceitas,'* ie., the value of the individual, which will be discussed in chapter four.
[265] Zager et al, p.14

'has no capital' (as finance, as the Capital Letters of a name,[266] as a capital city, as the capital of a column, as '*capus*' (head). In a sense, being 'headless,' it has always already been decapitated in terms of what Mark C Taylor calls art as the site of the Disaster, where metaphysics trembles in the irreducible obscurity that both beckons and frustrates thought."[267]

Barthes and Iser – "where your treasure is"

Incarnational metaphor's abnormality contains the privilege of already, in its penniless freedom, understanding the glory of the clash of unresolved/decoded meanings described earlier as excess and bafflement. This is a privileged insight into the disaster as it is prefigured in the death of the author. This is Roland Barthes' phrase from his thinking of the death of God:

> 'We now know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash,' and once the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.'[268]

Because autistic literal metaphor stays in the image, refusing to decode the branch of an organisation into a bureaucratic structure, it similarly refuses the "final signified," and is living resurrection which does not "close the writing."

Wolfgang Iser, writing even before Barthes' anticipation of Derrida's deconstruction, also foresees the anarchic power of the living text as the death of metaphoric stability. Iser's *Implied Reader* seems at first sight to exist in a neurotypical relationality, where the work of literature is realised in "an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination."[269]

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[266] In chapter five, autistic fascination will be thought of as namelessness in Pirandello's novel *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila (One, No-One and One Hundred Thousand)*
[267] Taylor, *Tears,* p.215
[268] Barthes, Roland, *The Death of the Author,* in *Image, Music, Text* Image, Music, Text (trans. Stephen Heath), (London, UK; Fontana Press, 1977) pp.146-7.
[269] Iser, Wolfgang, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore, Maryland; Johns Hopkins University Press,1978) p.257

However this "arena" is not real, but virtual. The work of literature in fact exists in autistic separation from both,[270] where reading is the reader's utter separation from authorial intent; reading is using "our own faculty for establishing connections – for filling in the gaps left by the text itself.[271] The reader is, then, ultimately a solitary figure, and reader and author are both separated by the implicit separation within the work itself, in its gaps. So Iser states that to perceive, "a beholder must *create* his (*sic*) own experience."[272] The writer becomes absent, leaving the reader to "engage his imagination in the task of working things out for himself (*sic*),"[273] and this is conscious autism when read as mindfulness of separation. This autism in the text itself seen as mindfulness of separation is equally autistic fascination occurring precisely in the separation. In the supreme authority of the novel as a rich text which withholds the 'prize' of configured meaning, "awareness of this richness takes precedence over any configurative meaning."[274] This richness-in-absence is read autistically as autistic fascination, and in subsequent chapters it will be seen theologically as a fascination in/of the incarnate crucified Christ in the kenotic realisation of the text. A fully incarnational metaphor is a kenotic theology of the Disaster instantiated in the work of art, where the trembling of the epoch indicated by Derrida is poetry, thought as "trembling on the edge of prayer."[275] This is being absent from the economy of the sign, laying up no treasure on earth. On this basis, incarnational metaphor can now be considered in chapter two as an autistic discernment of apophatic fiction which is contemplative prayer. Its theological import will become increasingly clear in chapters two and three, progressing towards a theology of autistic incarnational metaphor.

Thinking of autism in this very specific theological way draws on a wider narrative of thinkers such as Frith and Trevett who speculate on the autism of the (truly wise) 'holy fool.' This leads logically into the argument of this thesis as one key aspect of incarnational metaphor as seen in the autistic trinity. This

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[270] This separation will be examined further with regard to Maurice Blanchot's *Space of Literature* in chapter two
[271] Iser, *The Implied Reader* p.280
[272] Ibid. P.288
[273] Ibid.
[274] ibid. p.285
[275] Enda McDonagh, *Prayer, Poetry and Politics*, in *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe OP*, ed. Brian Davies OP (London, UK; Geoffrey Chapman Publishers, 1987), p.231

can be reasoned to be the autistic fascination which is the privileged insight belonging to the 'holy fool.'

Chapter two: Apophatic Fiction as Incarnational metaphor

Introduction

This chapter is the next stage in the journey towards Incarnational metaphor. Chapter one argued for a progression towards an autism of the deconstructed (a)theological text. This offered a discourse where an autistic hermeneutic of literal metaphor (with its fascination and mindfulness of separation) could give a reading where universal autism could support the validity of an (a)theological reading of the text.

The next stage in the journey towards a full Incarnational metaphor is to step back from the 20th/21st century, and to consider an apophatic theology which can be read in a postmodern hermeneutic. The aims this chapter will work towards are arguments of mutual validation between apophatic and autistic theological thinking. This is firstly because this apophatic discourse can be read as an authenticity which receives new power when read through the theological voice of an autistic hermeneutic. Both modes of thinking, the apophatic and the autistic, are marginal voices, deserving to be heard as theologically significant. Secondly, it is an important forebear of the (a)theological thinking which was read autistically in the previous chapter.

This is to read a more fully considered theological thinking of the autistic hermeneutic as a validation of apophatic discourse. As the Introduction to this thesis explained, arguing for universal autism as a validation of theological thinking is a big claim to make. However this is done by arguing that autistic perception is a legitimate hermeneutic which, in the ways each chapter explores, brings each chapter's (deep, divergent, marginal) theological thinking to life in a new way. This is a reciprocal relationship where the concepts of each chapter's theological discourse also validate autistic perception as a legitimate hermeneutic.

An autistic postmodern reading of apophatic theology emerges through a series of connections which this chapter develops. The postmodern hermeneutic

used in this chapter is that of Maurice Blanchot's thinking in '*The Space of Literature,*' because the autistic hermeneutic will be shown to resonate with Blanchot's thought. The apophatic discourses chosen to be read through Blanchot are Dionysius the Areopagite's *The Mystical Theology,* Teresa of Àvila's *The Interior Castle,* and John of the Cross' *The Interior Castle.* These three writers of apophatic theology are chosen because they express a progression of narrative strategies which this chapter terms 'apophatic fiction.' This apophatic fiction will yield possibilities for an autistic hermeneutic to validate a particular type of authenticity which can be discerned when they are read through Blanchot's thinking of the text. These connections are how the trinity of apophatic discourse, Blanchot's 'space of literature,' and the autistic hermeneutic will relate to each other.

Apophatic theology is distinguished from cataphatic theology. Translations of the Greek preposition *kata* is translated as '*Down from, through, out, according to, toward, along.*'[276] These are all prepositions of material, spatial or conceptual relation. "*According to*" is a prepositional phrase which functions as a metaphor of physical connection to indicate the object partaking in the quality of its subject.

So cataphatic discourse expresses a direct connection between subject and object which can be affirmed. It can be used to develop systematic theology which is constructed by affirming predicative statements.[277] The

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[276] *Strong's lexicon of New Testament Greek*, online access at http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?q=kata&rc=LEX&rc2=LEX+GRK&ps=10&s=References, accessed 25/1/2013

[277] Much Biblical commentary works by the reduction of the poetic power of metaphor to doctrinal formula. For example - Referring to Isaiah 49:23, "And kings shall be thy nursing father, and their queens thy nursing mothers, in a letter to William Cecil (May 1559), (Hastings Robinson, ed., *The Zurich letters: Comprising the Correspondence of several English Bishops and others with some of the Helvetian reformers, during the early part of the reign of Queen Elizabeth,* (Second Series. A.D. 1558-1602), (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press, 1845, p. 35), Calvin writes that "God promised by the mouth of Isaiah that queens should be the nursing mothers of the church." Calvin 'does the job for the reader' by interpreting the narrative – the queens are nursing the Church. Isaiah's prophetic genre, which as prophecy would require the reader (or hearer) to question what this narrative means *for her* (thought probably, for him) or even *for us,* as a soul-searching response. Calvin as a theologian closes down the poetic space by appropriating the metaphor's ambiguity and reducing it to a dead metaphor, which propositional language; *the state* has a duty to safeguard *the Church.* In this way an '*apo-*'opening is closed down into a '*cata-*'resolution. This is the 'task' of theology as theo-logy: to classify and organize '*ho theos*' into a (quasi-scientific) '*-logy.*' This section establishes the distinction between the two different strategies of metaphor here to clarify how apophatic theology is distinctive. A useful remark on this is Teresa of Àvila's account of her divergent theological method, where she meditated on "the living poetry of this (Bible) verse" '*The Interior Castle* trans. Starr p.57)

reader relates 'directly' (unproblematically) to this statement (in fact accepting spatial metaphors unconsciously, as 'dead metaphors.'[278]

The Greek preposition *'apo'* is translated as follows: *'Of separation, distance physical, of distance of place; temporal, of distance of time or origin of the place whence anything is, comes, befalls, is taken of origin or cause.'*[279]Again the metaphor is of spatial relation, but a relation which is interrupted. Theologically, this discourse arises from a theology of the transcendence of God.

Apophatic discourse, as separation, is the breakdown of the relationship which cataphatic discourse employs. For this reason, apophatic theology is also called 'negative theology' or 'mystical theology.' In fact, the two are inseparably related, because systematic theology affirms through cataphatic language the site where apophatic language needs to disrupt it, in order to explore the paradoxes which are implicit within it. In fact, cataphatic theology without the complement of the apophatic would probably not truly be theology, in that it would fail to consider the issue of the transcendence of God.

Straight away, this indicates a potential autistic reading of apophatic discourse as mindfulness of separation; discourse itself as distancing, and Mindblind in the face of the transcendence of God. The following sections now argue that the apophatic discourses of the mystics it considers can be read in terms of an 'apophatic fiction' which has resonance both as Blanchot's authenticity of the space of literature and, from there, an autistic theological integrity of Incarnational metaphor.

This chapter creates the neologistic term 'apophatic fiction' to explore how the genre of fiction might be a strategy for 'expressing what cannot be expressed' by cataphatic discourse. It argues that the three mystics considered are all using fiction as a narrative strategy to outwit the limits of cataphatic theology. They are writing apophatic theology 'as' fiction, and fiction 'as' apophatic theology, in the confluence which is termed 'apophatic fiction.' This is similar to Michel de Certeau's thinking of mystical writing in this period as "the mystic fable," where *eros,* not only in the secular Courtly Love genre but

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[278] Without the creative problematisation of dead metaphor which the autistic hermeneutic of literal metaphor involves [see chapter two].
11. *Strong's Concordance of New Testament Greek*

equally in mystical writing, has become "a "nostalgia" connected with the progressive decline of God as One, the object of love."[280]

Developing the concept of apophatic fiction will be considering how strategies of metaphor can 'indicate what cannot be indicated.' Working towards Incarnational metaphor in section five, apophatic fiction will be read in terms of a 'literal' metaphor which can only be theological. This will be where the (unreal) 'real' of the text will be 'literally' more real than the 'real' referent which chapter two's neurotypical common sense 'reduction to simile' would ultimately fail to truly theologically think.

2.1 *The Mystical Theology* as apophatic fiction

Dionysius as a theological thinker

In his introduction to Dionysius the Areopagite's *'The Mystical Theology and The Divine Names,'* C E Rolt encapsulates the need for apophatic discourse very simply; apophatic discourse arises as "merely a bold way of stating the orthodox truism that the Ultimate Godhead is incomprehensible: a truism which Theology accepts as an axiom and then is prone to ignore."[281] This is so in Christian theology because "the various Names of God are … mere inadequate symbols of That Which transcends all thought and existence."[282] This means that, far from annulling or contradicting orthodox theology, apophatic theology expresses what is implicit in orthodox theology. Therefore negative theology is best understood not as the negation of theology, but the theology of negation.[283]

In the inadequacy of these "names," it relies on a narrative strategy of metaphor which deviates from the strategy of cataphatic theology, but is still a crafted discourse profoundly rooted in and expressing theological thinking. It is

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[280] De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable* p.4; one could also see the emergence of new religious movements as a response to this religious crisis, and as de Certeau points out, "heresy abounded" (*The Mystic Fable* p.18) DETAILS
[281] Dionysius the Areopagite (trans. C E Rolt), *The Mystical Theology and the Divine Names* (New York; Dover Publications, 2004) p.7
[282] ibid.
[283] See Turner, Denys, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press, 1999 (1942)) p.22

this strategy of abnormal metaphor which qualifies Dionysius as a creative writer, reworking language as follows.

Dionysius is an original and creative thinker. Denys Turner writes:

> 'mystical theology' in the West is in itself unintelligible
> except against the background of [Dionysius'] writings …
> if and insofar as 'mystical theology' is the product of
> the convergence of sources in Plato and Exodus … then
> it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that Denys [sic]
> invented the genre for the Latin Church.[284]

Dionysius draws on the story of Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai, where Moses confronts the darkness which hides the face of God. He combines this Scriptural imagery with the Platonic myth of the cave, where Socrates describes the prisoners in the cave who "deem reality to be nothing else than the shadows of (unseen puppets)."[285] Turner argues that by fusing the imagery of the Exodus and Platonic narratives, Dionysius "made a theology out of these metaphors without which there could not have been the mystical tradition that there has been: 'light' and 'darkness,' 'ascent' and 'descent,' the love of God as *eros.*"[286]

Thinking autistically, when the story of Moses on Mount Sinai is thought through an autistic hermeneutic, the darkness hiding God's face is pure mindfulness of separation. Similarly, the Platonic myth of the cave is pure Mindblindness, because seeing 'only shadows' is the inability to understand the face of the other.

Dionysius' rhetoric of negation: "by a rejection of all knowledge, he possesses a knowledge that exceeds"

However, Dionysius' apophatic theology is not simply 'of' a hidden God, but of what the 'hiddenness of God' means for, and in, language. Turner explains that '*apophasis*' means "the breakdown of *speech,* which, in face of the unknowability of God, falls infinitely short of the mark … [if] theology means "discourse about God," or "divine discourse," so the expression "apophatic theology" ought to mean something like: "that speech about God

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[284] Ibid.p.13
[285] Plato, *Republic* 515C, quoted in Turner, *The Darkness of God* p.14
[286] Turner, *The Darkness of God* p.13

which is the failure of speech."[287] Dionysius' linguistic strategy for '*apophasis*' is for metaphor itself to become a distancing from or even within itself. He does this by conjoining metaphors which consume each other by negating themselves in their combination. This is why Dionysius employs light *as* darkness, for example:

> where the mysteries of God's Word/lie simple, absolute,
> unchangeable/in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence
> … [where thou] shalt be led upwards to the Ray of that
> divine Darkness which exceedeth all existence.[288]

Dionysius draws on the narrative of Moses on Mount Sinai as a way to express the apophatic opening which is achieved not by rejecting intellectual theology but by using the mind to advance to its limit:

> His incomprehensible presence is shown walking on the
> heights of His holy places which are perceived by the
> mind; and then It breaks forth, even from the things that
> are beheld and from those who behold them, and plunges
> the true initiate unto the Darkness of Unknowing … united
> by his highest faculty to Him that is wholly Unknowable, of
> whom thus by a rejection of all knowledge he possesses a
> knowledge that exceeds his understanding.[289]

Expressing this paradox of "a knowledge that exceeds his understanding by a rejection of all knowledge" is the attained by the linguistic strategy of the self-negation of language itself, as knowledge as the renunciation of knowledge. Denys Turner calls this a "self-subverting utterance" which "first says something and then, in the same image, unsays it."[290] Dionysius' theological thinking is that God as absolute origin is beyond even any language of being: requires a strategy beyond affirmation or negation. He explains that this is because of the nature of God as absolute origin:

> We do not say that the fire which warms or burns is
> itself warmed or burned. Even so if anyone says that
> Very Life lives, or that Very Light is enlightened, he will
> be wrong.[291]

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[287] ibid. p.20
[288] *Mystical Theology* p. 191-2
[289] ibid. p.194
[290] Turner, *The Darkness of God* p.21
[291] Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* p.75

This is expressed as self-subverting utterance, to go beyond the powers either of affirmation or negation. The need for this strategy is discussed at length in the discursive 'learned' narrative of Dionysius' *Divine Names,* and it is a carefully reasoned work of 140 pages. In contrast, *The Mystical Theology,* in only 11 pages, puts this strategy to work as an experiment in the creative practice of metaphor as self-subverting utterance.

This creative writing of theological thinking has potential to be thought of as autistic literal metaphor. In Dionysius, metaphor *as* separation is utterly radical, with the self-subverting strategy of metaphor cutting off every connection except to its own paradox; Very Life 'does not live,' and Very Light 'is not enlightened.' This moves towards the *coincidentia oppositorum* where theological thinking might see literal metaphor as an 'impossible possibility,' where Life and Light do not 'refer' to living and enlightening. They are 'shut up inside' the metaphor, in autistic failure/refusal to decode them as an ostensive intent.

2.2 *The Interior Castle* as apophatic fiction

This section puts forward an argument for Teresa of Àvila's *The Interior Castle* as apophatic fiction. First, its apophatic theological thinking needs to be established, then its narrative strategy as fiction. The two can then be related as apophatic fiction, amenable to Blanchot's authenticity of the text, and in turn autism's integrity of literal metaphor.

Fact or fiction?

This section argues that Teresa's mysticism is grounded in apophatic theological thinking. This is an argument which rescues her work from an experientialist hermeneutic. Denys Turner defines experientialism as "a rival practice which displaces that Christian ordinariness [of "worship, prayer and sacrament"] ... It abhors the experiential vacuum of the apophatic, rushing to fill it with the plenum of the psychologistic ... [resulting in] deformations of the spirit."[292]

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[292] Turner, *The Darkness of God* p.259

Both Turner and Starr note that Teresa's pupil, John of the Cross, felt that there was a danger of experientialism in Teresa's writing,[293] and the extreme sensory physicality of her narrative, along with her use of the word 'supernatural,' support the view that Teresa views supernatural experiences as 'real;' however this begs the question of what 'real' could mean in this context.

This chapter's strategy follows the thinking of Bernard McGinn and Denys Turner, both of whom read Teresa as a theological writer.[294] The logic of this chapter is, primarily, to disregard the complex and ultimately unverifiable question of Teresa as an experientialist *writer*. Instead, a non-experientialist *reading* can look for ways that the *text* works as a theological thinking and a narrative using the genre of fiction. However, this chapter also tends towards a reading of Teresa as a less straightforwardly experientialist writer than is often thought, on the grounds that Teresa is writing a highly creative, intellectually grounded narrative. This outwits the experientialism debate if the idea of 'experience' in the text is rethought as a narrative embodiment of apophatic theological thinking. A useful way to consider this could be to bring Teresa's work alongside Italo Calvino's thinking on *livelli di realtà* (levels of reality). Calvino writes:

> La letteratura non conosce la realtà ma solo livelli. Se esista la realtà di cui i vari livelli non sono che aspetti parziali, o se esistano solo i livelli, questo la letteratura non può deciderlo. La letteratura conosce la realtà dei livelli e questa è una realtà che conosce forse meglio di quanto non s'arrivi a conoscerla attraverso altri procedimenti conoscitivi. E' già molto.

> (Literature knows no reality, but only levels. If a reality exists of which the various levels are only partial aspects, literature cannot decide this. Literature knows the reality of levels, and this is a reality which perhaps recognizes this better than by way of other ways of

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knowing. And that, already in itself, is quite a lot.) [this author's translation]. [295]

When Calvino writes that literature knows only levels, but thereby knows *già molto* (already a lot), this understated validation of literary epistemology sits well with Teresa's literary-theological vision.[296] Teresa the narrator sometimes laughs at her own inadequacy as a writer[297] but this is possibly an ironic comment, as will be discussed later. It is also a theological statement, in the face of apophatic "expressing what cannot be expressed;" in the face of the greatness of God, she recognises the vital need for humility.[298] It would be unthinkable to feel that her writing, or any writing, would be adequate. However she does not thereby lack writerly ability or sophistication. In fact she is operating on multiple levels, in a sophisticated way. Heart, soul, body, temporality, a-temporality, intellect, memory and imagination are all part of her conceptual array, and metaphor seems 'confused' with apparently 'experiential' narrative, almost impossible to untangle. The levels seem indistinguishable. This is precisely the point. *Livelli di realtà,* about which literature "cannot decide," are theologically irrelevant, ultimately, in *The Interior Castle.* Not only does the narrator "see the world for what it is: illusion,"[299] but also she becomes able to see through the illusion, and discern the collapse of ontological difference: "what is revealed to the soul is that all things can be seen in God because God has all things inside himself."[300] So natural/supernatural/literal/literary/theological "things" all exist in God while

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[295] Italo Calvino, *I livelli della realtà*, (1978), in *Una pietra sopra*, in Calvino, *Saggi*, (Milan, Italy; Meridiani/Mondadori, 1995), pp. 381, 398) (trans, R Dunster)
See also Dunster, Ruth (2010), *The Abyss of Calvino's deconstructive writing: an apology for Non-foundational theology*, *http://theses.gla.ac.uk/1961/1/2010dunstermth.pdf*

[296] As rough notes in the writing of this thesis abbreviated *The Interior Castle* to *IC,* it recalls previous work on Italo Calvino (see previous footnote) where another *IC* stood for Calvino's *Invisible Cities.* It would be possible, in future research, to explore similarities between both dwellings as non-foundational spaces of discourse.

[297] Eg, *Interior Castle* p.275: "These metaphors make me laugh at myself. I'm not satisfied with them, but I can't come up with any others." Often, at the beginning and end of sections, she begs for God's help because she finds writing so difficult, and her writing as inadequate; humility, but also apophatic theological awareness.

[298] Humility can hardly be over-emphasised in Teresa's work, as a fundamental truth and an essential practice – eg. Teresa of Àvila (trans. Cohen, J M), *Life of Teresa by Herself* (London, UK; Penguin, London, 1957) pp. 85, 88, 118, and *Interior Castle* pp. 80, 90, 141, 190, 226, 247, 289

[299] Teresa of Àvila, I*nterior Castle* pp.246-7

[300] ibid. p.244

simultaneously not existing in illusion. The text knows "all these levels," and 'reality' is irrelevant, through faith, as an illusion.

If *The Interior Castle* is an 'experientially' rich apophatic fiction, then this offers real theological possibilities in terms of autistic literal metaphor, because the autistic 'literal' reading of truth,[301] surpassing 'normal' reading, can discern this authenticity of the text as authentic apophatic truth-bearing.

Teresa as a theological thinker

This section presents an argument for Teresa's theological literacy as follows. Her *Life by Herself* records that she travels widely, working to establish a reformed order, and converses often with 'men of learning' (theologians). When she expresses frustration with the theologians she meets, it is not that they lack theological expertise but that they are unaware of its apophatic potential.[302] [303]

An important statement in *The Interior Castle* from Teresa the narrator crucially sheds light on the question of Teresa as a theological thinker. Teresa writes that "Men of learning seem to get theology without much effort. But we women need to take it all in slowly and muse on it. We need to feel it."[304] This is a statement that needs to be considered with great care in the context of her rhetoric about her status as a theological thinker. She writes more than once about her 'inferior status' as an 'unlearned' woman.[305] However a double irony

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[301] This 'literal' reading can also be seen as a the 'second naïveté' discussed earlier (Ricoeur, Paul, *The Symbolism of Evil*) which echoes T S Eliot's *Little Gidding*:
"And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."
[302] See Teresa of Àvila, The Interior Castle pp.121, 123, also Teresa of Àvila (trans. Cohen, J M), *Life of Teresa by Herself* (trans. J M Cohen) p.100
[303] Peter Tyler in *Teresa of Àvila* writes that the teacher Fray Osuna is Teresa's 'spiritual maestro,' and his language of 'gustoes espirituales' (spiritual 'delights' (tastes) influences her frequent imagery of 'tasting' the sweetness of Christ. This invites an experientialist reading in keeping with contemporary 16th century Charismatic movements, but Osuna actually explains his teaching as a 'hidden theology' to which 'ordinary' (cataphatic) theology is an introduction. His language of 'hidden theology' in this sense reads as an echo of Dionysius' language discussed in section 1 (Tyler, Peter, Teresa of Àvila, Doctor of the Soul (London, UK; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013) p.40)
[304] Teresa of Àvila, *Interior Castle* p.44
[305] For example pp.250, 67; also *Life* p.75. Starr in her introduction to *The Interior Castle* states that she has edited the text to take away the extreme self-deprecating tone of many of Teresa's remarks (see Starr pp.15-16)

can be read into these remarks. Firstly, they can be read as the irony of a woman subverting the dominant male perception that a woman can't be a theologian, Secondly, the deeper irony would be that her very deviation from their cataphatic theology is actually more deeply theologically insightful.[306] "Feeling it" would be the meeting point of a (more) genuinely devout faith – but what is the 'it' which is being 'felt?' This 'it,' "taken … all in more slowly and mused upon"[307] is actually the theology of the men of learning. This suggests the irony that women might in fact better theological thinkers, 'musing' more deeply and therefore more capable of apophatic theological thinking. The next section will now explore what her theological thinking might be.

The irony of Teresa, the 'unlearned' theological thinker, being actually more deeply learned, resonates with the narrative of the autism of the holy fool, whose 'naïveté' enacts the boy's 'exposure' of true nakedness in the story of *'The Emperor's New Clothes.'* Teresa, the 'unlearned' writer, performs the resurrection of metaphor in mystic fable, and the autistic hermeneutic of incarnational metaphor, in (but only in) the space of the literary-theological-autistic bridge, can also resurrect Teresa's 'fabulous' [splendid, fable-ous] work as 'literally' the wisdom of God, a divine *eros* which Teresa, like Origen, offers as 'more true.'

The Interior Castle as Augustinian theological thinking

Teresa's first experience of monastic life was in an Augustinian convent,[308] and Rowan Williams writes about "her beloved Augustine."[309] Both Peter Tyler and Rowan Williams trace the influence of Augustine on her theological thinking. Tyler comments:

> Throughout the Life Teresa tells us how important books
> had been … Augustine, Jerome and Bernardino de
> Laredo had initiated her into the spiritual language of
> the Catholic Church.[310]

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[306] See *Life* p.121
[307] Also, "for many years I read a good deal and understood nothing; and for a long while, although God taught me, I could never find words" (*Life* p.86) indicates that she has cultivated a theological education.
[308] See Starr, Mirabai, Introduction, *The Interior Castle* p.6.
[309] Williams, *Teresa of Àvila* p.140.
[310] ibid. p.102; see also pp.24-5

Teresa's autobiographical *Life* records: "As I began to read [Augustine's] *Confessions*, it seemed to me that I saw myself in them."[311] This is a theological thinking in the context of the *alumbradismo* movement as an influence on Teresa, where, with a "mind receptive to God," it builds on "medieval Augustinian theology."[312]

It is therefore not unreasonable that "musing deeply," she is performing an equally theological thinking of Augustine's theological reworking of the Neoplatonic '*anamnesis*' (un-forgetting of the pre-existing soul)[313] as profound immanence.

Augustine writes:

> do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward
> man dwells truth) …[314] You were within me, and I was in
> the world outside myself.[315]

Teresa writes:

> I urge those of you who have not begun to go inside
> yourselves to enter now, and those of you who are already
> in: don't let warfare make you turn back.[316]

The trope of the interior castle, with a sequential narrative of 'dwellings' or rooms ever more inner, reads as an outworking of Augustine's conviction that lacking spiritual consciousness is being 'outside,' but God is within. Augustine's thinking of a transcendent God as being found most deeply and immanently in the self (also the self subject to original sin) is deeply paradoxical. Expressing interiority still requires self-subverting language for an apophatic thinking of God within yet absolutely beyond.[317] Teresa's apophatic theological intent in negotiating a similar paradox in *The Interior Castle* is clear throughout.[318] She

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[311] *Life* 9.7-8, quoted in Williams p.53
[312] Williams, *Teresa of Àvila* p.29
[313] See Turner *The Darkness of God* p.58; and Augustine reworks *anamnesis* as Christian theology when he writes that unforgetting is a spiritual union with God: memory is the faculty of unforgetting where" Our *hearts are restless until they find rest in you." (Confessions* 1.1.1)
[314] Turner, *The Darkness of God* p.129
[315] Augustine, *Confessions,* (UK; Penguin 1962), p.231
[316] *Interior Castle* p.62
[317] See Turner, *Darkness of God* p.69
[318] For example: "In this moment of perfect clarity, the soul understands that God alone is truth … I wish I could say more about this, but it's ineffable" (p.246); "God has made the soul into an utter fool so that he can replace false intelligence with true wisdom … In a state of union, the soul sees nothing and hears nothing and comprehends nothing" (p.123); "Our intellects, no matter how sharp, can no more grasp (the concept of the soul and God dwelling in it) than they can comprehend God" (p.36); "Yet when he unites himself with her at last, she understands

also describes her 'visions' as "mystical theology,"[319] and emphasis that a grounding in theology is her foundation.[320] When God suspends the understanding,[321] this echoes Dionysius' surpassing of the intellect in apophatic theology.

'Innerness' is separation from the world,[322] which an autistic hermeneutic will read as autistic isolation. However it also echoes Francesca Happé's words, discussed in the Introduction, about autistic bliss "in a world of her own."[323] In terms of Incarnational metaphor, the 'innerness' of autistic metaphor, closed in upon itself, is the site of the sacred which will be discussed in section four, regarding Blanchot.

Stories of the 'self' or of the 'soul?'

This section puts forward the argument that *The Interior Castle* is a work modelled on yet different to the *Confessions*. Augustine's *Confessions* is the genre of autobiography, but in terms of intellectual, theological and moral exploration. So the *Confessions* could be said to be a theological statement written in the genre of autobiography, and for Augustine, his concept of self means that autobiography and theology are inseparable.[324]

Williams comments that Teresa's work "reproduces something of the technique of Augustine's *Confessions,"*[325]and *The Interior Castle* has similarities, in that it is an 'inner quest,' but this chapter argues that it differs from the *Confessions* in ways that are crucial for the concept of apophatic fiction. This section argues, crucially, that *The Interior Castle* is primarily, *as a text,* not a narrative of the 'self,' but of the 'soul.'

Perhaps a common understanding of *The Interior Castle* is that it is the story of Teresa's mystical experiences. Turner calls this reading "a common,

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nothing. She loses her senses and her reason. in the "intensity (of) … such vivid knowledge, (the soul) feels estranged from God." (p.263).
[319] *Life* p.71
[320] *Life* p.84
[321] Eg *Life* p.85
[322] *Interior Castle,* p.139; also extreme loneliness (see *Life* pp.139-40)
[323] see autistic aloneness, introduction
[324] See Turner, *The Darkness of God* pp.50-73
[325] Williams, Rowan, *Teresa of Àvila* (London, UK; Geoffrey Chapman, 1991)   p.45

informal view around that the 'mystical' [has] something to do with the having of very uncommon, privileged 'experiences.'[326] However he adds that "John of the Cross and Teresa of Àvila did make mention of 'experiences,' [but] attached little or no importance to them,[327] and certainly did not think the having of them to be definitive of the 'mystical.'"[328] This tends to support the claim that was made above in section 2.1 that Teresa's mysticism is something more than experientialism. If Teresa (the nun) does not think mysticism is defined by 'her' experiences, then what form does her mysticism take?

A naïve reading of *The Interior Castle* could see it simply as a 'spiritual autobiography,' chronicling a series of inner 'events.' It would be difficult to argue that the story is not a narrative of events; in her preface to her 2003 translation of *The Interior Castle,* Mirabai Starr's rather effusive writing on Teresa sees it as an account of "religious fireworks and divinely altered states of consciousness" in which "God-states (start) to descend like a monsoon on the parched landscape of Teresa's soul."[329]

However the crucial point at issue here is the nature of 'experience.' The question Starr does not address is that of considering in what kind of discourse the text operates. Teresa herself, as narrator, alerts the reader to the danger of overly 'experientialising' the narrative.[330]

The point this section is making is that it is very important to be aware that metaphor is a narrative strategy, and that, in terms of a *narrative of experience*, Christ and the soul, not Teresa the nun, are the protagonists. This is what Michel de Certeau calls "the fiction of the soul," which he argues as the "foundation of *The Interior Castle*."[331] The text of *The Interior Castle* moves

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[326] Turner, *The Darkness of God* p.2
[327] ibid.
[328] ibid.
[329] *Interior Castle* p.9
[330] Teresa writes: "Look. Try to understand what I'm saying. We don't actually feel heat or smell an aroma." (ibid. p.99); See also pp.123-4: "how, you may ask, could the soul see this truth and understand it if she is incapable of seeing anything? Well, it is not in the moment of union that the soul is cognizant of this truth, but she sees it clearly afterwards. It isn't some vision … it is an unshakeable certainty …. Don't be mistaken. This conviction is not built upon any physical forms. It is not like the invisible presence of our beloved Jesus Christ in the most holy sacrament …. It has nothing to do with manifestation; it's purely about divinity," and p.225: "The soul didn't experience this with the ordinary senses that tell us there is someone next to us, but in a subtler, more delicate way that transcends explanation." See also *Life* pp.174, 187-8
[331] De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable* p.188

between narrative strands. One strand is the story in which Christ and the soul are protagonists, and the other is the interjections of Teresa the narrator as protagonist, advising the reader regarding her reception of, and response to the text.[332] In fact the bodily effects of contemplation tend to be suffering, and 'rapture' and 'ecstasy' "have little to do with" the body.[333] This is important, to establish that this is not the genre of autobiography. The difference between narrative techniques might be explained as follows.

Starr writes that Bernini's famous statue *Saint Teresa in Ecstasy* is "an unabashedly sensual image … the nun swooning blissfully backward while a clearly delighted androgynous angel plunges a flaming sword into her, leaving her on fire with love for God."[334] This is where the crucial point is. What Starr (but not necessarily Bernini) misses is that, although Teresa the narrator, Teresa the nun, may be in an ecstasy of "musing on" this theological imagery and experiencing the text,[335] it is not 'the nun' (Teresa, the narrator) who is 'swooning in ecstasy,' but the soul. Crucially, the illustration about Bernini's statue makes clear precisely why autistic literal metaphor works only as a theological (Incarnational) concept. This 'literal' metaphor is not 'taking the story literally,' in the way that Starr does. Instead it is the absolute inversion of that 'literal interpretation.' The theological intent of the metaphor, for an Incarnational *theological* hermeneutic, is *more literally* real than the 'literal' intent of reading the image as 'the nun swooning in ecstasy. This is what Jesus' disciples would call "a hard saying – who can understand it?"[336] All too readily, a defeated believer will follow the honest atheist's path to discredit the narrative: Teresa the nun is "only" describing the sexual experience of her own, rather bizarre erotic fantasy. Whatever the experience of Teresa the nun, Teresa the narrator, however, is in control of a tightly crafted mystic fable of

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[332] The effects of contemplation which Teresa the narrator discusses are not the same as the objects of contemplation. Teresa the narrator, in a didactic/pastoral role, alerts the reader to physical effects of intense contemplation (a 'second order' consequence of the practice of cultivating awareness of the mystical), for example "Pain … weak pulse, bones disjointed, hands rigid," (Life p.140); "copious tears and splitting headaches," (Interior Castle p.90) "Sobbing … chest constriction … nosebleeds" (Interior Castle pp.96-7)

[333] Regarding rapture, "It is all about love melting into love. Pleasures of the body have little to do with this union; the spiritual delights the Beloved shares with the soul are a thousand times removed from the pleasures married people must experience." (*Interior Castle* p.145)

[334] *Interior Castle* pp.10-11

[335] If contemplation often has physical effects such as nosebleeds, meditation on erotic imagery can have physical effects too; but this is not in itself the role of the erotic *in the text*.

[336] John 6.60

Augustinian inner rooms, and the reader of the text as mystic fable is invited to envision the soul's swooning as the 'literally' true in the mythical space of what can be seen also as Eliade's *kairos*, becoming a *kairos* of the text.

Allegory or fiction?

This section argues that '*The Interior Castle*' becomes a deeper theological thinking when read as fiction than it would as allegory. An allegory offers typological hermeneutics an environment where the text offers the coding of a type to be decoded. A typological hermeneutic would run aground in *The Interior Castle* because the text is too rich. The plot has too many strands interwoven: it is modelled on the quest genre, as the journey inward to both authenticity of self and of/as Christ, the idea of dwelling as a realisation of self, and the love story between the soul and Christ.[337]

Its other main tropes, if offered for rich theological thinking, would include

- garden (God as gardener – provider, loving care, fruitfulness, beauty, nature, creation);
- butterfly (Augustine "our hearts are restless," also fragile, short lived and beautiful – glory and fragility/smallness of self)
- reptiles (the problem of evil – the snake in the garden of Eden)

These alone invite a reading which lingers in the richness of metaphoric potential, as polysemic but also organically 'semic' ('*seme*' = a seed to be planted). There is also the richness of a glorious excess of poetic crafted material which amounts to a cascade of metaphors,[338] entirely surplus to the skeleton which allegory would offer for pragmatically constructing a (cataphatic) theological system.

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[337] Which mirror exactly the chivalric concerns of the fictional Don Quixote and the chivalric reading Teresa read in her youth; see section 2.5.2

[338] For example "silent sandpaper,"(p.50) "clash of arms and explosion of mortar," (p.57) "the desert of the soul,"(p.74) "wounds, ointment,(p.78)" "journey," fledgling birds,"(p.83) "storms,"(p.83) "stars hurtling across the heavens,"(p.92) "(the mind) wander(ing) from one extreme to another, like a fool who cannot find his assigned seat;"(p.108) (mere humans as) "worms"(p.150) life as a "tempestuous sea,"(p.150) spiritual strength as "streams of milk flowing from the divine breasts,"(p.271) (inauthentic thinking as) mud clinging to our boots,"(p.80) and there could be many other examples in this list.

Autistic metaphor is the literal 'staying in' the image, as the example of the 'branch of an organisation' made clear in chapter two. Decoding the branch out of the tree context is like decoding a pragmatic cataphatic intent from the apophasis of the poetic excess discussed here. Allegory, like dead metaphor, is anathema to incarnational metaphor, because this 'disability' which is autism, can now be inverted as a privileged sacred 'ability' to refuse to say, prosaically, that the castle (allegorically) 'stands for' the soul. Instead, impossibly, as with the bafflement of Ramsay's religious doxological language, the caste 'is' the soul.

True Erring: Monsignor Quixote, Teresa and the Novel

Having rejected an autobiographical reading or an allegorical reading, this section is now able to argue for *The Interior Castle* as a work of apophatic theological thinking. The argument of this section is crucial. It is that it is fiction itself which is an apophatic strategy, and therefore can be termed 'apophatic fiction.' This section is crucial, as the point towards which the whole of section two has been working, and this is the concept of 'apophatic fiction.' This term is created in this thesis to indicate that Teresa and John are both apophatic theologians *and* creative writers.[339] More than this, their creative work *is* the discourse of their apophatic theology. A remarkable part the 'story' is that, when Jesus appeared to Teresa, he asked who she was, and she replied "I am Teresa of Jesus. Who are you?" Jesus replied, "I am Jesus of Teresa." 'Teresa's Jesus' can thus be a creation of Teresa the narrator, giving her power to create theological fiction.

A lateral way in to thinking of the idea of apophatic theological fiction will now demonstrate what apophatic fiction might look like, if Graham Greene, the 'Catholic atheist,'[340] can similarly be considered as a novelist grappling with the unknowable God. This is particularly relevant in Green's novel *Monsignor Quixote.* Its similarities with *The Interior Castle* will become apparent.

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[339] Dionysius, in a sense, is also a creative writer, creatively reworking metaphor into a new form.

[340] Sweeney, Jon, *Almost Catholic: An Appreciation of the History, Practice, and Mystery of Ancient Faith* (San Francisco; Jossey-Bass Wiley, 2008), p.23

In Greene's novel, Cervantes' Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are recast as a Catholic village priest and a Communist atheist local politician. Cervantes' Quixote becomes the Don as he enters into the alternative reality of imagined participation in the grandiosity of the world of chivalric romance. Greene's Quixote becomes a Monsignor, erring bestowed on him by the deluded bishop who promotes him on slender and improbable grounds.

However there is a deeper and more fundamental play on delusion at work. When Monsignor Quixote and Sancho embark on journey, Sancho exchanges Father Quixote's book of moral theology for his copy of the works of Lenin. Sancho's Marxist ideals have been found wanting in Realpolitik at the level of mundane local politics, but it is Quixote who enacts that idealism in acts of resistance against capitalism.

Sancho in turn asks Quixote, "Do you really believe those stories?" of the faith. Quixote's answer is revealing: "I want to believe, and I want others to believe."[341] Doubt is an inalienable part not only Quixote's faith but also, he implies, even the Pope's. If his faith is 'only a fiction,' does this render it 'untrue?' His deluded quest 'for the socks' to make him a 'real' bishop is a comic reworking of the Don's equally comic quest for chivalric glory, and both fulfil that quest to its logical (apophatic) conclusion of madness. As a 'knight errant,' like the Don he is erring at every level – wandering in the 'cock and bull story'[342] of shopping for the purple socks, wandering in the title of Monsignor given to him by the deluded, drunken Bishop of Motopo, and wandering in the space of fiction, as Greene's creative reworking of the original.

'Monsignor Quixote-enacts Don Quixote-enacts the knight errant' is a multiple play on levels of reality in the text, just as Calvino's *livelli di realtà* does, as was discussed earlier. In an autistic hermeneutic, levels of reality in the text collapse and co-exist into one, 'literal' truth, just as they do in Greene's novel. In the space of the text (and only there, in the 'literal' space) Monsignor-*is* the Don-*is* the knight errant. Autistic literal metaphor, by taking

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[341] Teresa, like Don/Monsignor Quixote, wants 'others to believe' too, and her rhetoric is both poetry and persuasion. See above discussion of her motive to help her sisters to be better nuns [section 3.1.1]

[342] A *cock and bull story* is the title of Michael Winterbottom's 2005 comic meta-narrative film about a film crew attempting to make a film of the novel *Tristram Shandy,* which is itself (as is the film) a purported autobiography which also errs absurdly.

'the branch of the organisation' as 'the branch of a tree,' is therefore the privileged entry into the text with its impossible reality.

Teresa's 'soul' as 'Sister Quixote,' the knight errant

'The Interior Castle' is also a narrative of the journey as quest. Speculating on authorial intention, it could seem reasonable to think that Teresa, like the Don, is modelling her work on the same genre of chivalric romance. This is borne out in the biographical account that she grew up reading chivalric novels,[343] and 'believing in' the chivalric values of the quest for romantic conquest could be suggested in the reason for her being sent to the cloister, to protect a chastity under threat from amorous adventures.[344]

After her pivotal, transformative emotional reaction to the *Ecce Homo (*behold the *man* [my emphasis]) statue, Teresa's love is transferred to the quest for Christ. The question of 'erotic experience' has been discussed above, but a reworked chivalric *eros* is now enacted in the story of *The Interior Castle,* which is also the enactment of the Scriptures as story. She is a 'knight errant' as she errs in the space of fiction, 'taking liberties' with theology. Teresa's 'soul,' like the Don[345] and the Monsignor, also, in her quest, becomes mad with love, [346] and her final destination and consummation can also only be death.[347]

Teresa's awareness of the apophatic theological dimension leads her to rework both the chivalric love quest of her youth and the sacred story of faith in a second-order story similar to both Cervantes' and Greene's. Teresa is Cervantes, not Quixote. She 'spins a yarn,' for example, in the trope of the silk worm spinning its own cocoon, to create an inner sanctum for the purposes of dying in Christ, in order to be resurrected in Christ as a butterfly.[348] The soul as

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[343] *Interior Castle* p.5
[344] *Interior Castle* (pp.5-6, 8) describes Teresa as a "wild child" having "adventures" which include being in a teenage relationship which is "more intimate than was socially acceptable" and even as a nun becoming "an inveterate flirt" who becomes "perilously intimate with a man."
[345] Dulcinea becoming the for the Don object of the chivalric love; living out the justice of Sancho's Marxism as Christian love for the Monsignor.
[346] *Interior Castle* pp.112, 113, 114, 115, 123, 210
[347] Teresa's seventh dwelling discusses death at length, as the consummation of the divine marriage; both Quixotes die, happy in their madness.
[348] *Interior Castle* pp.126ff

a narrative character both casts itself poetically in the cascade of metaphors[349] and enacts itself in the narrative's plot of experiences of the quest, the dwelling and their enabling encounters with God as sensory *'gustoes.'[350]*

It was suggested earlier that Teresa was ironically 'outwitting' 'learning'[351] inasmuch as she has an awareness of apophatic potential in theological thinking. It is for this reason that there is an argument that *The Interior Castle* can be viewed as an apophatic discourse. Her fiction is apophatic in the sense that it is a rhetorical strategy to outwit cataphatic discourse, with the same theological intent of that used by Dionysius' strategy of self-subverting language.[352]

Crucial to this argument is that her rhetorical strategy is *itself* apophatic when the definition of apophasis is recalled. '*Apo-*' as a grammatical participle is the distancing of relationship where grammatical predication breaks down in discourse, in what Turner has called "that speech about God which is the failure of speech."[353]

The theology is expressed not as 'hidden' in the plot, but as the hiddenness which the narrative form creates,[354] existing by not existing anywhere, except *as* the plot. In this way, fiction is an apo-phasis, disrupting the cata-phatic relationship in which theological discourse would operate. Cataphasis would carry theological doctrine 'straight to' the reader, but fiction instead creates an opening for the reader, and the theological is suspended in the text, 'there for the taking,' but not really 'there' at all, in the sense of 'telling the facts.' Instead, it actually invites and questions the reader – 'do you enter this world of the text, partaking of the story as a poetic sacrament of mystery?'[355] In this sense, thinking theologically in the text is a wager of faith on the part of the reader. It depends on the reader to 'let go' of (cataphatic)

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[349] See section 2.3.2
[350] The sensory metaphor is gusto (taste)
[351] In section 2.2
[352] For example "Our intellects, no matter how sharp, can no more grasp (the reality of the soul) than they can comprehend God." (*Interior Castle* p.36)
[353] Turner, *The Darkness of God* p.20; see also section 1.3.3 above.

rhetorical security and enter a Coleridgean 'willing suspension of disbelief.'[356] The story isn't 'real;' but by faith it indicates a truth more real than 'fact.'

Over and over, Teresa the narrator repeats that '*gustoes espirituales*' cannot be 'known' but only 'experienced.'[357] They *are* 'experienced,' but experienced in another mode which is the apophatic which fiction offers by 'not being real.' They are experienced in the text. For fiction itself to be an apophasis speaks powerfully in the light of Incarnational metaphor. Literal metaphor is an apophasis where the reading of the metaphor, resisting decoding, exists in absence from cataphatic pragmatism, yet it is the full presence of the metaphor itself in the text.

The text within itself also offers a clear formula, to alert the reader to be anything but theologically naïve regarding the self-subverting utterance of '*docta ignorantia*'[358] in the comment that "as (the soul) cannot comprehend what it understands, it understands by not understanding."[359] When it also states that "knowing is not experiencing,"[360] a more meaningful reading of this than the experientialist understanding that 'you will only know if you experience this' is the possibility of reading it instead as '(true) knowing is 'not-experiencing.'' This is utterly apophatic because, theologically thought, the non-existent space of apophatic fiction is superlatively existent, as what Dionysius describes as, in fact, "this hidden Super-Essential Godhead."[361]

In summary, the tropes of the soul's journey and her love affair form an apophatic strategy to carry the ineffable into the non-existent space of literature. This is a progression to her pupil John's development of her method.

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[356] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* part 2.6, quoted in Jasper, David, *The Sacred Community* (Texas; Baylor University Press, 2012) p.106
[357] See section 2.3.2
[358] Referring to Nicholas of Cusa (trans, Heron, Fr. Germeain), *De Docta Ignorantia, (Of learned Ignorance)* (London, UK; Routledge & Kegan Paul,1954 (1440)): Nicholas argues from geometry that scientific reasoning, for example about tangents, will lead to the incalculable (an analogy which was discussed in chapter one). Nicholas then goes on to apply the same reasoning to theology: "We, then, believers in Christ, are led in learned ignorance to the mountain that is Christ" (p.161); Nicholas also develops *docta ignorantia* into the term Negative Theology (pp. 59-64) and this is also an innate feature of knowledge itself: referring to Aristotle's analogy of owls trying to look at the sun, "since the natural desire in us is not without a purpose, its immediate object is our own ignorance. If we can fully realise this desire, we will acquire learned ignorance" (p.8)
[359] Teresa of Àvila, *Life* p.127
[360] ibid. p.93
[361] Dionysius (trans. Rolt), *The Divine Names* p.53

John's poem, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, will be what the autistic hermeneutic views as a fuller poetic apophasis, where the ineffable as fiction carries great potential for literal metaphor to approach its fulfilment as Incarnation. To this end, apophatic fiction will be considered as expressed at its fullest in the work of John of the Cross. The next section will turn to considering his poem '*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*' as apophatic fiction.

2.3 Rhetorical strategies in 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel'

Influence of Dionysius and Teresa

This section can now use the conclusions of the preceding sections to argue for a fullness as the consummation of apophatic fiction in John of the Cross' '*The Ascent of Mount Carmel.*' The progression to *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* works as follows.

The argument is that John learns from his mentor, Teresa, [362] to employ rhetoric as possessing the status of the 'work' (in Blanchot's terms, see section five) but his poem becomes, for an autistic reading, a more fully absolute autism. John achieves this by following Teresa's strategy, but then also bringing Dionysius' self-negating language back to the poem. The important point at this stage is that this 'fullness' from Teresa and 'emptiness' from Dionysius[363] fuse to creates a text which, in Blanchot's terms, approaches the origin which is silence. This is why it is crucial to the conclusion towards which this chapter's argument is working, that the fullest Incarnational metaphor is poetic silence.

Turner makes the link back to Dionysius clear, that John and Dionysius both employ a doubled form of negation which is "a sense that negation operates in two roles or at two mutually interacting levels: at a first-order level of experience and at a second-order level of the critique of experience."[364] As a text, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* has similarities to the form of reasoned

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[362] See Turner *Darkness of God* p.250; also Teresa of Àvila, *The Interior Castle* p.13
[363] 'Fullness' in the sense that Teresa's work is overflowing with imagery and poetic invention, and 'emptiness' in the sense that Dionysius' images are tersely self-subverting. Teresa alludes to the ineffable and writes that there are moments when there must only be silence, but the main tropes she uses, of the inner journey and the spiritual marriage, are in a fullness of poetic discourse.
[364] Turner, *Darkness of God* p.270

persuasion Dionysius uses to 'contain' and argue for his apophatic 'formulae.' Following Dionysius, John combines Dionysius' twin strategies of a) self-negating metaphors and b) reasoned argumentation for them. However John infuses Dionysius' strategies of self-negation and argumentation with Teresa's strategy of apophatic fiction.

When *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* combines a fullness of extended poetic narrative into a deeper partnership with self-subverting utterance, this begins to approach a genuinely theological Incarnational metaphor. A literal metaphor of a 'full' self-subverting text reads the fullness of presence and emptiness of self-subverted absence as the literal absent presence of the divine in the text. This will point towards theological, literal metaphor as a paradoxical kenotic Incarnation in and of the text.

The text and the work

In order to think through the potential for reading '*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*' in terms of the art work's autistic authenticity, it is important here to establish the poem as apophatic fiction.

Like Dionysius and Teresa,[365] John knowingly moves between narrative functions. The pure work of the poem is only sixteen lines long, but the introductory statement ('argument'), prologue, and following three books all shift back into a prose register. This prose register of the argument, prologue and books uses the same strategy of 'learned' reasoned argument for self-subverting language Dionysius has used in *The Divine Names*,[366] and so is not the kind of poetic narrative that Teresa has used. The pure 'work' itself, of the 16-line poem, however, is entirely poetic and everything outside it in the prose register is a commentary on it:

> All the doctrine whereof I intend to treat in this Ascent of
> Mount Carmel is included in the following stanzas, and in
> them is also described the manner of ascending to the

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[365] Dionysius, as argued previously, moves between argumentation and metaphor; Teresa moves between the narrative of the journey/betrothal plot and the interjecting voice of the didactive narrator.
[366] See Turner *The Darkness of God* p.270

summit of the Mount, which is the high state of perfection which we here call union of the soul with God.[367]

'All the doctrine,' then, is in sixteen lines of verse. In this sense, the 'text' is 294 pages long, but the 'work' occupies less than a page. "Describing the manner of ascending to … union of the soul with God," like Teresa's story, is experiential language. However, again the same point applies – the 'manner of ascending' is a poetic manner, and not an 'experientialist' one.[368]

Every line of the poem is composed of physical images, and the language is of darkness and hiddenness. Ascent is by means of a "secret ladder." These are both very significant, but what is most striking is the erotic (*lover, Beloved; breast; caress; reclining on the Beloved).*

Self-subverting utterance has become extended poetic narrative here for apophatic theology, but also expressing itself as a first level metaphoricity of eros and darkness. The combination of the two metaphors, eros and darkness, will later become, in regard to Blanchot's authenticity of the apophatic, an autistic eros/darkness twinning when '*eros*' is thought of as the integrity of autistic affective empathy in the face of impaired cognitive empathy.[369]

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[367] John of the Cross (trans. Allison Peers, E), *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (Radford, Vancouver; Wilder Publications, 2008 (1582-88)), p.63   S
[368] The poem reads as follows:
On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings – oh, happy chance!
I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest.
In darkness and secure, By the secret ladder, disguised – oh, happy chance!
In darkness and in concealment, My house being now at rest.
In the happy night, In secret, when none saw me, Nor I beheld aught, Without light or guide, save that which burned in my heart.
This light guided me More surely than the light of noonday,
To the place where he (well I knew who!) was awaiting me – A place where none appeared.
Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,
Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!
Upon my flowery breast, kept wholly for himself alone,
There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him, And the fanning of the cedars made a breeze.
The breeze blew from the turret As I parted his locks;
With his gentle hand he wounded my neck And caused all my senses to be suspended.
I remained, lost in oblivion; My face I reclined on the Beloved.
All ceased and I abandoned myself, Leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies. (John of the Cross (trans. Allison Peers), *Ascent of Mount Carmel* p.65)
[369] See introduction

Eros

As in *The Interior Castle,* the poetic work is not theological discourse but the theologically thought, poetic telling of erotic experience,[370] and again, 'experience' is within the poem. This is a fiction of union, similar to Teresa's, but it is also a fiction of the negation Dionysius uses. Absolute divine *eros* is known only in absolute union with the Super-Essential God Dionysius has written about. For this reason, the pure erotic can only be known in the darkness of unknowing. John's poem is, like Teresa's both a journey and a love affair, with the journey towards the lover leading to the absolute union which can only be told as apophatic discourse.

At this point, it is worth noting that the hidden, secret *eros,* even before it is read through Blanchot's thinking of literature as a space of pure being, lends itself to an autistic reading. An autistic reading will recognise a discourse here which speaks to autistic empathy. The impairment/refusal of cognitive empathy here would be a strategy to understand the darkness as a mindfulness of separation, as will be discussed in the following section. However in terms of divine *eros,* autistic affective empathy functions precisely within autistic being which is also the mindfulness of separation. The poem's combination of *eros* and hiddenness/darkness is, in fact, a 'loving without knowing.' This is the risk of autistic faith which practises love with no guarantee, because there is no way to 'assess' the object of love. It is simply giving. [371]

This affective *eros* works as discussed in the previous summary above, in terms of affective/cognitive twinning. It also moves towards a thinking of Incarnational metaphoricity because literal metaphor, as chapter two argued, revels in the kind of religious language of excess where the metaphor simply 'is,' and this delight is a pure *eros.*

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[370] Scriptural also, in its following of the narrative of the *Song of Songs* (also, as its title indicates, a 'narrative of a narrative')

[371] This is also a discourse which Jean Luc Marion develops, where the gift outwits ontological difference in the parable of the prodigal son. See Marion, Jean Luc (trans. Thomas A Carlson), *God Without Being: Hors-Texte (Dieu Sans l'être: Hors-texte)* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1991 (1982)) pp.97-99). Eros surpasses knowledge, because the father loves without knowing if the son 'deserves' forgiveness. In autistic terms, the father practises total affective empathy precisely in this space of impaired cognitive empathy. This will be explored in terms of the ontology of the art work in section five.

Darkness

This section thinks through the imagery of darkness in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* as apophatic theology, so that an autistic theology can read itself in the darkness. Darkness, hiddenness, non-appearance and secrecy dominate the first six lines, establishing their importance as 'unknowing. In the last three lines, in the image of erotic union, John writes: "all my senses were suspended" and "I remained lost in oblivion; in the last line, "all ceased and I abandoned myself."

This is ecstasy, and as absolute ecstasy it takes place in the absolute *eros* of absolute unknowing ['*ex-stasis*' – displacement 'out of-the space' of normality]. This 'carnal knowledge' as complete unknowing takes on real power when it is read as apophatic fiction. Here, John is employing Teresa's strategy of using story as an apophasis of union, but whereas Teresa merely explains that she is writing the ineffable, [372] John reworks the ineffable more completely in terms of Dionysius' self-subverting utterance.

This self-subversion is, as suggested above, the total unknowing *of* the most intimate knowing, and in this sense, it can be read as a paradoxical re-expression of the pervasive imagery of darkness, night and concealment. If the poem "contains all the doctrine" of John's theological thinking, Denys Turner is right to interpret the 'dark night' theologically. Turner comments that

> Faith, the darkness of unknowing, is the conviction – but
> also the practice of the Christian life as organised in terms
> of that conviction – that 'our deepest centre is in God,' It
> is the conviction that our deepest centre … is in us but not
> of us, is not 'ours' to possess, but ours only to be
> possessed by. And so faith at once 'decentres' us. [373]

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[372] For example, in The Interior Castle: "In this moment of perfect clarity, the soul understands that God alone is truth … I wish I could say more about this, but it's ineffable" (p.246); "God has made the soul into an utter fool so that he can replace false intelligence with true wisdom ... In a state of union, the soul sees nothing and hears nothing and comprehends nothing" (p.123); "Our intellects, no matter how sharp, can no more grasp (the concept of the soul and God dwelling in it) than they can comprehend God" (p.36); "Yet when he unites himself with her at last, she understands nothing. She loses her senses and her reason. in the "intensity (of) … such vivid knowledge, (the soul) feels estranged from God." (p.263)

[373] Turner, *Darkness of God* p.251

Taking 'the darkness of unknowing' as a trope, this safeguards a place for the imagery as theologically thought, as a metaphor of negation. Turner argues persuasively for the fundamental distinction between experiential depression and the dark night of the soul which John dwells on much more in his work of that title.[374] This is a fundamental safeguarding from experientialism. Turner explains the difference:

> in depression, it is the 'self' which causes the distress of the sense of its loss, but 'the dark nights' on the other hand are entered into as loss of that same self, for in that consists their pain, but the hope it acquires is of the non-recovery of that selfhood in any form, for what is lost in the passive nights was never the self at all, but only an illusion all along. But in saying that this conventional self is an 'illusion' it is necessary to warn against an obvious, and tempting, misinterpretation. To say that the self is an illusion is not to say that it is not real, for, on the contrary, it is precisely in terms of such selfhoods that real people really live, most of the time … a live, dynamic falsehood.[375]

The theological conviction behind this, of faith as a decentring, turns the question of 'experientialism' on its head. If the 'experience' of the self is the real fiction, as Turner argues, then the non-experience which can only 'exist' in its poetic telling is in fact the more theologically 'true.' This is why apophatic fiction can be read as a mute language of being in the section after this one. This is true in the sense with which Turner reads John's theological thinking:

> My true self consists in my transformation in God. I know myself in my not-knowing my difference from God. And 'contemplation' is the power to rest in that not-knowing. There is no experience, then, of which that selfhood is the object. The experience of the loss of experience of the self … is what John calls 'the passive night of the spirit.[376]

The reason that apophatic fiction offers a place to rest in that not-knowing is that it operates theologically thought, but expressed only as '*poiesis,*' which is a text of what 'is not,' but is 'only' the image. This can now be thought through, in the following section, in terms of what Maurice Blanchot

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[374] John of the Cross (trans. Allison Peers, E), *The Dark Night of the Soul* (Westminster, Maryland; Newman Press, 1953 (1577-78))
[375] Turner, *Darkness of God* p.244
[376] Ibid. p.245

calls '*The Space of Literature.*' Section 5 is the destination point for being able to develop this understanding, and will now explore apophatic fiction as the language of mute being. This mute being of the work of art can then be read as the authenticity of autistic being, which exists in the silence of mindfulness of separation.

The purpose of doing this is to be able now to view this fully apophatic fiction in terms of an authenticity of mute being in Blanchot's terms. It will then be possible to use this mode of thinking, of the mute being of apophatic fiction, to work towards a fully kenotic autistic thinking of apophatic fiction as Incarnational metaphor.

2.4. Mystical theologies in Blanchot's "Space of Literature"

This section is following a new trajectory in revisioning and even rehabilitating (as re-seeing) what this chapter has called apophatic fiction. In the introduction to *The Darkness of God,* Denys Turner indicates this kind of fruitful possible development, and this is the one towards which this chapter has been working. Turner writes:

> Though I do believe we have been misreading (the Medieval mystics) ... within the rather closed, anti-intellectual world of Christian 'spiritualities,' ... (there is) the possibility that certain quite contemporary developments in Western thought, associated with 'post-modernism,' contain a revival of that awareness of the 'deconstructive' potential of human thought and language which so characterised classical medieval apophaticism."[377]

Chapter two looked at readings of postmodern writers, particularly Derrida and Barthes, and through the (a)theological thinking of Mark C Taylor. The aim was to think how a deconstructive (a)theology might offer an autistic hermeneutic the possibility to express itself as Incarnational metaphor. In this chapter, the 'postmodern' thinker who offers a particularly rich possibility

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[377] Turner, *The Darkness of God* p.8

theologically, in the light of revisioning apophatic fiction, is Maurice Blanchot. A theological thinking of this choice can be explained by contrasting Blanchot's (a)theology with Derrida's, where Derrida's 'trace' is less sympathetic to apophatic theology than Blanchot will be shown to be.

Dionysius and Derrida

In *Denials: How to Avoid Speaking,* Derrida writes an extended commentary on Dionysius' *Mystical Theology'* but insists "what I write is not negative theology."[378]

The difference is in how absence is thought, within or without the wager of faith which distinguishes John's dark night of the soul as the "ontological wager of hyperessentiality" which is, he says in the same breath, "not the deconstruction" that he writes.[379] Instead, the absence which "blocks every possible relationship to theology"[380] is simply meaningless absence. Derrida writes:

> Only pure absence – not the absence of this or that, but the absence of everything in which all presence is announced – can inspire, in other words, can work, and then make one work.[381]

This statement makes his commentary on Dionysius an ironic one where Derrida in fact is subverting its subversion and demolishing its theological power. This does indicate a potential for (a)theological discourse, but Derrida is not equating this with his deconstructive narrative project. [382] In contrast, Blanchot as a Heideggerian (a)theological thinker implies (namelessly) the hidden superabundance which apophatic discourse indicates and in its self-negation embodies.

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[378] Derrida, Jacques (trans. Frieden, Ken), *How to Avoid Speaking: Denials* in Budick & Iser (eds.), *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (New York; Columba University Press, 1989) p.8
[379] Ibid.
[380] Derrida, Jacques (trans. Bass, A), *Positions* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1981) p.40 quoted in Taylor, *Erring* p.6
[381] Ibid.
[382] Derrida, *How to Avoid Speaking: Denials* p.77

In *'The Mystical Theology'* Dionysius writes of an absent trace:

> "the understanding and contemplation of (this hidden
> Super-Essential Godhead)'s nature is not accessible to any
> being; for such knowledge is super-essentially exalted
> above all (names) unsearchable and past finding out, since
> there is no trace of any that have penetrated the hidden
> depths of Its infinitude."[383]

Dionysius writes of a trace which is not; Derrida's trace is the ubiquitous lack of identity in a labyrinth of "everything always already inhabited by the track of something that is not itself."[384] Derrida's trace is absence thought, in fact, as lack of absence in the collapse of subject-object duality. It is the denial of Dionysius' denial. While this prompts Mark C Taylor to see the dissemination of the trace as a site where (a)theology can articulate, Blanchot instead is following Dionysius' trace as absence itself, the space where being speaks. This can be read, for the autistic hermeneutic coming to this discourse, as autistic glory, as this chapter will explain when it reaches fruition in considering Blanchot's apophatic fiction as mindfulness of separation.

To bring together the conversation between Blanchot and the mystical theologians' apophatic fiction of this chapter, a structure will now be followed first by explaining Blanchot's concept of mute being in terms of the work's space and the absence of the gods. From there, the ideas of negation and 'uselessness' will be discussed as ways to think of apophatic fiction re-visioned as the language of mute being. Chapter two followed Mark C Taylor into the (a)theological possibilities of Derrida's dissemination, but here a more deeply authentic possibility begins to open up for an autistic hermeneutic. This is because Blanchot, following Heidegger, thinks in terms of the departure of the gods. This is equally (a)theological, but the same time more deeply thought in terms of apophatic discourse as 'mute being.' This silence will be explored in this section as approaching the absolute silence of pure being. This is a move towards Incarnational metaphor as a theological understanding of the text as absolute kenosis.

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[383] Dionysius, *Divine Names,* p.53
[384] Spivak, (Translator's Introduction), in Derrida, *'Of Grammatology'* p. lxix, quoted in Taylor, *'Erring,'* p.138

Blanchot and the work

This chapter draws on Maurice Blanchot's poetic 'theology'[385] of the work of art as he thinks it in his 1955 study '*L'espace littéraire (the Space of Literature*).[386]

Just as Wittgenstein was shown in chapter two to celebrate the ability of the Uhland poem to magnificently 'utter the unutterable' (see Chapter two section 2.2.4), Blanchot writes about a 'pure' form of poetry which expresses what is evanescent, such as the work of Mallarmé. He writes about a place where language 'expresses nothing'[387] because the pure work of art does not exist to represent but to be. The work of literature is, for Blanchot, something more and other than the mere fact of the existence of the book; it is the realm where being speaks. To explain what this means, it is important to see how Blanchot is thinking in terms set out by Heidegger.

Blanchot and Heidegger

Blanchot is writing within Heidegger's shadow, [388] so it is important to discuss here, at least briefly, what this means for Blanchot's thought. In the essay '*What is called Thinking?*' Heidegger asks a fundamental question about thinking, in the sense that unreflective thinking does not question the representational assumptions it makes. Stepping back from the assumptions that representation 'simply works,' would be to be aware of a withdrawal from the nexus of logic:

> The real nature of thought might show itself, ... at that
> very point at which it once withdrew, if only we will pay

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[385] This term is used advisedly, as will become clear.

[386] Blanchot, Maurice (trans. Smock), *The Space of Literature*

[387] Blanchot (trans. Smock), *The Space of Literature* p.22

[388] Ann Smock brings out the fundamental but implicit nature of Blanchot's Heideggerian thinking: "all of 'l'espace littéraire is imbued with care [*Sorge*]: *le souci de l'origine, le souci de l'oevre,* anxious solicitude for a time before the time when beings supplant being and submit to the command of the objectifying, acquisitive subject; concern for a time other than the time measured by the gradual reduction of the irreconcilably alien to the homogeneity of all that is comprehensively mastered. To the extent that in the work of art the impossible is realised as such, art alone answers, with true fidelity, to the requirement of Heideggerian authenticity" [Translator's Introduction, *The Space of Literature* p.7]; Blanchot rarely uses Heidegger's name, but assumes that the reader will recognise what his use of the term implies in debt to Heidegger – for example "When I am on *the worldly plane*, which I share with things and beings, being is profoundly hidden. (It is the thought of this concealment that Heidegger urges us to welcome.)" [*The Space of Literature* p.251]

> heed to this withdrawal, if only we will not insist, confused by logic, that we already know perfectly well what thinking is.[389]

... "when we wait for the sun to rise, we never do it on the strength of scientific insight."[390] The issue of 'stepping back from' metaphysical representation/conceptualization is to step outside representational thinking, and being aware of its inadequacy in the face of being; in this sense, "science does not think."[391] Language that escapes the 'trap' of 'scientific insight' is poetry, and Heidegger's 'turn to the poetic' indicates that poetry is akin to 'thought' in its originary capacity preceding metaphysics. However "thought and poesy, each in its own way, *are* the essential telling, (but not that) thought and poesy use language merely as their medium."[392] Words are "not merely terms (but) wellsprings that are found and dug up in the telling."[393] Blanchot draws on Heidegger's understanding of poetry as this originary 'wellspring' of pre-reflective, pure thought.

Heidegger has suggested that being is 'in' the work, and the poetic work is not the pragmatic representation of 'text' or 'writing,' when 'used' for anything, but being disclosed, as the 'unthought thought' itself. In this sense, Blanchot can speak about the work as the non-representative space of pure being. Heidegger's thinking of the world falling silent as a withdrawal of all representation reads powerfully in an autistic hermeneutic. In an (impossible) absolute autism, metaphor 'represents' nothing, being only the pure being indicated by withdrawal. Theologically, this can be read as absolute Incarnational metaphor where the 'Nothing' beyond representation is the (being) All of God.

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[389] Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*? pp.44-5
[390] ibid. p.36
[391] ibid. p.134
[392] ibid. p.128
[393] ibid. p.130

The Space of Literature as mute being

Following Heidegger, Blanchot considers the possibility of the work of art as 'beyond thinking,' as pure being representing nothing. He writes:

> The work brings neither certainty nor clarity. It assures us of nothing, nor does it shed any light upon itself. It is not solid, it does not furnish us with anything upon which to brace ourselves. These values belong to Descartes and to the world where we succeed in living.[394]

> This is the Heideggerian withdrawal of being which speaks only by not speaking (not speaking as representation). In this sense, the work speaks by being-silent/silent-being:

> In (poetic) language the world recedes and goals cease; the world falls silent; beings … are no longer ultimately what speaks. Beings fall silent, but then it is being that tends to speak and speech that wants to be.[395]

There is an essential apophatic nature of the work when it is thought of in this way. Blanchot writes:

> Why is art so intimately allied with the sacred? It is because in the relation between art and the sacred, between that which shows itself and that which does not …
> … (where they are) realised only as the approach of the unreachable – the work finds the profound reserve which it needs.[396]

This sets 'the sacred' (apophatic discourse of the absolute holy) apart from 'religion.' 'Religion' (as cataphatic) does not produce the work, because "when art is the language of the gods, when the temple is the house where the god dwells, the work is reduced to the vehicle of representation, and the work invisible and art unknown. The poem names the sacred, and men hear the sacred, not the poem."[397] It is the absence which is the sacred which gives the work "the profound reserve which it needs," and this must be the sacred of the divine as absence. This is the authenticity of the "wellspring" Heidegger has described.

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[394] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* p.223
[395] ibid.
[396] ibid. p.233
[397] ibid. p.230

Thinking through the apophatic works this chapter has considered, apophatic fiction is similarly the sacred of the absent god who speaks by being silent, and is seen by being invisible. This means that apophatic fiction can be understood as the language of mute being, "where beings fall silent and being speaks," but only in the space of the work itself, which regarding all representation is silent, beyond all thinking.

This can be outworked in ways which show that an utter authenticity of being in terms of Blanchot's "work" can be discerned in the apophatic fictions of Teresa and John. To show how this authenticity speaks in these works, Blanchot's ideas of 'uselessness' and 'betrayal' shed light on the mystical writings considered in this chapter. The apophatic quality of the authentic work (where Blanchot alludes to the need for the gods to be absent) here meets with the authenticities of this chapter's mystical narratives which give self-subverting utterance the power to speak. In the stories of Teresa's 'soul, 'and of John's 'lover,' this power of the work of fiction is seen as follows.

Apophatic 'uselessness' in the space of literature

This section considers 'uselessness' as a mark of authenticity in Blanchot's terms, which can give a reading of John's and Teresa's apophatic fiction as authentically useless. This is an inversion of worldly values enacting the Kingdom of God in the Beatitudes; yet at the end of this section this inversion will reveal this authenticity to be the only thing of any use that there is.

Teresa's text is written to be of 'use,' but of 'dubious use,' only as inspiration, suggesting images which are, using the term advisedly, erotic fantasies. The book is 'useful,' but she explains this 'use' as nothing more consequential than 'consolation' and 'delight.'[398] However, what use is the story (the pure work) as within itself? Teresa interjects again and again about 'good works,'[399] and there is a mutual interplay, in the holism of the charism, where contemplative prayer, sisterly love and loving service are 'useful,' each

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[398] *Interior Castle* p.297
[399] For example, *Interior Castle* pp. 293, 294, 288; *Life* p.19

supporting the other. However, what is the 'use' of love itself? Referring back to Monsignor Quixote's politically naïve rethinking of social justice as an act of love, Teresa's stance towards political praxis is simply for the furthering of goodness, not 'civilisation,' empire or any achievement at all.[400] What use is love?

At another level, one could outwork love without contemplation, and Teresa the narrator makes it clear that this is equally valid as a means to achieving love.[401] So this begs the question again of what 'use' the Castle is. Its 'use' is to indicate a journey which has no use at all, because it doesn't even exist at all. The contemplative orders 'do' plenty,[402] but in contemplation – what do they 'do?' Teresa the woman, and John the man, do plenty,[403] but Teresa's 'soul' and John's 'lover' as narrative protagonists can only wait, in Taylor's terms, 'After God.' What 'use' is the dark night where John's lover "abandons himself" (abandons his self)? Both journeys lead nowhere – by definition, to an ineffable 'no-where.'

Blanchot honours this quality of 'uselessness' as the authentic nature of the work. When the work speaks, it speaks not as, or in the service of, anyone; it simply speaks:

> The writer belongs to a language which no-one speaks, which is addressed to no one, which has no center, and which reveals nothing. He may believe that he affirms himself in this language, but what he affirms is altogether deprived of self.[404]

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[400] *Life* pp.76, 147, 150-1, also *Interior Castle* pp.47, 294
[401] For example, *Interior Castle* p.113
[402] "Carmelites speak of contemplation as a gift of God that can be nurtured by a life of prayer, community, and service. These three elements are at the heart of our charism.
In prayer (or worship) we build up a friendship with 'the God whom we know loves us', as St. Teresa of Avila described it.
In community building (or fraternity) we encounter God in our brothers and sisters, who comfort and challenge us.
In service (also known as mission, apostolate, or ministry) we open ourselves to be God's hands in the world, responding to the needs of others, especially the poor and marginalised." (The British Province of Carmelite Friars: '*Carmelite Spirituality - The Carmelite Charism: Contemplation*), online access http://www.carmelite.org/index.php?nuc=content&id=236 13/8/2016)
[403] See *Life* pp.18,74,79, *Interior Castle* p.12; '*The Life of Saint Teresa by herself*' not only prefigures the metaphoric structure of *The Interior Castle,* but also recounts a life story of tremendous activity. However, the goal of the activity is to further the Kingdom of God, which is 'useless' in earthly terms, as the 'foolishness of God.'
[404] Blanchot, The Space of Literature p.26

This 'nothing' place "reveals nothing" in a "pure passivity of being."[405] This "pure passivity of being" is the place where the work of art – the pure poem – does not act, but is. Action would be a mimetic function which the pure poem resists. So the authenticity of the 'useless' apophatic discourse is also the authenticity of Blanchot's 'useless' art work. Similarly, incarnational metaphor is 'useless;' it does not respond to pragmatic demands for what ostensive intent requires (the branch of the tree needs to be the branch of an organisation for business to function).

Negation, error, and betrayal as authenticity in the space of literature

Teresa and John are both rebels, running the gauntlet of heresy,[406] and audaciously going beyond merely reforming their own orders but establishing new ones, and these new orders are unconventional enough to suggest walking barefoot in the park.[407] John is actually denounced, incarcerated and tortured as a traitor to his order. At the level of the text, they are also traitors by deviating from propositional 'common sense' theological narratives. Negation itself is a betrayal of affirmation. Erring (as used by Mark C Taylor, and also as it was earlier suggested of Teresa/Cervantes's knight errant) is also a betrayal. Erring is risky, and there is not an ironic tone when Teresa the narrator inserts comment on the dangers of 'grave error.'[408]

Teresa is often censured, even ridiculed, as a hysterical or deluded person. ("hysterical" – the instability of the womb-an). Taking her 'literally' and emulating the book is a recipe for facilitating the distress of psychosis.[409] If 'experience' is read outwith a metaphoric, poetic space, fanatical devotion is the danger. This chapter has argued that this is a seriously dangerous misreading, which deviates entirely from Teresa's frequent interjections into the poem of warnings about precisely this – humble service, in the spirit of love,

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[405] ibid. p.27
[406] See Tyler ch.1 and Starr's introduction to Interior Castle
[407] The Discalced order (founded by Teresa) literally means those who have renounced footwear
[408] Interior Castle pp.41, 42
[409] However, an interesting consideration on delusion/psychosis is the contemporary movement in the mental health world which listens to delusional voices for their message, befriending rather than attacking the enemy (see www.hearing-voices.org)

as a spiritual (religious) discipline creating the (only) conditions for the poem's reception.[410] However, she runs the risk of misleading others, if she is not misled herself. By writing as they have done, John and Teresa are both erring, perhaps not on the side of caution.

Blanchot's thinking of the work itself as betrayal adds a deeper substratum to this idea. A reading bringing the respect accorded by Blanchot to figurative language does not rescue Teresa or John from 'error,' but validates their 'error' as authenticity. Blanchot recounts that Hölderlin ("already veiled by madness") describes the necessary betrayal which enacts the "infidelity" of the gods who depart. In an act "less facile than humanism," "man forgets himself and forgets God: he turns back like a traitor, although in a holy manner … in the form of infidelity where there is a forgetting of everything."[411]

This language, which reads as an echo of Meister Eckhart's 'taking leave of God for God's sake,'[412] is describing a 'holy treachery.' It is holy in its authenticity which reckons with how 'facile' humanism is, precisely in the terms Blanchot (following Heidegger) has used about 'science' which 'does not think.' Apophatic fiction then becomes an act of authenticity which enacts the infidelity of the gods. It is only in the absence of God (itself a betrayal), that faith is made possible, because as Turner writes about John's 'dark night,'

> "Faith, the darkness of unknowing, is the conviction – but
> also the practice of the Christian life as organised in terms
> of that conviction – that 'our deepest centre is in God,' It
> is the conviction that our deepest centre … is in us but not
> of us, is not 'ours' to possess, but ours only to be
> possessed by. And so faith at once 'decentres' us."[413]

In other words, to have faith at all, it is necessary both to be both betrayer and betrayed, as in this ultimate faith it becomes possible, and necessary, to follow Meister Eckhart, as God takes leave of us, to find ourselves also, in absolute faith, "taking leave of God for God's sake."[414]

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[410] The 'ordinariness' of Christian practice discussed in section 2.1
[411] Hölderlin, *The Poet's Vocation*, quoted in Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* p.272
[412] Meister Eckhart, (trans./ed. Davies), *Qui audit me non confundetur, Selected Writings* (London, UK; Penguin, 1994) pp.176-7
[413] Turner, *Darkness of God* p.251
[414] "Therefore Paul says: 'I would be willing to be eternally separated from God for the sake of my friend and for God's sake (Rom. 9.3) …Taking leave of God for the sake of God is the greatest act of renunciation that someone can make. Now St Paul renounced God for the sake of

David Jasper thinks through these betrayals in his meditation *Evil and Betrayal at the Heart of the Sacred Community,*[415] disrupting comfortable assumptions about the community of faith with ironic insight. The problem of evil presents itself not only in the crucifixion, and in the post-holocaust world, but in the simple act of choice facing Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor as he betrays Christ:

> Not a bad man in the end, I have often thought, in his concern to protect the church from harsh reality … but one who never faced his own demons, let alone dared look evil in the face, lest he saw his own reflection, and therefore could not believe in God.[416]

Similarly, incarnational metaphor, indifferent to the world's pragmatic demands, betrays the 'common sense' business contracts of the world. Neither can it conform to the expectations of community, with its autism 'cured, (the shadow of evil lurks also in the eugenic 'cure' narrative of *I am Autism,* with which this thesis began*)*. It is literally 'other-worldly,' with the autist irremediably (yet also, as Eckhart understands, salvifically) "in a world of her own."

Distress: ridiculous amounts of suffering and authenticity

Betrayal is distressing, and this is another sense in which Blanchot's thinking of the art work sheds light on apophatic fiction.

Teresa might be a hypochondriac, manufacturing the symptoms of the Passion (the famous image of her heart's (phallic) piercing by God mimicking the spear in Christ's side). Equally, Teresa might be genuinely chronically ill,[417] so possibly therefore the venerated saint who endures suffering with courage and 'long'-suffering. 'The Jury is out.' At the level of the text, suffering is a huge element of the soul's necessary experience. Reading her text as the work

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God: he left all that he could get from God … he never gave anything to God, nor did he ever receive anything from God." (Meister Eckhart, (trans./ed. Davies), *Qui audit me non confundetur, Selected Writings* pp.176-7)

[415] Chapter Three, pp.31ff, Jasper, *The Sacred Community*

[416] Jasper, *Sacred Community* p.44

[417] She discusses (bodily, physical) illness in both the *Interior Castle*'s didactic narrator voice and in her *Life,* most often using the anonymity trope "a certain woman …" (see eg. Int*erior Castle* pp.8-9, 159-60, and *Life* p.140)

of art, the suffering in it becomes both 'spiritual' and 'aesthetic' (if the two can be discriminated – however, in a reading which honours the text in terms of authenticity/art, the answer would be no, in a "spiritual classic," whatever that is taken to mean).

Suffering in the struggle for/of authenticity would read the suffering in Teresa's text in terms of enduring in the absence which John poeticises as the 'dark night of the soul.' This would read the narrator character Teresa's suffering as the embodiment of (a)theological faith. Negative theology is a theology of 'not;' it is the privation which Hölderlin describes as the 'lack' which 'helps' poetry.[418] Hölderlin (as Blanchot points out, approaching madness) "calls the empty, distressful present "bountiful suffering.""[419] Teresa also, numerous times, describes her suffering as a blessing and even a delight.[420] Like Hölderlin, she writes that "the joy she felt in that pain (in the context of 'becoming a poet') …(was) agony."[421]

Welcoming of suffering echoes Paul's entering the suffering of Christ (Colossians 1.24: in Young's Literal Translation, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and do fill up the things lacking of the tribulations of the Christ in my flesh for his body, which is the assembly"). In fact, reading Teresa as an apophatic theologian, it is tempting to read "the things lacking of the tribulations of the Christ" not as the (rather awkward) notion that Christ's sufferings are somehow 'not enough.' An intriguing possibility might be to read Christ's suffering *as* the things lacking, in the cry of desolation.[422] So "filling up" this "lack" would be, in apophatic terms, entering into the nothingness (the lack of God) of the Crucifixion.

Exactly the same point applies to John's 'dark night,' which is indistinguishable, Turner argues, from 'clinical depression' except in how it is construed theologically. It is clear that John suffers not only in the 'literal' sense of the incarceration and torture recorded in his biography, but also with a 'dark night' which is (not merely, even if also manifested in) clinical depression.

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[418] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* pp.246-7
[419] ibid. p.246
[420] Suffering as bliss is the pervasive concept throughout the dwellings which become increasingly inner in union with Christ.
[421] Teresa of Àvila, *Life* p.113
[422] Which Teresa echoes in the soul's experience; see *Life* pp.140, 157

Both Teresa and John write a lot 'about' suffering. Even in the erotic bliss of the night time tryst, the lover in John's narrative is 'wounded' by the caress of the beloved. This makes sense in terms of the work of art, in Blanchot's terms. It might mean the following.

Blanchot, discussing Hölderlin's words "what use are poets in the time of distress," writes

> Forgetting, error, the unhappiness of erring can be linked to an historical period: to the time of distress when the gods are absent twice over, because they are no longer there, because they are not there yet.[423] This vacant time is that of error … and nevertheless error helps us … the force, the risk proper to the poet is to dwell in God's default, the region where truth lacks. The time of distress designates the time which in all times is proper to art.[424]

This is, however, what Hölderlin calls a "bountiful suffering, bountiful happiness."[425] This is a self-subverting strategy as has been seen in Dionysius, and John on almost every line of *'The Ascent of Mount Carmel'* describes the dark night as "O happy night!" Teresa too employs self-subverting language of exquisite pain.[426] At the level of the work, is there an authenticity which conflates suffering with happiness? Blanchot argues that "when Hölderlin speaks of poets who, like the priests of Bacchus, go wandering from country to country in the sacred night, is this perpetual departure, the *sorrow of straying* which has no place to arrive, to rest, also the *fecund migration,* the movement which mediates, that which makes of rivers a language and of language the dwelling, the power by which day abides and is our abode?"[427]

This is certainly how Mark C Taylor views Derrida's dissemination, as fecund migration, invoking the parable of the Sower and the Seed,[428] so that a new a-theological thinking can be 'assured.' Blanchot is slower to 'out himself' as an a-theologian (perhaps thereby being one), and rests his case in his identity

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[423] Teresa describes the extreme suffering of her 'soul' as being 'suspended between earth and heaven (like Christ on the Cross); see *Life* pp.138-40, *Interior Castle* pp.249-258
[424] Blanchot, *Space of Literature* p.246
[425] Hölderlin, *'Dichterberuf,'* quoted in Blanchot p.246
[426] Teresa of Àvila, *Interior Castle* pp. 140, 167-8
[427] Blanchot, *Space of Literature* pp.246-7
[428] Taylor, *Erring* pp.118-120

as a poet: "To this question there can be no response. The poem is the answer's absence."[429]

There can similarly be no answer, ultimately, to the question of 'experience'/experientialism in the apophatic fictions of Teresa and John. She might be hysterical and deluded,[430] and he might be chronically depressed; or both might be superlative apophatic theologians, writing knowingly in a crafted poetic register. The poem, solely and entirely as the poem, is the answer's absence. Fundamentally, the point here is to think of autism as Mindblindness/zero degree of cognitive empathy/mindfulness of separation, and precisely at the same time fascination/affective empathy/presence. This is to be in that decentred place of faith which Turner describes, and to be 'suspended between earth and heaven' with Teresa (and with Christ). It is true of autistic metaphor, suspended in the space of fiction, as chapter one argued. This deeply theological space of apophatic fiction can be embodied in autistic metaphor because autistic poet-faith understands the impossibility of 'cure,' and finds great joy in its being. In an act of autistic authenticity, the betrayal of God and by God is the inhabitation of absolute mindfulness of separation. In this space, it is necessary to read on, and see where Meister Eckhart's words lead:

> When (St Paul) took leave of these things, he renounced
> God for the sake of God, and yet God remained with
> him, as God exists in himself, not according to the
> manner in which he is gained or received but according
> to the being which he himself is.[431]

This is, again, fascination/mindfulness of separation in the forgiveness of betrayal, and the acceptance of its necessity. Autism has a privileged insight of this, as follows.

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[429] Blanchot, *Space of Literature* p.247
[430] this is the dubiety at the heart of Ron Hansen's novel Mariette in Ecstasy (Hansen, Ron, Marie*tte in Ecstasy* (London, UK; Harper Perennial,1992); is the novice Mariette a true stigmatic (and does that mean bearing the wounds of Christ inflicted by the society [and the reader] judging her also?) or is she 'simply another neurotic emo kid' who would listen to SOAD and self-harm? Would Pilate find her "innocent?"
[431] Meister Eckhart (ed. Davies), Qui audit me non confundetur, in Selected Writing p.177

Authentic apophatic discourse: Towards Incarnational metaphor

Each section of this chapter has indicated how it is a stage towards Incarnational metaphor. In a sense there is little more to say, but in a deeper sense, there is Nothing to say. Autistic metaphor can be thought of as Incarnation, when the mystery of the Incarnation is the absolute apophasis of mindfulness of separation. In the paradox which apophatic discourse expresses in self-subverting utterance, it is also the union of total absence in and as total presence. This total presence is indicated in discourse as the expression of autistic fascination. Autistic fascination, in saintly terms, is absolute autistic affective empathy as *eros*. That *eros* is also, in saintly terms, the absolute unknowing of faith, in the face of the mindfulness of separation in the darkness of God. The literal metaphor discussed in chapter two becomes a theology of the Incarnation as apophatic language, thought also as the authenticity of mute being. Self-subverting apophatic fiction is a metaphor which is 'real,' and actually, theologically, more 'real' than anything else.[432] When an autistic hermeneutic takes apophatic discourse 'literally,' as chapter one argued, the distance between figuration and theological thinking collapses. This is, paradoxically, in the light of *I livelli della realtà*, precisely also the very opposite of 'taking the story literally,' and for this reason the pure Incarnational metaphor can only work as a theological autistic thinking. In this sense, the saints are absolutely autistic when they 'literally' see God in mystic beatific vision. Apophatic discourse indicates this vision, but the vision itself is 'dazzling darkness' and the words are silent. Pure autistic apophasis, as the Incarnation itself, is silent, and ultimately, in absolute purity, 'cannot be spoken of.' This would be an absolute autism, which will now be explored in chapter four.

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[432] Teresa indicates this inversion of 'reality:' "there is nothing in the world but the soul" (Life p.91) and the world is, in the end, illusion (Interior Castle pp. 246-7)

Chapter Three: Incarnational Metaphor as the Autism of God

Introduction: Incarnational metaphor, Autism and Altizer

This chapter continues the journey towards Incarnational metaphor, bringing it to a halt which is its fruition, by envisioning its completion. This completion is absolute, expressed in this chapter as the autism of God. Chapter two worked towards it by showing that apophatic fiction could offer a hospitable refuge for the narrative of autistic fascination, unharried by the demand to leave its haven of separation. It was suggested that this refuge could exist only as a theological one, seen by the world as madness but in fact a profound inhabitation of the foolishness of the gospel. The metaphoric strategies of the mystical theology of chapter two were read in the light of a mythologised autism. This mythologised autism can now be rethought in terms of a Christian myth of the post-Christian world, where an absolute autism of total incarnational metaphor is expressed as the death of God. With this absolute autistic incarnational metaphor in place, this chapter will provide the language which will then be able to discuss an absolute autism at work in the discourses of chapters four and five.

Absolute autistic Incarnational metaphor as the death of God will now in this chapter be shown to be paradoxically both utterly impossible and utterly necessary, by being of supreme value as a radical thinking of the depth and fullness of the Incarnation itself. This absolute impossible autism finds a hospitable discourse offering a 'homeless home' for its absolute autistic hermeneutic of (non)being in Thomas Altizer's work. This is because, for a Christian autistic hermeneutic, Altizer's "Gospel of Christian Atheism" expresses a mythologised theological thinking of the Gospel. This offers a discourse where the autistic hermeneutic might find a hospitable place to express the deepest mythological absolute autism. The reason for this is that pure Incarnational metaphor will be shown to work as mindfulness of separation only when it is radically and deeply thought a-theologically. Altizer's Christian atheism offers a metaphoric thinking of the Incarnation, which is likewise and conversely a

profoundly Incarnational thinking of metaphor. This has potential for autistic incarnational metaphor to function as a perception of Christian atheism, as the theological power which gives it its fullest life. William Hamilton writes that Altizer's work is "evangelical and even pastoral,"[433] and it is with this concern that Altizer is read here, as offering an authentic path for autistic theological thinking. It requires to be considered carefully, in order to give an Incarnational autistic hermeneutic a space where it might, with theological integrity, 'lay its head' (recalling Blanchot's words about 'getting a footing' in the groundless).

3.1 Modernism and myth: the death of God movement

The Death of God Movement

This chapter argues that the much maligned 'death of God movement' of the late twentieth century has been misunderstood and undervalued, because its nature as poetic existential statement has been perhaps mistaken for systematic theology. The specific aim of this chapter, with this in mind, is to read Altizer's death of God thinking in the light of autistic myth as a neurotribal revisioning which could rethink its value if it is read mythologically.

The April 8, 1966 (exactly fifty years ago, at the time of writing this thesis), the cover of *TIME* magazine was the first ever in the magazine's history to feature only type, and no photo.[434] The cover – with the traditional, red border – was all black, with the words "Is God Dead?" in large, red text. This brought the 'death of God movement' into the view of the American public, creating public controversy most famously played out a year later in the debate between Thomas Altizer and John W. Montgomery at the Rockefeller Chapel, University of Chicago.[435] Looking back, Altizer writes of the period:

> I think that I became one of the most hated men in
> America, murder threats were almost a commonplace,

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[433] 'A lucid, joyous, wise, evangelical – even pastoral – piece of theological work.' (Cover matter, Altizer, Thomas J J, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Pasadena, USA; Westminster Press,1966)
[434] TIME magazine, 8th April 1966, Time Inc., New York
[435] Altizer, Thomas J J & Montgomery, John Warwick, *The Altizer-Montgomery Dialogue: A Chapter in the "God Is Dead" Controver*sy (Chicago; Intervarsity Press, 1967).

> savage assaults upon me were widely published, and the churches seemed possessed by a fury against me.[436]

In the UK, earlier in the 1960s Bishop John Robinson had done something similar in achieving public prominence through his SCM paperback *Honest to God,* arguing for a Christian atheism.[437]

Theologians including Harvey Cox, William Hamilton, Gabriel Vahanian, Paul van Buren and Thomas Altizer came to be known as proponents of the 'death of God movement' which had generated the writing in TIME magazine and also in *Honest to God:* as early as 1961 Altizer was arguing for a non-theistic Christianity in *Oriental Mysticism and Biblical Eschatology*.[438] Death of God theology was not simply atheism, but a deeply theologically thought response to secularism. In *The Secular City,* Harvey Cox envisioned a harmony between the secular and the religious, which celebrated both: "God can be just as present in the secular as in the religious realms of life, and we unduly cramp the divine presence by confining it to some specially delineated spiritual or ecclesial sector."[439]

William Hamilton draws on Bonhoeffer's 'religionless Christianity' as a forebear of the death of God, quoting Bonhoeffer's letters from prison:

> So our coming of age forces us to a true recognition of our situation vis-à-vis God. God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34 ['My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?']). The God who makes us live in his world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing. Before God and with him we live without God. God allows himself to be edged out of the world and onto the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the

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[436] *Living the Death of God: a Theological Memoir - Memoir Two* (New York, SUNY Press, 2006) (online stable online url http://www.altizer.narod.ru/memoir/memoir.html
[437] John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God,* (London, UK; SCM Press, 1963)
[438] Thomas Altizer, *Oriental Mysticism and Biblical Eschatology* (Westminster, Philadelphia, USA; Westminster Press, 1961)
[439] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City 25 Years Later,* Introduction to second edition of *The Secular City,* Macmillan in *The Christian Century*, November 7, 1990, pp. 1025-1029. Online access http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=206 accessed 29/09/2016

only way, in which he can be with us and help us.
(Letter of 16th July 1944)[440]
… Man is challenged to participate in the sufferings of
God at the hands of a godless world').[441]

Even while appropriating Bonhoeffer, however, Hamilton then goes against Bonhoeffer's belief that God, even while forsaking us, "can be with us and help us."[442] Hamilton writes:

> There are thus no places in the self or the world,
> Protestants who listen to Bonhoeffer go on to say,
> where problems emerge that only God can solve…. The
> world itself is the source of the solutions, not God.[443]

Hamilton seems to be advocating a secular humanism where God has become redundant. He envisions a "movement away from God and religion … towards the world, worldly life, and the neighbour as the bearer of the worldly Jesus," affirming "both the death of God and the death of all theism."[444]

Paul van Buren also thought through the implications of secularisation for theology, also thinking through the consequences of historical, de-mythologising Biblical criticism. Hamilton sees van Buren as, in the service of Bonhoeffer's "non-religious interpretation of the gospel," engaged in a "linguistic analysis … (such that) Bultmann, taken seriously, means the end of the rhetoric of neo-orthodoxy and the so-called biblical theology."[445] This means, in Hamilton's reading of van Buren, "the rise of technology and modern science, the need in our thinking to stick pretty close to what we can experience in ordinary ways."[446] Wolfgang Saxon adds to this that van Buren was "trying to find an utterly nontranscendent way of interpreting the Gospel."[447]

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[440] *Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* Hamilton, William, in *Radical Theology and the Death of God,* ed. T J J Altizer, T J J & William Hamilton, William (Middlesex, UK; Pelican Books, 1968) p. 120
[441] ibid. p.123, quoting Bonhoeffer, letter 18 July 1944
[442] This reads as an echo of the Dark Night of the Soul discussed in chapter two; John of the Cross, like Bonhoeffer, writes from the experience of torture and imprisonment.
[443] Altizer, Thomas J J & Hamilton, William, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* p.121
[444] ibid. pp.49, 121
[445] ibid. p.33
[446] ibid. p.45
[447] *"The Secular Meaning of the Gospel: Based on an Analysis of Its Language"* Macmillan, UK, 1963, in Wolfgang Saxon, http://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/01/us/paul-van-buren-74-death-of-god-exponent.html

Gabriel Vahanian saw the death of God in terms, like Bonhoeffer's, which resonate with the mystics. Vahanian expresses faith as paradox:

> The Christian era has bequeathed us the 'death of God,' but not without teaching us a lesson. God is not necessary; that is to say, he cannot be taken for granted. He cannot be used merely as a hypothesis, whether epistemological, scientific, or existential, unless we should draw the degrading conclusion that 'God is reasons.' On the other hand, if we can no longer assume that God is, we may once again realize that he must be. God is not necessary, but he is inevitable. He is wholly other and wholly present. Faith in him, the conversion of our human reality, both culturally and existentially, is the demand he still makes upon us.[448]

Where Hamilton writes of a "new optimism" which is "'not an optimism of grace, but a worldly optimism,"[449] Altizer's radical sacred profane argues for a subverted and inverted theology, nonetheless and even consequently deeply theological, so that he can honour "Georges Bernanos' dying country priest (who) can joyously if feebly announce that everything is grace," in a thinking which can "celebrate the presence of the Word in a new world that negates all *previous forms* (my emphasis) of faith."[450] Altizer is profoundly Christian, and when he writes *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* in 1966, he is articulating a vision of new "forms of faith" which attempts to rescue an authentic Christianity, paradoxically, by subverting it. His thinking is in fact not 'secular' but 'profane,'[451] and this important distinction comes from his reading of Tillich and Eliade, as will be explained below. His Christian atheism offers a mythological thinking which ironically re-mythologises what Bultmann has de-mythologised, and this makes his work a hospitable discourse for an autistic hermeneutic. To demonstrate how he arrives at this mythological stance, it is necessary briefly to look at the influence of Tillich for how Altizer will take Eliade's thinking of mythology as sacred *vis-à-vis* profane, and create a new mythology of the sacred profane.

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[448] Gabriel Vahanian, *The Death of God: The Culture of our Post-Christian Era*, (Eugene, Oregon; Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1961 (1957)), p.49
[449] Altizer & Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* p.168
[450] ibid. p.140
[451] 'Secular' meaning within the confines of a worldly vision; 'profane' etymologically as 'pro-fanus,' 'outwith the temple (the temple still in sight) but also with overtones of profanity as blasphemy/obscenity/offense – in other words, as heresy.

Tillich

If Bonhoeffer writes a 'religion-less Christianity' from the shock of the existential threat of Nazism, Tillich also writes from the existential threat of the First World War, so that he can write of *The Shaking of the Foundations*.[452] He is also writing within a theological context where Existentialist thought has raised questions of threatenedness. George Pattison argues in his essay *Fear and Trembling and the Paradox of Christian Existentialism*[453] that twentieth century Christian existentialists including Tillich, Bultmann, Marcel, Berdyaev and Bultmann share a "relation to a number of key Nineteenth Century sources, most notably Schelling, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche."[454] Pattison adds that "it is from Kierkegaard that such central concepts as anxiety, repetition, the moment of vision, despair, and being-toward-death derive their distinctively existentialist meaning – as does the term "existence" itself."[455] Tillich's theology of culture is a response to threatenedness which listens to Existentialist thought and argues that

> the human condition always raises fundamental
> questions which human cultures express in various ways
> in the dominant styles of their works of art, and to
> which religious traditions offer answers expressed in
> religious symbols.[456]

The correlation between art as fundamental question and religion as symbolic answer moves religious discourse into an existential tension where art takes on weight and religion must answer authentically. This lifting of art beyond a mimetic function in service of religion is a secularizing one, but by no means a dilution of religious thought. Tillich has been called an atheist, but his "atheism" is not the rejection of God-language, in fact the very opposite. When he writes that "The modern way to flee God is to rush ahead and ahead … But God's Hand falls upon us,"[457] this is an existential statement, because "The God

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[452] The title of the 1949 collection of Tillich's sermons
[453] George Pattison, *Fear and Trembling and the Paradox of Christian Existentialism*, in *Situating existentialism: Key texts in Context*, ed. Judaken & Bernasconi (New York; Columbia University Press, 2012) pp.211-236
[454] Ibid. p.212
[455] Ibid.
[456] Kelsey, David H, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology* (Eugene, Oregon; Wipf & Stock, Eugene, 2011) p.64
[457]Tillich, *Shaking of the Foundations* p.48

whom he cannot flee is the Ground of his being."[458] Tillich's atheism is the expression of the majesty of God conceived beyond theism. David Kelsey comments that God cannot "be a "supreme being" for, by definition, *any* entity is finite. Hence, Tillich refuses to speak of the "existence" of God.[459]

Kelsey expresses Tillich's thinking of the personal authenticity of faith as "the question about our "ultimate concern." Whatever concerns us ultimately, says Tillich, is our "god.""[460] Religion can easily displace a thinking of this, so that

> ... religious ritual, myth or institutions are ambiguous,
> 'functioning religiously' to express the unconditioned ...
> (but) they invite for themselves the ultimate concern
> appropriate only to the unconditioned. Thereby they
> become "demonic," powerfully destructive of the life
> trying to "transcend" itself.[461]

False gods, when we form religion carelessly, then, can mean that religion can be demonic, and this is something to which Altizer will return. Tillich provides a thinking of theology as 'a-theist' existentialist authenticity, in the light of Modernism, and the death of God movement can be seen to rely on this.

Altizer and Tillich

The collection of meditative essays *'Radical Theology and the death of God,'*[462] written by Altizer and William Hamilton in 1966, is dedicated to the memory of Tillich, and his influence is central to the emergence of the radical a-theological current. Graham Ward has remarked that Altizer "reverses Tillich's priorities – judging God in the darkness of modern culture rather than culture by the ultimate revelation of God."[463] This tends to imply that Altizer is not fundamentally grounded in Christian theology, and this is far from the case. His subversion of theology is itself deeply theological, engaging with Protestant

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[458] ibid. p.54
[459] Kelsey, *Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology* p.66
[460] Ibid. p.65
[461] Ibid. pp. 70-71
[462] Altizer & Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God,*
[463] Ward, Graham, Postmodern Theology, in Ford, David F & Muers, Rachel (eds.) The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918 (Massachusetts; Blackwell Publishing, 2005 p.136

and Catholic theologies along with Buddhist thought. What Ward is picking up on is the way in which Altizer writes.

Where Tillich thinks of authentic being so that art and culture asks questions which theology answers, Altizer thinks of this authenticity differently. In Altizer's work, art is not the question to which theology can respond, but art itself is the mode where theological thinking is situated. The same can be said of Altizer's reading of Hegel, who is thought theologically as a thinking of the poetic.

His a-theology is not written in the genre of systematic or dogmatic theology, but can be read as a poetic form which has similarities to what chapter two called apophatic fiction. Although both are a-theological thinkers, Altizer differs from Hamilton. Where Hamilton's concern is chiefly to dwell on the death of God as the waning of Christianity as a socio-political-cultural phenomenon, Altizer is more concerned with a theologically thought cosmic and existential death of God which culture does not create, but rather expresses. Where Tillich correlates art as question with religious symbol as answer, Altizer goes beyond correlation to fusion. Like Teresa of Àvila and John of the Cross, he employs metaphorical strategies to approach the deeply thought paradox of the death of God in Christ.

His theology is an evolution of Tillich's thinking of the "non-existence" of God, in the existential sense meant by Tillich, and if a Biblical theology often is more implicit than explicit in Altizer's narrative, this is not to conclude that culture 'judges' God. More accurately, God and culture articulate each other, in an inseparable identification which could be called a theological poetics or equally a poetic theology.

The key to this synthesis might be thought of as lying in Altizer's reading of Mircea Eliade. Eliade views religion within an anthropological religious studies viewpoint when he writes that

> In imitating the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic
> hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man
> of an archaic society detaches himself from profane

> time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred
> time.[464]

Altizer employs a mythologising strategy where the secularizing narrative in Western art and particularly literature is the expression of the mythologised Biblical narrative, sacred profane. So Altizer reads James Joyce's irreverent textual games with Catholicism in terms of a mythic retelling of the sacred. Where Eliade has designated separate places for sacred time and profane time, Altizer's idea of the sacred profane thinks of all as sacred, and all as profane. The narrative of authenticity in secularisation is as sacred as Biblical narrative, and in fact is an enactment of Biblical narrative.

Altizer writes about his "three prophets," Hegel, Blake and Nietzsche,[465] and his argument is that by listening to these writers and inhabiting, rather than "answering" them,[466] the gospel becomes more deeply authentic Christian thought. He does this by taking the gospel as mythical narrative of authenticity, in such a way that the kenosis of the Christ event to can be read also in Modernism as an authenticity of the end of Christendom. These "prophets" make it possible to read an ultimate kenosis as the death of God. This radical, absolute kenotic thinking is Altizer's 'Christian Atheism,' and by reading it autistically, this chapter can form an Incarnational metaphor which is the death of God. The death of God in absolute incarnational metaphor will become the autism of God.

Is this blasphemy?

Carers (but perhaps not so often autists) have been known to claim that God 'heals' autism, or that God can be known 'in spite of' autism, so that autism remains an impairment which needs to be 'managed,' or even, if possible, removed ('healed') in the faith community.[467] The faith community, and by implication, God, are the 'safe,' normative world of non-autism. Is the idea of God's autism absurd? This absurdity is irreverently depicted with cruel but undeniable humour in the satirical animation series *Family Guy,* when

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[464] Eliade, Mircea, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (trans Philip Mairet) (New York; Harper Row, 1967), p. 23
[465] Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism,* p.23
[466] Thereby moving beyond Tillich's theology of correlation
[467] Examples of this will be discussed in the conclusion.

Peter, Quagmire, Cleveland and Joe go to heaven to meet God. God, here, is the archetypal old man with a beard, mild, doddery, and an ineffectual meddler. As they leave, Peter goes to give God a hug, and Quagmire tells him "I wouldn't do that. God doesn't like people touching him – he's mildly autistic."[468] An "autistic God" is everything Christian theology wouldn't want "Him" to be.

Family Guy's God is funny, and part of an all too incisive commentary on the ineffectiveness of much contemporary religion. Autism is the butt of humour here too. Turning both these perceptions upside down is the different, holy blasphemy which this chapter aims to express. What preceding chapters of this thesis have argued is that an autistic theological perspective is a privileged one, speaking from the margins but with a truth which the neurotypical world misses to its cost. To suggest the autism of God is to offer praise for a God at the deepest ground of our being. If it is perceived as heresy, and all the more so because it reads itself in terms of death of God theology, it is a divergent heretical view which has the honour of integrity,[469] and is, in fact, profoundly Christian, as this chapter will now argue.

3.2 Altizer, metaphor and autism

Altizer's Sacred Profane

This offers possibilities straight away for Incarnational metaphor, because the poetic and the theological are not available for pragmatic 'appropriation' (as Tillich would envisage) by each other. Instead, if anything, it is a confluence where theological thinking 'listens to' the poetic as the discourse of its being. If it is true that the Christ event is incarnate in the poetic, this does not mean the poetic 'is' a metaphor 'for' the theological. Instead, the poetic-theological simply is, and there is no theistic referent for metaphor to 'carry between' the

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[468] *Family Guy* S12 E13, *Acts of God,* Seth MacFarlane, Fox TV, 2014
[469] Chapter six will consider the autistic hermeneutic as a 'holy fool' narrative, and in the Conclusion its role as validation and validate will be considered.

two. The function of theistic referent disappears,[470] and Altizer calls this living within metaphor the 'sacred profane.'

For an autistic hermeneutic, a 'sacred profane' of metaphor-as-atheism-as-the-Incarnation offers a way to validate its way of seeing. Sacred profane can be thought in two senses. Firstly, the sacred profane is honouring a sacrality of the space of the secular, divorced from religion [archaic *'pro* (outside)-*fanus* (temple)], and secondly, it is the profanity (blasphemy) of 'taking God's name in vain' by speaking the death of God. The second sense, the 'profanity' of the death of God, will be discussed in detail in the following sections. However, at this point the context of this 'profanity' is now explained as the first sense of profanity, as 'outside the temple' and 'irreligious.' This "pro-fanus" will now be read autistically as autistic fascination in the space of mindfulness of separation.

The 'irreligious' sacred profane as fascination

Literal metaphor, as chapter three argued, does not allegorise metaphor into a 'useful' theological schema, referring 'to' that which theology formulates.[471] Instead, literal metaphor was read as being 'in' the space of apophatic discourse, which does not formulate but inhabits that 'object.'

Looking at the sacred profane as 'outwith the temple' offers another way to think of the marginal space of apophatic theology, which operates 'outwith the temple' of theology. This can be read autistically as fascination. Reading autistically, fascination can be discerned as a reading of the sacred profane

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[470] This follows on, in this thesis' thinking, from chapter three's concept of apophatic fiction, and Altizer's work also refers to the connection between Christian atheism and apophatic theology; for example, "the naming of the anonymity of God) echoes the highest expressions of our mysticism in its call for a total transfiguration, and possible only by way of a full union with the depths of anonymity itself" (Altizer, *Godhead and the Nothing*, p.2)

[471] Chapter five will develop this idea further, by reading a fully Incarnational literal metaphor in Manley Hopkin's '*ecceitas*' (poetic Scotist '*haecceitas*'). In chapter five, at that point, this will be a fuller space of autistic fascination. Here, though, regarding Altizer, this reading prepares the way for chapter five's reading fascination as an '*ecceitas*' of the sacred profane. The reason for this is that the possibility of reading back into Hopkins' '*ecceitas*' autistically is made possible in the light of Altizer's sacred profane death of God.

because art does not 'lead to' a theological outcome but 'is' the theological object, and this is in fact a non-theological object without meaning.[472]

To approach this connection, it is useful to go back to how fascination was introduced at the beginning of this thesis. Fascination was described as joyful immersion, being overwhelmed in the object of fascination. This is the phenomenon of 'RRBI''s [473] – it could be as an Asperger's obsession or a 'severely impaired' autistic behaviour of repetitive, restrictive behaviours of touch, smell, hearing, tasting. For example, what could be more 'profane' (in the archaic sense of non-religious) than deep fat fryers, shiny spinning objects, twinkling lights, electric pylons, a running tap, a piece of velvet cloth? Yet this is the sacred space of 'meaningless meaning.' It is the place most fully to 'be.'

A sacred profane of meaningless communion does not theologise this into symbolic appropriation – water could be thought in Biblical tropes, but electric pylons? (stretching metaphors to think of electric pylons as carriers of the power of the Spirit, for example, would be absurd). Fascination simply 'is,' full of spiritual power in sensory delight.[474] The clear distinction here is that in the autistic sacred profane, the symbols of the sacred [the absolute kenosis of God into the world, as universal sacrament] clear a space for the profane [my delight in 'seeing' the wonder of deep fat fryer design]. The converse does not hold – theology has recognised and honoured the sacrality of my love of deep fat fryers, but my deep fat fryers don't symbolise anything at all, including the theologically thought sacred.

In the same way, fascination as literal metaphor comes closer to the theological thinking of Altizer's sacred profane. For example, Altizer writes that the sacred profane is embodied in

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[472] This is the opposite of Otto's thinking of the numinous as '*Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*' (Rudolf Otto, '*The Idea of the Holy* (Eastford, Connecticut; Martino Fine Books, 2010 (1917)). This is not a sacred which overwhelms in an eerie unknown which causes trembling terror and mesmerisation. It is instead joyful being in the sacred mystery which remains mystery precisely because it does not need meaning. Autistic fascination as sacred profane is not a fascination of encountering the other, but a fascination of being in what representation would convert into the other. This seems the opposite of mindfulness of separation at first glance, but it is the mystical union of separation which was indicated by chapter three's autistic hermeneutic of apophatic discourse. The next section will explore this paradox.

[473] Introduction –see 'RRBI's' and 'Sensory Connoisseur.'

[474] Or horror, in the distress of being overwhelmed in a too stimulating, crowded, noisy, too bright environment.

the greatest landscape paintings of Monet and Cezanne, and even in the late landscapes of Van Gogh, wherein the very incarnation of chaos in the dazzling space before us poses an inescapable call for union with that chaos.[475]

The "incarnation of chaos" indicates the moment which Modernism presents, as chapter two discussed, and the role of art is to invite an apocalyptic chaos, to dazzle, not to signpost. For this reason, the landscapes are manipulated into form and texture which catches rather than represents the landscape. The distortions which prevent a simple image emerging in fact capture more of the landscape, but as an *'ecceitas,'*[476] not a representation.[477]

To see the "dazzling space" of the art work as autistic fascination would mean that a theologically thought fascination is honoured by a mythically thought theological narrative. This would be because literal metaphor, not 'signposting anywhere,' might find itself in the space where, increasingly in Impressionist, Expressionist and abstract Modern art, representation is eclipsed by the pure power of the work which "dazzles." In this way, these landscapes function as literal metaphor because they do not 'fold back to' pragmatic interpretation, staying instead in the mute power which was indicated by Blanchot, discussed in chapter two.

The "chaos" for which Altizer is arguing, as the site of these works, is the chaos of the death of God, as the next section will explain, but this death is enabled by Modernist abilities to articulate an emancipation of the profane. Its relevance to literal metaphor is firstly, that being 'in' the profane as a sacred space is 'literally' the fascination which autistically inhabits art which breaks free of representation. Secondly, this sense of profanity's relevance to

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[475] Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.2
[476] See chapter five; here, '*ecceitas*' indicates absent presence in the poetic. It articulates how Altizer's thinking of art as Incarnation relates to a theologically thought Incarnational metaphor.
[477] Similarly, many of William Turner's watercolours "enter into chaos" as being, not representation; The Victoria and Albert's guide discusses this: "William Hazlitt commented that Turner's 'pictures are...too much abstractions of aerial perspective, and representations not properly of the objects of nature as of the medium through which they are seen...they are pictures of the elements of air, earth and water' … Turner was less concerned with painting specific places than with the dramatic possibilities of sea and air, and with the motion of the elements. Light was his theme … Joseph Farington noted that 'Turner has no settled process but drives the colours about'." (*British Watercolours 1750-1900: J M W Turner and John Ruskin: Turner's 'golden visions'*"") online access http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/b/british-watercolours-turner-and-ruskin/ accessed 3rd September 2016

Incarnational metaphor is also a mindfulness of separation, where autistic fascination as the profane is marginalised from religious discourse, 'cast out' from the temple by the blasphemy which speaks the Incarnation in a deep fat fryer.

This sacred profane, then, is irreligious, but Altizer's argument is that, precisely by being so, it is profoundly Christian. This second sense of the sacred profane explains this, and an autistic reading of this is the next stage of working towards Incarnational metaphor as a theological thinking of the autism of God.

Profanity as blasphemy: the end of Christendom

When Christian atheism is read as the blasphemy of the death of God, this blasphemy is articulated as, and because of, the end of Christendom. So the sacred profane in both senses, as 'outwith the temple' and as holy blasphemy, can be envisioned in a Western culture which is living the end of Christendom. Modernism both articulates and makes possible the end of Christendom; Altizer argues that "it cannot be denied that there is an epiphany of nothingness in full modernity which is unique in history."[478] Altizer writes about "seers" who bring this end into view and into being: it is "deeply and comprehensively envisioned by Blake, Goethe, Dostoyevsky and Mallarme … called forth by Joyce, Kafka, Stevens and Beckett."[479]

Being 'outwith the temple' entails living the death of Christendom, and Altizer reads this death in terms of Modernism, but also in Blake, Hegel and Nietzsche.

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[478] Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.51
[479] Altizer, Thomas J J, *Godhead and the Nothing* (Albany, USA; State University of New York Press, 2003) p.13

Blake's "honest indignation"

A starting point is Blake's words in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "The voice of honest indignation is the voice of God."[480] In the vast symbolic universe Blake creates, the kingdom of Luvah is the repressive weight of the edifice of the Christian tradition. Altizer, like Blake, sees Christ as the heretic who overturns the structures of religion, and both see their task as a recovering of that heretical Christ. Blake's indignation is against Christendom as a loveless oppressive structure. In *The Garden of Love,*

> the gates of this Chapel were shut
> And "Thou shalt not," writ over the door …
> And I saw it was filled with graves,
> And tombstones where flowers should be;
> And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
> And binding with briars my joys and desires.[481]

An autistic hermeneutic reads Blake's "honest indignation" and the poem's defence of Christ as pure Love in terms of autistic integrity. Pure autistic affective empathy disregards the neurotypical cognitive structures of the "chapel," and the autistic truth telling of a 'garden of fascination' does not recognise any compromise in its indignation. This is also a dangerous, anarchic thinking of Jesus[482] because it also emancipates the artist; Blake writes: "I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty of both body & mind to exercise the Divine Art of Imagination."[483] This is 'dangerous,' because the artist, as chapter three discussed, errs. Who knows where the "Divine Art of Imagination" might lead? It might lead to deep fat fryers, or Tracy Emin's

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[480] Blake, William, *A Memorable Fancy,* Plate 12, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* 1790, in http://www.gailgastfield.com/mhh/mhh.html, accessed 23/01/2015

[481] Blake, William, *The Garden of Love, Songs of Experience* in http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/175220, accessed 25/01/2015

[482] Altizer writes about the Incarnation of Jesus, rejecting the Messianic theology of the names "Christ" or "Lord."

[483] Blake, William (eds Erdman, David et al), *Complete Poetry and Prose* (New York; Anchor Books, 1982) *Jerusalem,* 77, quoted by Searle, Joshua T, *The Divine Imagination: William Blake's Vision of Theosis and the Theology of Hope,* in *Luvah: Journal of the Creative Imagination,* in https://www.academia.edu/8358853/The_Divine-Human_Imagination_William_Blake_s_Vision_of_Theosis_and_the_Theology_of_Hope_pp._1-14_Link_Luvah_Journal_of_the_Creative_Imagination, accessed 23/01/2015

unmade bed. Autistic faith might be dangerously unconventional, and the autist might be a disturbing alien presence in the community of faith.[484]

Profanity as blasphemy: Nietzsche

For Altizer, Barth's *Krisis* of the divine "No" is subverted to become a Nietzschean No-Saying. Where Barth argues that theology is "a service serving the church – an "ecclesiastical science,""[485] Altizer follows Blake in assaulting Christendom as the place where "The footsteps of the Lamb of God were there; but now no more."[486] Altizer argues that "Luvah's sepulchre, most simply interpreted, is the repressive body of the Christian Church – as Nietzsche remarked, Christianity is the stone upon the grave of Jesus."[487] This, however subversive, is not alien to even an apparently more orthodox Tillichian thought:

> ... religious ritual, myth or institutions are ambiguous,
> 'functioning religiously' to express the unconditioned ...
> (but) they invite for themselves the ultimate concern
> appropriate only to the unconditioned. Thereby they
> become "demonic," powerfully destructive of the life
> trying to "transcend" itself.[488]

The autistic literal hermeneutic reads this 'literally' (at face value, seriously, with integrity) as an absolute No. An autistic 'serious' following through of the critique of Christendom as Blake's "sepulchre" sees Christ dead, here, in our midst. The metaphor is "real," here, as the instantiation of God's absence.[489] The autistic hermeneutic 'takes Altizer seriously' when subversively, Altizer writes:

> Karl Barth was the first theologian to maintain that the
> "secret" of the creation can only truly be known by faith

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[484] Reading George Eliot's *'Felix Holt the Radical'* in an autistic hermeneutic, Felix Holt's uncompromising stand for justice makes him out as odd and inconvenient, and autistic faith asks the awkward questions of 'elephants in the room,' disregarding tactful conventions. Holt is an interesting parallel, in the context Of Eliot's theological and political radicalism, where he is critical equally of both ecclesial power and (a)moral pragmatism. (Eliot, George, Felix Holt the Radical (Ware, UK; Wordsworth Classics, 1997 (1866))
[485] Hardy, Daniel W, *Karl Barth*, in Ford & Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologians*, p.24
[486] Blake, *Jerusalem* 24.23, quote in Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.42
[487] Ibid. p.43
[488] Kelsey, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology* pp. 70-71
[489] Altizer's Memoir is entitled "Living the death of God," and that impossible, intolerable paradox, read autistically, will become the narrative of intolerable, impossible absolute autism.

in Christ ... it beautifully illustrates the quandary of the modern theologian who is forced to speak about God in a world in which God is dead.[490]

Barth expresses God as known through Christ, but Altizer shifts the emphasis so that 'what is known' is the crucified Son of God, actually (for the autistic hermeneutic, 'literally,' as a Trinitarian thought of *homoousios*) as the death of God.

In Altizer's thought, Nietzsche, like Blake, is a "modern Christian seer"[491] of this death. God, for Nietzsche, is "the deification of nothingness, the will to nothingness pronounced holy!"[492] and the parable of Nietzsche's Madman reads:

> Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.[493]

The death of the metaphysical God is both chaos and gospel, as emancipation. Altizer writes: "to know an alien and empty nothingness as the dead body of God is to be liberated from every uncanny and awesome sense of the mystery and power of chaos,"[494]and "only by means of a realisation of the death of God in human experience can faith be liberated from the authority and the power of the primordial God."[495]

This means that the demonic nature of Luvah is taken 'absolutely seriously' by the autistic reader who is able to follow Blake's honest indignation into Altizer's theological thinking.

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490 Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.99
491 ibid. p.95
492 Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. R J Hollingdale) *Twilight of the Idols/The Antichrist* (London UK; Penguin Classics 1990 (1889/1895)) section 18, quoted in Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.93
493 Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Common, Thomas), *The Joyful Wisdom* (New York; Ungar/Continuum, 1973) quoted in *Gospel of Christian Atheism* (citation not given) p. 95-96
494 Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.96
495 Ibid., p.112

A Short 'Deviation': Chop Suey's betrayal

A twenty-first century deviation from the narrative here perhaps helps to work into thinking of the fully radical nature of this thinking of the demonic. This deviation is the deconstruction of any possible theodicy in the music of System of a Down's *Chop Suey.'*[496] System of a Down (SOAD), an American thrash metal band of Armenian ethnic origin, express 'honest indignation' as raw rage, where reflecting on the Armenian genocide leaves religion as a shallow formula which mocks the actual carnage by offering any sanitising power: "I don't think you trust in my self-righteous suicide." Yet its 'self-righteous suicide' formula is also a 'literal' enactment of the insane choice of the 'suicidal self' of the 'righteous' Christ in Gethsemane.[497] Autistic integrity, with its black and white thinking, will grapple with this dubiety/duplicity, and refuse to ignore the betrayal upon betrayal ("Jesus, be sensible [we would say] and grow up, we do love you, you don't need to do this ...") inherent in it.

Betrayal is an important concept because, as chapter two argued, it is the 'entry price' to the space of fiction which 'takes liberties with' narrative. Monsignor Quixote, like Teresa, like Don Quixote, is "mad out of duty to the truth of the book."[498] In every hermeneutic, Hermes is both the messenger of the gods and a liar. This is an understanding of Coleridge's "willing suspension

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[496] System of a Down, *'Chop Suey,'* Written by Daron Malakian, Shavo Odadjian, John Dolmayan, Serj Tankian • Copyright © Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, 2004; (online access https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSvFpBOe8eY 3rd September 2016): *"I don't think you trust*
In my self-righteous suicide
I cry when angels deserve to die
In my self-righteous suicide
I cry when angels deserve to die / Father, father, father, father
Father, into your hands I commend my spirit
Father, into your hands
Why have you forsaken me?
In your eyes forsaken me
In your thoughts forsaken me
In your heart forsaken me, oh
Trust in my self-righteous suicide."
[497] See David Jasper's theologically ironic chapter, *Evil and Betrayal at the Heart of the Sacred Community,*: "we prettily talk of paronomasia while this poor guy is dying on the cross, for Christ's sake" (*The Sacred Community* p.39); "We have to step outside this fictive nonsense, this mythical realm, confronting two worlds whereby the banality of evil ("Jesus, be sensible [we would say] and grow up, we do love you, you don't need to do this ...") is exposed in its truly mythic dimensions" (ibid., p.37)
[498] Jasper, *The Sacred Community* p.36

of disbelief"[499] which means that reading and writing are acts of collusion. Regarding '*Chop Suey,'* who are the "angels (who) deserve to die," and why? It's impossible to say, because, in the end, it's 'only a song,' articulating betrayal – of angels, or of angelhood? Or both? It's possible to sing along without knowing. It is possible, in pure affective empathy bereft of cognitive empathy, to be utterly beyond making sense of atrocity, and sing by howling in the death of God, at the existence of a culture's felt need for "self-righteous suicide" as escape or atonement.

David Jasper points out that the apostle Peter is both betrayer and betrayed: "his hopes dashed – for which he had given up everything? To hell with everything, we understand very well how once can prefer the banality of everyday evil … to this awful, overturning, unbearable, unnecessary violence."[500]

This all happens *within the text,* because it is within the gospel narrative *as* narrative that words function as "living powers, by which things of the most importance to mankind are actuated, combined and humanised."[501] Jasper points out that the omniscient narrator of Mark's gospel privileges the reader with another layer of Peter's betrayal, which is that the reader knows what Peter does not; "In betraying his dearest friend, (Peter) admits that he has no idea who that friend is ["I know not this man of whom ye speak"]; he cannot know the fissure that has been opened on the mythic shadows of evil as the clouds of heaven are rent by the coming of the Son of Man."[502]

Jasper links this back to the idea of the reader "confronting two worlds whereby the banality of evil ("Jesus, be sensible [we would say] and grow up, we do love you, you don't need to do this …") is exposed in its truly mythic dimensions," and these "two worlds" are where the reader chooses which betrayal to make: "Through the looking glass of fiction, the question is how we tell the difference between real and unreal. Or perhaps the real question is, in

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[499] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* part 2.6, quoted in Jasper, *The Sacred Community* p.106
[500] Jasper, Sacred Community p.35
[501] Coleridge, quoted by Jasper in *The Sacred Community* p.80; see also Jasper, David, *The Study of Literature and Religion*, 2nd ed. (London, UK; Palgrave McMillan, 1992) p.xix
[502] Jasper, *Sacred Community* p.35

a world where finally only truth really matters, should we even try to do so, and simply remain content to be mad out of duty?"[503]

If Christ's kiss on the lips of The Grand Inquisitor is a Judas' kiss, it is necessary to agree with the Grand Inquisitor that Christ's gift of freedom is evil, in that "In respecting man so much you acted as though you had ceased to have compassion for him … had you respected him less you would have demanded of him less, and that would have been closer to love."[504] Yet even to 'sign up too quickly' for Ivan Karamazov as an authority on the death of God[505] is to overlook another layer of betrayal, which is that of the author betraying words. Rowan Williams alerts his reader to Bakhtin's ""polyphonic" dimension of Dostoevsky – the coexistence of profoundly diverse voices, making the novel itself a constant and unfinished interplay of perspectives."[506] Bakhtin's reading alerts the reader that it is Dostoevsky, following the Grand Inquisitor's Christ, who enacts the death of the author, in a betrayal which is also a "self-righteous suicide."

Chop Suey is also singing a double betrayal, blaspheming Christ who fails (betrays) the Armenians by remaining 'self-righteous' in indifferent absence, while expressing the idea of the Crucifixion as the death of God, who kills and betrays Love requiring the suicide of the righteous self, and this is a cosmic enactment of their suffering.

If this is dismissed as 'mere emo music' (as which it certainly also is perceived, for a certain audience), this dismissal is perhaps because the authentic (and autistically sensitive) 'emo' teenage questions are unheeded,[507] and teenage rebellion is honest indignation. SOAD's discography also includes critiques Western indifference to the Tiananmen square massacre, for example, in '*Hypnotise'* (2005), or the Iraq war in 'Boom' (2005). Their concern for social justice is expressed as the music of rage, and its scrutiny is relentless.[508] '*Chop*

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[503] ibid. p.38

[504] Dostoevsky, Fyodor (trans. David McDuff), *The Brothers Karamazov* (London, UK; Penguin Books, London, UK, 2003) p.334

[505] As Rowan Williams accuses William Hamilton of doing (Williams, Rowan, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (London/New York; Continuum, 2011) p.2)

[506] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* p.3

[507] Doesn't Heidegger remark that children are the true philosophers, when he writes of "The *Geschick* (art) of being: a child that plays" in Heidegger, Martin (trans Reginald Lilly) *The Principle of Reason* (Indiana; Indiana University Press, 1991 (1956))

[508] Like Blake, SOAD also have a liberated view of sexuality, which they see as oppressed by Christian morality.

Suey' questions Christendom's claim to goodness, exposing its demonic nature and simultaneously suggesting the possibility of trusting the demonic 'self-righteous suicide' as a necessary betrayal.

Holy Blasphemy

The reason for digressing into this strange reading of Mark/Cervantes/Jasper//Dostoevsky/metal music is to approach the moral power of shocking holy blasphemy as a 'mythical dimension' of truth telling where autistic integrity can be 'mad out of duty' in facing layers of betrayal.

It articulates the consequences of Altizer's radical deconstruction of the 'salve' of Christendom, which is also a shocking holy blasphemy. The Nietzschean No-Saying for Altizer issues from a reading of Blake's '*Jerusalem*' where "the Great Selfhood, Satan … the Devouring Power." [509] Nietzsche's God of Christendom is the Christian God as "the embodiment of an absolute No-saying, because it is the only epiphany of the sacred which is a total reversal of a forward-moving divine process."[510]

In this sense the ultimate paradox of Barth's *Krisis* is, radically and heretically, inverted by taking the theological position that Christ, becoming sin for us, does so to the point of being an embodiment of sin, and God is Satan, as the negation which is itself (as SOAD have expressed, in sacred, profane rage) negated in the Crucifixion as the death of God:

> (T)he Christian God can be manifest and real only by means of a faith engaging in an absolute world and life-negation, a negation that must occur wherever there is energy and life. When the radial Christian confronts us with the liberating message that God is Satan, he is stilling the power of that negation, breaking all those webs of religion with which a regressive Christianity has ensnared the Christian, and unveiling the God who had died in Christ.[511]

SOAD's God is the "self-righteous" Satan in whom "I don't think you trust," and yet, for Altizer thinking theologically, and SOAD thinking equally

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[509] Blake, *Jerusalem* 33:17-24 in Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.100
[510] Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.101
[511] ibid.

authentically, there is a strange meeting of this evil and death with the suffering of John of the Cross in the apophatic discourse of *The Dark Night of the Soul*. Altizer writes:

> All our deeper Christian vision has known the presence of God as the presence of an absolute abyss, as here total presence can only be the total presence of an absolute abyss.[512]

Inverting the model of clinical depression, this is not an abyss of suffering but a suffering of abyss. Thinking of the necessary betrayals of Peter, Quixote and the Grand Inquisitor, SOAD's lyrics invite a reading of God *as* abyss. Altizer writes:

> Is an absolute abyss possible apart from a realisation of God, and a realisation of the very voice of God, a voice that is a pure and absolute abyss, one whose realisation silences every other voice, or silences every voice that is not the voice of abyss?[513]

The abyss is the place of the gospel. When it is possible glibly to assent that Christ is "made sin for us,"[514] what is harder to consider is the utter self-righteous suicide where God is in Hiroshima, Auschwitz, Armenia, as Satan. Altizer's mythology is outrageous, but it is outrage at Christendom, whose God is perhaps indeed a little too self-righteous. Justly, His angels as agents (Lucifer, the angel of light) "deserve to die," and so, in holy blasphemy, does "He."

Altizer knows full well that he is mounting an assault on the religious establishment, and frequently says so. So how can he be "evangelical" and "pastoral?"[515] His concern is to be faithful to the truths of twentieth (and now twenty-first) century Christianity. He argues that nineteenth century textual criticism has effectively destroyed the credibility of a unified and literally inspired Biblical voice, undermining the Church's authority. He writes:

> A century and a half of historical scholarship has demonstrated that the Bible contains a diverse body or

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[512] Altizer, *Godhead and the Nothing* p.129
[513] ibid. p.131
[514] 2 Corinthians 5.21
[515] 'A lucid, joyous, wise, evangelical – even pastoral – piece of theological work.' (Cover matter, *Gospel of Christian Atheism*.)

> series of traditions and imagery that resists all attempts at harmonisation or reconciliation. No longer is it possible to speak of a Biblical faith or a Biblical religion or even of a distinct and singular Biblical God; nor is there any possibility of rationally or logically uniting the self-contradictory Biblical images of God. Nevertheless, a radical and dialectical theology can lead us to grasp the necessity of the contradictory language of the Bible.[516]

The end of a (straightforwardly) "Biblical faith" opens an abyss which is the death of God, and yet as such is the epiphany of the cosmic Jesus. Altizer expresses this abysmal Incarnation as the self-exile of God. For an autistic hermeneutic, this section has offered first and foremost a discourse which can be read autistically as the autistic integrity of 'black and white thinking' which resists compromise. The self-exile of God will now offer this integrity a way to read itself into this self-exile as total mindfulness of separation, and this exile's embodiment will enable a thinking of total Incarnational metaphor as embodiment to come into view.

3.3. The self-exile of God: Altizer, Hegel and autism

Altizer and Hegel

At the start of this chapter, the sacred profane was read autistically as fascination, and literal metaphor became the dazzling presence of light in art which does not represent. The sacred profane can now become a fully theologically thought Incarnational metaphor of, and as, mindfulness of separation, when it is read as the embodiment of God's self-exile in Altizer's narrative. This draws on Altizer's reading of Hegel which will offer Hegel's *'Geist,'* theologically thought, as an incarnation of metaphor. Altizer thinks a Hegelian reading of Biblical myth where the utter *kenosis* of salvation history as the death of God is told as the dialectical outpouring of *Geist*. This mythological synthesis arises out of an existentialist theological background, where Tillich's theology of correlation, as noted earlier, is transmuted from correlation to fusion.

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[516] Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.89

Altizer's '*The Gospel of Christian Atheism*' is dedicated to Paul Tillich, and rethinks Tillich's theology of culture. Tillich has already sown the seeds of an 'existential faith' which listens 'outwith the temple.' In George Pattison's words, an existential faith requires "as a prerequisite the "shaking of the foundations"[517] of being by the shock of non-being. "[518] Pattison is describing an existentialist theology which is an expression of Modernism but at the same time, anchored in a Christian humanism of Tillich's 'theonomy' where "the "Will of God" … is not a strange voice that demands our obedience, but the "silent voice" of our own nature as man, and as man with an individual character. "[519] The "silent voice" of "our own nature" is thought by Altizer as a-theological, expressed in Hegelian terms, where the "silent voice" becomes the voice of God in Scripture, which is also the silent voice of Hegelian Being or *Geist*.

Hegel presents the dialectical unfolding of Being as the Becoming of Mind or Spirit (*Geist*). Altizer quotes Hegel:

> This incarnation of the Divine Being, its having
> essentially and directly the shape of self-consciousness,
> is the simple content of Absolute Religion. Here the
> Divine Being is known as Spirit; this religion is the Divine
> Being's consciousness concerning itself that it is Spirit …
> [520]
>
> Spirit alone is reality. It is in the inner being of the
> world, that which essentially is, and is per se; it
> assumes objective, determinate form.[521]

In Altizer's reading, that "inner being" is known in and as the sacred profane. Hegel's dialectic is the process of Spirit's becoming, and in this he has a definite teleology where history is the self-realisation of Spirit in consciousness. As Ernst Cassirer remarks,

> The true life of the idea, of the divine, begins in
> history. In Hegel's philosophy, the formula of Spinoza,
> Deus sive Natura, [God as nature] is transformed into
> Deus sive Historia [God as History]. Yet the apotheosis is

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[517] Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations,* 1948
[518] Pattison, *Fear and Trembling* p.227
[519] Tillich, *Morality and Beyond (London, UK;* Routledge, 1964) p.24, quoted in Pattison, *Fear and Trembling* p.228
[520] Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* p.66, citation not given
[521] Ibid, p 64, citation not given

> not concerned with particular historical events, but
> rather with the historical process as a whole.[522]

The unfolding of Being in Becoming is *'Geist'* in the form of 'God as History.' There is here, however, an interesting reversal in Altizer's use of Hegel. Hegel writes:

> In the Christian religion God has been revealed
> as truth and as spirit. As spirit, humans can receive this
> revelation. In religion the truth is veiled in imagery; but
> in philosophy the veil is torn aside, so that humans can
> know the infinite and see all things in God.[523]

In Altizer, truth is not 'veiled in (an) imagery' of religion, but History (which would become a socio-economic narrative in Marxist Hegelianism) becomes a cosmic Story where the Christian narrative is not a veil but an actual enactment of Hegel's Being and Becoming. This is not actual as a historical process, although the history of consciousness enacts the cosmic story, in religion not as Hegel's 'veil' but as the embodiment of Spirit in (crucially, *in,* not *by*) the metaphors of Biblical narrative. "Living the death of God" is an exercise in existentialist poetics, not theological doctrine.

The aim of following this embodiment of the self-exile of God in metaphor is two-fold for the autistic hermeneutic. Firstly, this self-exile will be viewed as absolute mindfulness of separation in the autism of God. Secondly, this embodiment of God's self-exile will be viewed as absolute Incarnational metaphor. To approach the autism of God as a reading of Altizer's thinking of the self-embodiment of God, God's self-exile needs to be explained.

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[522] Cassirer, Ernst, *Werke* 15, p.368, quoted in Hans-Christian Lucas, *Spinoza, Hegel, Whitehead: Substance, Subject and Superject,* in *Hegel and Whitehead: Contemporary perspectives on Systematic Philosophy,* ed. George R. Lucas, p.40

[523] Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/259378/Georg-Wilhelm-Friedrich-Hegel/41239/At-Heidelberg, accessed 06/02/2015

The self-embodiment of God

When Altizer draws on the third of his "prophets" of the death of God, Hegel, he re-enters the "religion" which Hegel has described as the "veil," and thinks through Hegel's dialectical philosophy of Spirit in terms of Biblical narrative. Effectively, Biblical narrative becomes Hegelian dialectic, and for this reason, this philosophical dialectic of *Geist* (Spirit) as Becoming is made deeply Christian as the death of God.

A simple statement of Hegel's dialectical philosophy is that Spirit is realised as Becoming by the embodiment of being in its dialectic synthesis with nonbeing. This dialectical interaction between pure being and pure nothing is their mutual negation for new being to emerge, in sublation.

In dialectical becoming, pure being and pure nothing sublate into 'impure' determinate being, and the being and nonbeing of determinate being sublate into new determinate being in continuing dialectical synthesis, which itself has its own new opposition and union of being and nonbeing. A 'primordial' speculative sublation and becoming means that pure being becomes 'impure' by entering into a relation with the other and its descent into the dialectical process.

Spirit descending entering into dialectical process is what Altizer casts as the Fall. A cosmic fall from the silence of pure being into dialectical process is not only fall, but also Creation, by the production of determinate being from that Fall:

> Mythically envisioned, the advent of speech is both creation and fall. For speech is simultaneously both the origin of all meaning and identity and a fall from the quiescence and peace of silence.[524]

Recalling Tillich's thought of the Divine as Ground of Being which is known authentically as the inner speech of a theonomy, this inner speech is Hegelian Spirit, at the same time mythically as the totality of God's acts in Scripture.

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[524] Altizer, T J J, *The Self-Embodiment of God* (New York; Harper Row, 1977) P.5

Speech as the voice of God

The acts of God in the Biblical narrative are the sublation of pure being and nonbeing into determinate being, and this dialectical history is the myth which is spoken by God in sacred history.

Altizer observes that in the times of the Hebrew Bible prophets and of the New Testament, there are obstacles to authentic speech, out of which prophecy emerges as a new authentic speech. The fullest speech, in authentic response to the Divine, arises from the deepest silence. The language of faith needs to be not "merely repeating the words of faith"[525] but something new. Speech is the way in which faith emerges; faith is the fullness of speech and not just any speech ('chatter') but, in Tillichian language, "speech embodying its own ground."[526] Speech is fundamental and not a mere vehicle but something more profound, which actually creates faith; "faith responds to the mystery of speech."[527]

Silence is "both our origin and our end," and as such it is actually present in speech and is "speakable in speech."[528] Silence passes into speech when speech emerges out of silence. It is a presence in speech. "Silence can dwell in speech, but its emptiness is negated by the presence of speech. When silence is present in speech it is not a mere emptiness, just as it is not a simple absence, it is far rather a presence."[529] This is an echo of the apophatic discourse of mystical theology, where apophatic self-negating strategy indicates that authentic speech moves to and comes from silence.

At this point, an autistic hermeneutic, as a legitimate theological voice of absolute autism, can now be seen as a possible way to validate Altizer's Hegelian reading of the narrative of God's acts. Firstly, autistic integrity and black and white thinking has no place for "chatter." Its absolute mindfulness of separation, which is also absolute fascination, recognises a fundamental

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[525] ibid. p.2
[526] ibid. P.3
[527] Ibid.
[528] ibid., P.5
[529] ibid., P.9

authenticity of the silence of pure being as the voice of God, Absolute Spirit, as silence within speech. This, again, is the silence which is indicated in apophatic theology. Now, in the light of the myth of the death of God, it can now be thought of as pure autistic affective empathy in absolute kenosis. To do this, the following section will now explain what Altizer's Hegelian reading of Scripture means by kenosis, so that absolute the absolute autistic affective empathy of sainthood can then be seen theologically as the absolute kenosis which is the autism of God.

Incarnation as kenosis

Exile as kenosis

The mythical salvation history of Biblical narrative forms an epic telling of the outpouring of pure Being into determinate being. This Hegelian descent of the absence which is pure quiescent being, into presence which is determinate being, is the universal Fall enacted in the total salvation history as embodied in the mythology of Creation, Exodus, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Ascension, Resurrection and Apocalypse. Ascension to heaven is viewed as a Hellenistic accretion, and instead the ascension is subverted into utter, absolute descent of being into Hell. This is an apocalyptic kerygma of the death of God, and Jesus is known in the Incarnation which is also Crucifixion. Resurrection is the emptying of the crucified Jesus into the world in the death of God. This is a return to a primitive gospel without Messianic or Hellenistic elements. This is the embodiment of the Christian myth in faith, and Altizer's *The Self-Embodiment of God* traces Christian myth as the following Biblical archetypes:

> ... to embody the fullness of the biblical moment of faith,
> and it evolves by way of an evolutionary yet interior
> movement of the biblical moments and movements of
> Genesis, Exodus, Judgement, Incarnation and Apocalypse.
> The sacred history of the Bible here becomes interiorised
> and universalised ...[530]

The universal cosmic Fall is the fall of God, and the myth of Exodus is not only the Exodus of the people of God. When God enacts their redemption by

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[530] Altizer, *The Self-Embodiment of God* p.6

God's presence in the burning bush, this is God's choice to exile God as determinate being from God as pure being. This is therefore God's exile:

> God is the name of exile … the name of God makes exile manifest in its source, and thereby in its finality, a once and for all finality eradicating every possibility of the nonbeing of actuality. And to speak the name of God is not simply to speak the name of the ground of actuality, it is to sanction actuality, it is to speak that name whose utterance seals the finality of the actual.[531]

This self-embodiment of God as exile is an absolute kenotic choice, and in all its moments is enacting the apocalyptic gospel of God with us *in* death. This is both terrible and wonderful; as Nietzsche writes, "Even God hath his hell: it is his love for man."[532] The death of God which liberates the world is God's self-emptying, so that also in Nietzsche's words, for the atheist Christian, "I tell you: one must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: ye have still chaos in you."[533] The gospel of Christian atheism is 'a hard saying,' but it is ultimate hope, of God with us, even in our hell, and this is the faith of John of the Cross' dark night of the soul.

Autistic kenosis

This kenosis is absolute love, and again, this speaks through an autistic hermeneutic in all its dimensions. Firstly, as fascination, it is God utterly present, all in all, in the world as full Incarnation, known as the liberation of the dancing star, the glittering object which fascinates the autist in joy. Secondly, as pure affective empathy, utter kenosis gives unconditionally, even in the unknowing of the lack of cognitive empathy which is the death of the omniscient God. Thirdly, mindfulness of separation is the kenotic self-exile of God, and the faith which chooses to affirm itself as faith in God, even the absent, dead God, in the chaos where we are "straying, as through an infinite nothing … (with) night continually closing in on us … (because) God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.[534] Faith for the autist is difficult. Black

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[531] ibid. pp. 29-30
[532] http://www.philosophy-index.com/nietzsche/thus-spake-zarathurstra/xxv.php
[533] http://www.philosophy-index.com/nietzsche/thus-spake-zarathurstra/prologue.php, part 5
[534] Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom* (citation not given), quoted in Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* p. 95-96

and white, literal thinking does not find a resolution to the question of faith when it applies positivist logic. Pure affective empathy in the face of the bewilderment of impaired cognitive empathy is painful and costly. Mindfulness of separation is inescapable. The supreme validation for autistic faith would be faith in an autistic God, which is now suggested as a way to think the embodiment of God's self-exile.[535]

3.4. The autism of God.

Universal autism as Hegelian nonbeing

Taking absolutely its radical separation as an existential thinking of the ground of dialectical being, absolute autism as mindfulness of separation actually becomes the creative dialectical Hegelian nonbeing. As such it is the nonexistence which is the necessary opposite of being in Becoming. Ultimately, a mythic thinking of dialectic leads back to a return to the origin of Pure Being in apocalyptic consummation of the Divine. Beyond the embodiment of Becoming is total absence which is total presence in an apocalyptic consummation. To return to the trinity of mythic autism, this consummation of synthesis will view this consummation as an absolute apocalyptic revelation of pure absolute autism in its trinity of absence (separation), presence (fascination) and paradoxical absent presence (incarnational metaphor). Each one of these is the expression of the others. First, thinking this Hegelian *telos* theologically as apocalyptic consummation needs to be seen in Altizer's language as a new Plenum. The resolution of being and nonbeing which is the silent speech of a new Plenum, is achieved only by the absolute absence (death) of God which is God. Living in kenotic death, death is life[536] and the presence of God is the absence of God. In the trinity of mythic autism, presence (absolute fascination) and absence (absolute mindfulness of separation) coincide, finally and apocalyptically, as the consummation of incarnational metaphor. Incarnational metaphor is the final absolute kenosis where silent speech is total

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[535] This autistic God is underpinned by the assumption that it is possible to conceive of a Disabled God (see Eiesland, *The Disabled God* p.100)

[536] Also as the inversions of the Beatitudes, the Kingdom of God as dying daily to be born in Christ (1st Corinthians 15.31)

metaphor, beyond being as fullness of joyful poetic being which has no referent, Becoming nothing. This is total presence as total absence.

In this way, mythic absolute autism can be expressed as the Hegelian negation which Altizer expresses as the death of God. With autism as negation, as manifestation of the kenotic fullness of the death of God, it is possible to arrive at an Autistic God.

Altizer sees the mythical narrative of Creation, Exodus, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Apocalypse as the speech of God, and it is also possible to think of universal, absolute autism as a mythology of God. If absolute autism is the embodiment of an utter separation which is kenotic fullness, the death of God is the embodiment of a now universal autism. This is an autism which has 'come of age' by finding its autonomy as mindfulness of separation of the death of God. This 'coming of age' of a conscious autism was thought of earlier in terms of Modernism, and it is equally as a *'felix culpa'* of emancipation in terms of the heretical vision of Nietzsche and Blake.

In person-specific autism, as the introduction made clear, the fundamental separation is between (human) being and (human) being – there is a communication breakdown and a lack of meeting. The fusion of horizons envisioned by Gadamer is impaired. In absolute terms, this is a tear in the fabric of the human universe. The introduction explained that, in terms of the human autistic spectrum, this is a universal phenomenon. Even if it were not, its very existence as a phenomenon would speak as a way in which the human universe contains something which embodies disunity and separation. This is not the separation of the 'sin' of fallen humanity; this is independent of any apparatus of dysfunctional relationships or the disharmony of competing egos which might be the cause of the separations of 'sin.' Rather, this is a structural feature which cannot be 'fixed' but only 'managed,' or more helpfully, understood and accepted, and even celebrated and cherished.

Altizer, as this chapter has explained, argues for God's inner exile as the embodiment of God. Postulating a myth of the autism of God would mean that God's inner exile is the tear in the fabric of the universe which is autism. Autism is that fundamental separation which isolates. Autism is the quality of exile in the negation of unity, and God's exile is God's inner autism. By the act of

speaking (relationality) God falls from a primordial Plenum into separation from that Plenum, so that Godself is exiled from Godself. So paradoxically, relationality (speaking) carries within it its own exile and so even relationality carries within itself its other as autistic separation.

If the infinite is all (Hegel's Good Infinite) then Absolute Spirit is being nonbeing. Altizer extends Hegel's argument that Absolute Spirit is determinate being. This in turn means that, if God is determinate, speaking in the acts of salvation history, the transcendent primordial Godhead is dead, and apocalyptic consummation is thought of as the final *telos* of that death. Being nonbeing as Absolute Spirit is the kenotic totality of God's acts, as Love poured out even unto death. Mythical absolute autism is then this creative absolute separation in determinate being itself. Sublation brings together being and nonbeing in determinate being, autism as the dialectical other is the perpetual existence of their separateness and negation which continually plays in the shimmering of Becoming. Being inescapably contains its other, and that other is other. The Becoming of determinate being cannot exist without the continual separation which creates the tension of nonbeing and being. Autism, as the phenomenon of separation itself, is this perpetual moment of separation. Autism is the moment of nonbeing which itself generates the separation of being-nonbeing and it is also, as a consequence, the distress of determinate being's separation from the transcendent primordial plenum pure being.[537] Autism is the embodiment of the primordial Fall which is the fall of God.

God as isolation

Altizer describes a cosmic separation and isolation in God and consequently in all reality. An autistic hermeneutic would read the following almost as a textbook definition of universal autism:

> Now the fall can be envisioned as a fall of an original
> Totality or All; it is the centre or primordial ground of
> reality which becomes darkened and broken by the Fall. As
> a consequence of the movement and actuality of the Fall,
> alienation and estrangement penetrate the centre of

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[537] Pure being, thought theologically, as what was earlier considered as Tillich's atheism of the inescapable Ground of Being which Is Not.

> reality, as the primordial Totality becomes divided and alienated from itself. Nothing whatsoever stands apart from the "descending" and chaotic movement of the Fall, as every individual entity now stands out in a new solitude and isolation. For with the loss of an original unity, harmony or coherence, distance arises and creates every new experience, thus bringing about a new and solitary selfhood which is its own individual centre or ground. From a radical Christian perspective, we could say that God Himself is the primary embodiment of a solitary and isolated selfhood.[538]

Where this chapter has earlier discussed God as carrying an internal autism of inner exile, Altizer's work here now discusses God as isolated. This cosmic and divine isolation emanating from the Fall is an utter separation; in the language I am using here, it is universal autism. The isolated God is autistic, and the autistic God is isolated. The death of God is the autism of God.

'*It is finished*'

Altizer writes:

> A fully self-actualised presence can only be total presence, and a presence in which speech and silence are one. A total speech must also and necessarily be a total silence ... such silence speaks ... insofar as presence is actually absent, or inasmuch as absence is actually present.[539]

This is an apocalyptic speech where the All is realised in the total presence of total absence. The All is real presence – it is total presence – and yet what is the 'where?' There is no 'heaven' which would be separate from the All – what could be separate from the All? Total presence is everywhere and nowhere, and yet it is 'here' – it is an actual presence and 'the' actual presence. Yet we cannot 'grasp hold of' totality or total presence. So total presence is also total absence.

This language employed by Altizer is utter paradox, echoing the apophatic fiction discussed in chapter two, and it is the paradox of the

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[538] Altizer, *The Descent into Hell: A Study of the Radical Reversal of the Christian Consciousness* (New York; Seabury Press, 1979) p.183
[539] Altizer, *The Self-Embodiment of* God pp.91, 89

coincidentia oppositorum of presence and absence, silence and speech, which is the apocalyptic fulfilment of the death of God in the Incarnation of Christ Crucified.

This fulfilment of the All is an act of fullness where the actuality of self-identity empties and negates itself:

> this occurs not simply in the disappearance of presence, but rather in the disappearance of the self-identity of presence. And this can occur only in the act of that self-identity ... in which it speaks by actualising itself as silence.[540]

It is profoundly Christological; an utter immanence of the Incarnation really does mean that Christ is 'all in all,' and saviour in the sense of being thus the total presence which not only dies but in so doing, in this absence which is self-silencing, completes the self-realisation of All: *'It is finished.'* Now, where there has been the Fall from a primordial Plenum (which we cannot have known) into the particularity of the transcendent God, the apocalyptic reversal of this Fall is the death of the dualism of the transcendent God and humanity, and the gathering of all in fullness. As the All it is silence which speaks in its being. It is the completion of Christ's total Incarnation. Rather than the book of Revelation's 'four horsemen of the apocalypse' vision (although a godless world is a world of darkness) this apocalyptic consummation is a symbolic enactment of the fullness and completion *('It is finished')* of Christ as something we can enter existentially in faith: "as we hear and enact that impossibility, then even we can say 'it is finished."[541]

Faith enables us to speak by enacting this fullness, in living the sacrament of the death of God in faith. The gospel saying *'I am the door,'* by seeing it differently as *"The door is I"* – Christ as pure subject - becomes the realisation of an existential self-negating self-identity which completes the (impossible) possibility of the All and the Nothing in an apocalyptic fulfilment:

> All self-identity is realised in this act: "The door is I." "The door is I" when "I am the door." Yet this is a door leading

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[540] ibid. p.89
[541] Altizer, *Self-Embodiment of God* p.96

> to nowhere … presence loses itself as presence … "I am the
> door" only when "The door is I."[542]

Why is this important for an autistic reading? Simply because when "the door is I," this is the total autos of pure subject, in kenotic Christianity as a wager of faith where absolute absence is absolute presence. The door is I when I, present only to myself, in my own authentic choice independent of you, realise presence as the absolute subject's act of faith. This is why faith as conscious autism is the ultimately impossible demand as absolute unknowing. The call to autistic discipleship means forsaking all and following Christ, where the all we let go of is all we know.

Silent speech

In terms of an apocalyptic gospel, which is completed in Jesus,[543] what is the consummation which would be a fullness of autism come of age? What is the Autistic God? The autistic God is silence. The autistic God is silent speech. This is beyond the 'garrulousness'[544] of religion. The Autistic God is the fulfilment of absence (I have accepted my fundamental separation from you, become absent from you, and passed into a silence of pure presence). The Autistic God has ceased to speak, because by being all in all (total presence) the Autistic God is beyond all words and images. The Autistic God cannot communicate. Furthermore, God is not simply autistic but is actually autism itself. God is that silence which is beyond words. If the God of Totality is pure autism, then pure autism – its silence – is God. Here, it is vital to recall this is not discussing autistic people with a (relative) autism but the absolute quality of pure autism. Pure or absolute autism, as the introduction made clear, does not exist. But neither does Totality – as total Being, how can it have being?

Yet the Autistic God is also speech, but a silent speech. This moves into the place of the presence of autistic fascination. The Autistic God is that pure

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[542] ibid. p.88

[543] The title "Christ" holding messianic overtones is rejected by Altizer

[544] In degrees of fascination and wordlessness, the garrulous autist speaks obsessively about her special interest, but no-one listens, because no-one can tolerate it by entering that world. In more profound (or, in mythic terms, more profoundly self-validating) autism, 'chatter' is forsaken because deeper fascination in deeper isolation is the deeper silence. Similarly, Altizer distinguishes pure speech from chatter (*Self-Embodiment of God* p.3)

wordless object which holds the autist in fascination whereby the union of seer and seen keeps the autist within the world of the sensory of obsessive object. This is the sensory connoisseur's incomprehensible joy, where Gunilla Gerlund takes refuge in the texture of the brown sofa,[545] and the way in which Katie Bridges can '*stare at a drawing of a futuristic city all day long*'[546] in rapt fascination.

Is this union an ecstasy? People frequently say that the sensory or the obsessive are the autist's 'escape from the world,' (ex-stasis) but fascination is more than this, it is joy (ex-stasis = ecstasy). This is a separation from the world which leads into the ecstasy of joy. The outpouring of the garrulous autist is the attempted return into language from the pure joy of the communion within the sensory and the obsessive which are fascination, just as religious language is the attempted return into language from that which cannot be spoken. Yet the object of fascination speaks to the autist in silence[547], more powerfully than anything the words of the neurotypical world can offer. This is a kind of presence unlike anything in the neurotypical.

The Autistic God, then, is the object of fascination, and the Autistic God demands fascination. In this very particular sense, chapter two demonstrated Teresa of Avila to be fascinated by God. Her fascination, beyond words, requires the non-language which has required her to express it as the non-being of apophatic fiction which is incarnational metaphor.

Fascination

Is the Autistic God also fascination itself? Is God fascinated? Fascination is not only aesthetics but passion and love. The language of the moment of fascination is a mythic language of the holy. So God might not merely be 'in' that moment, but actually be it. In Altizer's thought, the Incarnation as the utter kenosis of God is love, and not the love 'of' or 'from' a transcendent

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[545] Gunilla "found the place to be left in peace – behind the armchair, where she was able to shut out everything and simply be – absorbed in the material of the brown armchair" (Bogdashina, *Autism and Spirituality* p.191)

[546] http://thinkingautismguide.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/special-interests.html accessed 25 April 2012.

[547] Recalling the autist Leneh K Buckle's words that she was happier before she could speak (*Is increasing functionality always good*? in *Autism, Ethics and the Good Life*).

Godhead but the pure embodiment of love itself. So Jesus is anonymously present,[548] and it is Blake's poetic vision, not theology, which can be an articulation of it.[549] This embodiment is 'profane' – utterly immanent and therefore secular – and yet, as Blake would argue, also holy. It is the embodiment of the sacred profane.

The Autistic God's love is the expression of love which is realised in death. This is the acceptance of the death of all the 'normal' (neurotypical) comforts of interaction, and yet remains love as fascination. God's love is fascination, in the sense of being completely immanent, just as autistic fascination is an inner and immanent experience. "in a world of her own." The Autistic God of Love is fascinated by the All in which Godself is embodied, and this all is God. God is fascinated by God's own self and in love with all as that self. God, the embodied presence which is the active, present Geist, is the fascination inherent in the dialectical development of both creativity and the history of ideas, so that the process of pure idea is the immanence of God as Idea in history. The creative thinking generating this process of idea happens in a space of autistic separation.[550] Paradoxically, the separation of the thinker creates the immanence of the independent thought. But that is another model of the autistic God, with God as 'intimately part of' the dialectical process. What is at stake here is an apocalyptic silence. The autistic God is absolute autism and hence absolute silence. In the absolute isolation of the dead transcendent God the Autistic God is absent, not present in any way. Furthermore, the inner exile of Godself means that God is isolated even from Godself. This isolation is so utter that there can be no speech. True, the God of exile speaks in revelation, but this is, in Auerbach's terms, the alien speech of Yahweh.[551] The prophets speak, repeatedly, and nobody listens. In terms of the inner exile as alienation, it as if this fissure widens and widens – Israel itself is cast out into exile. The fissure widens until Christ bursts it open in His death

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[548] Drawing on Blake's idea of Jesus as Universal Humanity; see Altizer, *Gospel of Christian Atheism* pp.69ff

[549] See Altizer, *The New Apocalypse: The Radical Christian Vision of William Blake* (Aurora, Colorado; East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967); also reading Nietzsche's aphorisms as poetry, so that the 'three prophets,' Blake, Nietzsche and Hegel, are read poetically with Scripture to form a mythic, existential telling of the gospel.

[550] See Baron Cohen et al. The Autistic Spectrum Quotient and Fitzgerald, Genius Genes

[551] See Auerbach, Erich (trans. Trask, W, ed. Said, W) *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey; Princeton University Press, 2013 (1946)) and his chapter *Odysseus' Scar* on the Hebraic versus Homeric literary world views.

which is the consummation of God's absence, and yet simultaneously it releases a new presence which is, as has been explained, present in absence. The God in exile cannot even 'talk to Godself.' The Autistic God is silence, a silence which grows with an increasing degree of autism manifesting until in the Crucifixion there is the Autistic God's total silence; Jesus cries *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* and there is no answer. This is, as Blanchot expresses it, the place where "There can be no answer to that question. The poem is the answer's absence."[552]

Yet the autism of God in Christ is also the manifestation of 'other side' of God's autism; no less silent ("The door is I" when "I am the door." Yet this is a door leading to nowhere" – an entry into silence) but yet speaking in the apocalyptic coincidence of silence and speech. Christ's ministry in the gospels is speech, but it is a silence when he speaks in parables so that no-one can understand him. Understanding is possible only in devotion to the enactment of the parables of the Kingdom. The ministry of Christ now is silent and anonymous, where faith becomes the acts of Jesus absolutely "in His absence." Yet the silent speech and total presence of Christ can be figured in the holy space of the autistic fascination of God, and it is a space of love and joy.

3.5 Full Incarnational metaphor

The goal towards which this and the previous chapters have been working is a statement of fully realised incarnational metaphor, and this section can now express incarnational metaphor in the light of the autism of God in the Eucharist. The speech of *The Self-Embodiment of God* becomes the embodiment of God thought at the deepest level, the level where Altizer has been aiming all along – the self-embodiment of God in Eucharist. The Eucharist of the epic[553] is that of the sacred profane enactment. The epic of *The Self-Embodiment of God* culminates in the most sacred moment, the consummation of the death of Christ. Here, at its deepest level, it is sacred speech which embodies that

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[552] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* p.248
[553] Biblical narrative as epic, but also the sacred profane of Joyce, for example, in Finnegan's Wake, or in Melville's Moby Dick, as Modernism is the enactment of the death of God (see Altizer, eg. *Gospel of Christian Atheism* ch.1)

consummation, and so it is the voice of Christ who pronounces "It is finished." Altizer writes of this as 'the impossible possibility' which is the actual death of God and the moment of Christ's total entry into world, death and hell. This is the realisation of total absence *("My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?")* and total presence (It is God who dies in the Crucifixion) and as such it is a totality, and ultimately the pure speech of God. Altizer conveys the utter holiness of this moment as divine consummation, and that consummation as the sacrificial emptying which is divine love. It is divine perfection and the mystical paradox of the self-emptying and self-embodiment of God; it is both the death of God and the life of Jesus, a Jesus who is the embodiment of the death of God. So that Jesus can truly say, 'It is finished.' Does it end there? Of course, the answer is yes, but it is also no. Altizer asks whether we can enact this moment by hearing this silence. The answer is the hearing which is the embodiment of grace:

> The otherness of silence disappears and is reversed
> when silence is fully actual and immediate in its
> presence. Such silence is grace, the one grace that is
> possible in actual presence, and it is a grace that is
> everywhere in the actuality of total presence. Indeed,
> only when voice passes into silence.[554]

This is what language can approach, but ultimately only express in a non-language in mysticism. It is only at the finishing of language, and it is enacted again and again in the testimony of the mystics who articulate it as a finality of language which, being beyond language, is beyond time and participates in the 'once for all' event of silence:

> Even if it happened fully and finally only once, it occurs
> again and again, and once again occurs even now
> because of the finality of that once and for all event.
> And it does occur even now, and even occurs to us, and
> occurs when we say 'It is finished.'[555]

It is also the enactment of the Eucharist of 'Living the Death of God,' in faith, as Altizer has expressed in his memoir of that title.

The enactment of the death of God happens, in the outpouring of the Spirit of Jesus. For us, also, there can be an enactment in our lives through

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[554] Altizer, *The Self-Embodiment of God* p.95
[555] Ibid.

mindfulness of the mystery implicit in the 'impossible possibility' which is the Incarnation. It requires a silent hearing of profoundly silent speech which enacts it in a mindfulness where only silence can embody that mindfulness, and we 'say' in silence:

> That actuality is immediately at hand when it is heard,
> and it is heard when it is enacted. And it is enacted in
> the dawning of the actuality of silence, an actuality
> ending all disembodied and unspoken presence. Then
> speech is truly impossible, and as we hear and enact
> that impossibility, then even we can say: 'It is
> finished.'[556]

Incarnational metaphor is metaphor as kenotic incarnation of the death of God. It is a Eucharistic language where literal mindedness speaks as silence, because in "it is finished," language is finished. Chapter one indicated the possibility of incarnational metaphor as the doxological religious language of excess which Ramsay describes, and the post-Cartesian language of deconstructive theology which discerns the gaps inherent in language, so that metaphor does not "do," but "is." Chapter two suggested that incarnational metaphor could be thought of in terms of apophatic fiction which can approach but not indicate its object. Now, a theological thinking of metaphor as the autistic death of God means that to say "It is finished" in Eucharistic enactment is language where metaphor is incarnate by meaning "nothing." An absolute incarnational metaphor of absolute autism is silence, the silence of kenosis, absolute absence and absolute presence of Christ when "It is finished."

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[556] ibid. p.96

Chapter Four: Hopkins' *ecceitas* and an autistic hermeneutic

Introduction

[An earlier draft of parts of this chapter was presented as an unpublished paper in the Glasgow University Theology and Religious Studies departmental seminar on 24th February 2016]

The autism of God, the silence and the death of God, were the completion of theologically thought incarnational metaphor in the last chapter. Is there 'nothing more to say?' Is it possible to say 'nothing,' in the sense that it could be possible for 'nothing' to be said? The autism of God in the previous chapter was a 'good' autism of the poetic text.[557] It attempted to bring an autistic mode of perception to bear on a mythical thinking of God. The mythological literary-theological autism of the text reached its consummation in the autism of God. "It is finished."

Perhaps it is not entirely, ever, finished, in the sense that Mark C Taylor, following Altizer, remains embedded in not the Book, but the book. Taylor notes that James Joyce's words which are "almost the end of Finnegan's Wake" are

> … p. s. fin again …
> Far calls. Coming, far! End here. Us, then, Finn,
> again![558]

So, following Taylor's/Altizer's/Joyce's example, this thesis is not "finished" without entering the space of the book, at least provisionally, as an 'experiment' in how incarnational metaphor might work in practice. This will be primarily as fascination in the poem (this chapter) and then primarily as mindfulness of separation (chapter five). As always, however the poetic, autistic incarnational metaphor, thought as the presence of fascination, is also thought as mindfulness of separation. This chapter approaches the book of the poem as an inherent possibility for mythical autistic being *as* sacred, poetic awareness. This sacred, poetic awareness might be thought of by comparing it to the term *ecceitas,* as was considered in the example it provided for

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[557] The 'good autism' of honest atheism
[558] Taylor, *Tears* p.72

interdisciplinary thinking in the introduction. To recap, *ecceitas* is the neologism created by the Victorian Jesuit priest and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, which conflates two Latin terms. He creates *ecceitas* by conflating Duns Scotus' metaphysical term *haecceitas* [individuation, thought of as 'this-ness'] with *ecce* ['behold', 'here is']. The significance of this neologism is argued for by the twenty-first century critic John Llewellyn, and Llewellyn's reading will be an important part of this chapter's argument for an autistic *ecceitas*. If *ecceitas* can be conceived as a silent speech of God, it will also be possible to think of it as another way to consider an autism of God. The further implication will also be that *ecceitas*, expressed as autistic fascination, will present incarnational metaphor as an underpinning of an autistic creative potential. The possibility of unsuspected autistic art will follow from this. The logical progression of this chapter is

1. to explore the significance of Hopkins as a poet-priest, and his reading of Duns Scotus, as a way to argue for his poetics in terms of Scotist theological univocity and *haecceitas*;
2. to frame this as Hopkins' *ecceitas*;
3. to consider the background of *haecceitas* as a univocal sacrament of language
4. to read *ecceitas* theologically;
5. to read *ecceitas* as incarnational metaphor;
6. to speculate on an inherent autistic *ecceitas* present in art, potentially critiquing the clinical narrative of 'who (and what) is autistic.'

4.1. 'Untying the theological knot'

Carol T Christ argues for the problem of Victorian poetics as an anxiety over the validity of Romantic subjectivity. She writes that Hopkins can be said to 'untie the knot' of post-Romantic subjectivity through his theological vision, as a poet-priest. Carol T Christ argues that Hopkins uniquely finds a way through the Victorian post-Romantic problem of subjectivity: "Hopkins is the only Victorian poet who resolves the tension between the meaning objects have for

themselves and our impressions of them."[559] She quotes an early poem from Hopkins' notebooks:

It was a hard thing to undo this knot.
The rainbow shines, but only in the thought
Of him that looks. Yet not in that alone,
For who makes rainbows by invention?
And many standing round a waterfall
See one bow each, yet not the same to all,
But each a hand's breadth further than the next.
The sun on falling waters writes the text
Which yet is in the eye or in the thought.
It was a hard thing to undo this knot.[560]

Carol Christ's concern is with poetics, not theology, but she discerns that Hopkins' 'solution' flows from a theological source in his own quest for holistic integrity as poet-priest. She captures this poet-priest sensibility by describing how in Hopkins' conception of God, there is a divinely ordained poetics inherent in creation. She explains his view:

In the creation of the universe, God charges it with a rhyming capacity which enables man's imagination, his capacity of instress, to realise the divinely ordained instress of the world.[561]

The word "instress," meaning the poetic potential or essence of the object seen in poetry, is another of Hopkins' neologisms, and it is frequently used by him because it is crucial to his poetic vision. It will be discussed later in this chapter, but the reason for quoting Carol Christ on it here is to emphasise how theologically thought this poetics is: instress is a "rhyming capacity" not only as realised in "man's imagination," but also as something with which creation is "charged" by divine creation and ordination. 'Instress" is thought of simultaneously as theological and poetic. Martin Dubois quotes F R Leavis, saying that Hopkins has a "habit of seeing things as charged with significance,"

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[559] Christ, Carol T, *Victorian and Modern Poetics* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1984) pp.69-70; citation not given
[560] Hopkins, *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* ed. W H Gardner & N H Mackenzie, quoted in Christ, *Victorian and Modern Poetics* p.70
[561] Christ, *Victorian and Modern Poetics* p.70

so that this significance is "not a romantic vagueness, but a matter of explicit and ordered conceptions regarding the relations between God, man and nature." [562]

However, instress as both theological and poetic might also, perhaps, mean that poetic vocation might be what leads him into danger of straying from doctrinal orthodoxy. Martin Dubois speculates on Hopkins' attraction towards Scotus as "(an) opposition to the dominant mode of Catholic theology at the time, a rigidified Thomism which ran contrary to Hopkins' instinct for discerning God's animating touch in nature's diversity as in human uniqueness ... the world is charged with the grandeur of God.''[563] This argument for an attraction for Scotism might be seen in a reading of Hopkins' *Duns Scotus' Oxford,* and how it expresses a deep appreciation of Scotus, even approaching veneration:

> Towery city and branchy between towers:
> Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmèd, lard-charmèd, rook-
> racked, river-rounded;
> The Dapple-eared lily below there; that country and
> town did
> Once encounter in, here coped and poised powers;
>
> The hast a base and brackish skirt there, sours
> That neighbour-nature thy grey beauty is grounded
> Best in; graceless growth, thou hast confounded
> Rural rural keeping-folk, flocks, and flowers.
> Yet ah! This air I gather and I release
> He lived on; these weeds and waters, these walls are
> what
> He haunted who of all men most sways my spirits to
> peace;
>
> Of realty the rarest-veinèd traveller; a not
> Rivalled insight, be rival Italy or Greece;
> Who fired France for Mary without spot.[564]

This is a richly crafted sonnet, using the rhetorical devices which characterise much of Hopkins' work when he is most lyrical;[565] alliteration, enjambement, sprung rhythm, inversion and densely packed imagery. This is a

[562] F R Leavis, *The Common Pursuit,* [LEAVIS REF???] Leavis, F R, *The Common Pursuit* (Middlesex, UK; Penguin Books, 1969 (1952)) pp. 51-2, quoted in Dubois, Martin, *Hopkins' Beauty,* in Bevis, Matthew (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford, UK; Oxford University Press, 2013), p.549
[563] , Dubois, *Hopkins' Beauty* p.552
[564] Wordsworth Poetry Library edition p.40
[565] see the sections later in this chapter, which discuss his poetic technique in more detail

powerful admiration of Scotus. One could suspect that by being in sympathy with Scotism as against Thomism, Hopkins is courting theological 'eccentricity.'[566]

There is a sense of wonder in the journal entry where he names Scotus as the source of a possible "mercy from God:"

> After the examinations we went for our holiday out to Douglas in the Isle of Man... Aug.3 At this time I had first begun to get hold of the copy of Scotus on the Sentences in the Baddely library and was flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm. It may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God. But just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus.[567]

If inscape is here thought of as somehow linked to Scotus as a 'mercy from God,' it can be considered as a theological-poetic possibility.

4.2. *Ecce* – instress and inscape

Instress and inscape

Inscape and instress are significant neologisms which Hopkins creates. In his notebooks, examples of the term inscape are prolific. Two examples suffice:

> May 11th, 1871 - It was a lovely sight – The bluebells in your hand baffle you with their inscape, made to every sense: if you draw your fingers through them they are lodged and struggle/with a shock of wet heads ... then there is the faint honey smell[568]
> April 8, 1873 – The ashtree growing in the corner of the garden was felled ... looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to

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[566] On the contemporary Catholic theological context: "Decisive support for (the revival of Thomist thought) came with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879; "Eternal Father"). ... Leo asked especially for a recovery of the wisdom of Aquinas, whom he hailed as "the special bulwark and glory of the Catholic Faith." ... In 1880 Leo made Aquinas patron of all Roman Catholic schools. The Code of canon Law of 1917, the official compilation of church law, required that Catholic teachers of philosophy and religion follow the method and principles of Aquinas. This established Thomism as the official philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church." [Thomas F O'Meara, *Thomism,* in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* online access https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thomism, accessed 9/10/2016]
[567] Journal, June 29th – August 3rd, 1872, in Hopkins, G M (ed. House, Humphry) *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London, UK; Oxford University Press, 1959), p.162
[568] Ibid. p.145

die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed
any more.[569]

Instress is hard to pin down as something separate to inscape except for
perhaps having a different emphasis – for example

> Sept. 1, 1868 - The all-powerfulness of instress in mode
> and the immediateness of its effect (in the architecture
> of a chapel) are very remarkable[570]
> July 13, 1874 - The comet – I have seen it at bedtime in
> the west, with head to the ground, white, a soft well-
> shaped tail, not big: I felt a certain awe and instress, a
> feeling of strangeness, flight (it hangs like a shuttlecock
> at the height, before it falls) and of threatening.[571]

Charles Williams on Hopkins

Instress/inscape can be seen as the 'isness' inherent in the object, but
also as the subjective sensitivity which generates poetic response to the seen
image. However the resulting poetic work does not 'spontaneously flow' without
technique, although it might seem to do so.[572] This 'apparent effortlessness' of
the flow of much of his poetry could be compared to the novelist Italo Calvino's
ironic remark about the work that is needed to produce the effect of
spontaneity.[573] To analyse how Hopkins' technique mediates inscape/instress,
Charles Williams gives a useful insight, in his 1930 introduction to the second
edition of *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*.[574]

Williams expresses a sensitivity to technique in Hopkins' poetry which is
amenable to an argument that in his work *haecceitas* becomes *ecceitas*. He
focuses on Hopkins' use of alliteration as a way of poetic being. He argues that
Hopkins' sound is integral to bringing the 'isness' of its content further into life,
achieving this by bringing words into a tight binding together which brings not so

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[569] Journal, April 8, 1873, ibid. p.174
[570] Journal, Sept 1,1868 ibid. p.119
[571] Journal, July 13, 1874, ibid. p.198
[572] Hopkins' journal entries record how instress occurs, in 'the thing itself' and in his response;
however the poems differ from the journal entries in their craftedness.
[573] Calvino reportedly said that in his technique "a very patient elaboration of style is needed to
produce the effect of spontaneity. Spontaneity is not the starting point but the destination."
[Ribatti, Domenico *Omaggio a Italo Calvino - Autobiografia di uno scrittore*. (Manduria-Bari-
Roma; Piero Lacaita Editore, 1995), p.12] [this author's translation].
[574] Charles Williams, Introduction, in Hopkins, G M (ed. Bridges, Robert) *Poems of Gerard Manley
Hopkins* (Oxford, UK; Oxford University Press 1930)

much a poem of words but a poem of 'thing.' The 'thing' is a unity of response where

> 'Thou hast bound bones … fastened me flesh.' It is as if the imagination, seeking for expression, had found both verb and substantive at one rush, had begun almost to say them at once, and had separated them only because the intellect had reduced the original unity into divided but related sounds …(t)he very race of the words and lines hurries on our emotion; our minds are left behind … because they cannot work at a quick enough rate. 'Cast by conscience out' is not a phrase; it is a word. So is 'spendsavour salt.' Each is thought and spoken all at once; and this is largely (as it seems) the cause and (as it is) the effect of their alliteration. They are like words of which we remember the derivations; they present their unity and their elements at once.[575]

Williams' comparison to words and their derivations is a good one; words are 'supercharged' with content brought into them by the alliteration of the phrase which brings the sound of it, as a direct result, into the poem. In fact, this could also be seen as an intense sensitivity of poetic response and craft where alliteration also becomes onomatopoeic. For example, "cast by conscience out" brings the hardness of the 'c' sound in to embody the hardness of conscience which confronts the mind. Similarly, "spendsavour salt" embodies the 'slipperiness' of the poem's "liar" who is evasive in staying away from the light. *'Beamblind,'* too, works onomatopoeically as well as alliteratively by using 'b,' 'm' and 'n' sounds perhaps to suggest fumbling or muttering sounds.[576]

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[575] Ibid., pp. xi-xii
[576] Second stanza, *The Candle Indoors*, ibid., p.46:

> Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire
> Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault:
> You there are master, do your own desire;
>
> What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault
>
> In a neighbour deft-handed? Are you that liar
> And, cast by conscience out, spendsavour salt?

Although Williams is sensitive to how crafted sound embodies the nature of what it conveys, this thesis' reading of Hopkins departs from his claim that "Hopkins was not the child of vocabulary but of passion."[577] Hopkins is indeed "the child … of passion," as the intensity of alliterative response, like indeed all his poetic sensitivity, demonstrates. However, to suggest that he is less a "child of vocabulary" is perhaps misleading. He is a superb wordsmith, and this is better seen as a fusion of vocabulary and passion. The craft of poetic creation is rightly seen by Williams as resulting in the poem as a level of being into which the reader is drawn, and he expresses this graphically:

> Alliteration, repetition, interior rhyme, all do the same work: first, they persuade us of the existence of a vital and surprising poetic energy; second, they suspend our attention from any rest until the whole thing, whatever it may be, is said … (phrases) proceed, they ascend, they lift us (breathlessly and dazedly clinging) with them, and when at last they rest and we loose hold and totter away we are sometimes too concerned with our own bruises to understand exactly what the experience has been ... (his) experience (of inner wrestling') is expressed largely in continual shocks of strength and beauty. [578]

In this fusion, an ex-centric reading of Manley Hopkin's poetry as in fact the child of *haecceitas* discerns an enfleshment of words, or a wording of enfleshment, which will be considered in an autistic hermeneutic as a theologically thought incarnational metaphor in an intensity of fascination.

Williams sees Hopkins as approaching, but not actually being mystical.[579] He sees a fusion in his work of two elements where poetic response (ie., the poet's emotional response to the world which generates his poetry) and processing of that response co-exist – he refers to "a passionate emotion" and "a passionate intellect."[580] If Hopkins "approaches" the territory of mysticism, this might be seen in a theological thinking related to chapter two's apophatic fiction. However, instead of absence being the main focus, presence is more

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[577] Hopkins, G M (ed. Bridges), *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* p. x
[578] Ibid., pp. xxii-xxiii, xiv
[579] Ibid., p. xiv
[580] Ibid., p. xv

apt. This is because his "passionate intellect" and "passionate emotion" work in his poetry to be an (apparently spontaneous) outpouring of *ecce! – 'behold!'*

Pitch and ecceitas

Ecce draws on the vocabulary of the Latin of Hopkins' scholarship as a classicist, but also invokes the *ecce homo* of Christ. Hopkins as poet-priest uses words with care, interrogating them as linguist, theologian and poet.

A significant example of the fusion of theology and aesthetics is in his use of the term 'pitch.' In aesthetic terms, he uses it in his Lecture Notes on Rhetoric as a description defining a poetic quality: he points out that English language is not tonal, relying on stress rather than pitch, but French and Greek use pitch to accentuate word sound. As a reader of all three languages, he discerns these two characteristics, stress and pitch, and uses an interesting metaphor for their presence:

> We may think of words as heavy bodies, as indoor or out of door objects of nature or of man's art. Now every visible palpable body has a centre of gravity round which it is in balance and a centre of illumination or highspot or quickspot up to which it is lighted and down from which it is shaded. The centre of gravity is like the accent of stress, the highspot like the accent of pitch, for pitch is like light and colour, stress like weight … as it is only glazed bodies that shew the highspot well so there may be languages in which the pitch is unnoticeable. English is of this kind, the accent of stress strong, that of pitch weak – only they go together for the most part.[581]

He is able to explain this clearly because he has 'an ear for language.' But an aesthetics of theology also discerns accents in actions, and for this he uses the same term, 'pitch.' One could similarly say that he has 'an ear for what theology writes,' as it is spoken in action and spiritual practice. It is telling that he employs an aesthetic term (pitch) in a similar structure of contrasting aspects, when further exploring a moral theology/psychology (*'of personality)* in his *Prima Hebdomada* meditation:

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[581] Hopkins (ed. House), *Journals & Papers* pp. 223-4

> Freedom of pitch, that is/ self determination, is in the chooser himself and in his choosing faculty; freedom of play is in the execution; freedom of field is in the object, the field of choice.[582]

Pitch is contrasted with quiddity:

> Two eggs precisely like, two birds precisely alike: if they had been exchanged no difference would have been made. It is the self then that supplies the determination, the difference, but the nature that supplies the exercise, and in these two things freedom consists. This is what I have before somewhere worked out in a paper on freedom and personality and I think I used the terms freedom of pitch and freedom of play: they are good at all events and the two together express moral freedom.[583]

Pitch is, it seems, equivalent to both a poetic and a moral/spiritual instress:

> It is to be remarked that choice in the sense of the taking of one and leaving of another real alternative is not what freedom of pitch really and strictly lies in. It is choice as when in English we say 'because I choose,' which means no more than (and with precision does mean) / I instress my will to so-and-so. And this freedom and no other, no freedom of field, the divine will has towards its own necessary acts. And no freedom is more perfect; for freedom of field is only in accident …. So that this pitch might be expressed, if it were good English, the doing be, the doing choose, the doing so-and-so in that sense.[584]

From here, crucially, Hopkins is now in a position to conclude, "Is not this pitch or whatever we call it then the same as Scotus' *ecceitas*?"[585] Seeing pitch, both moral-existential and poetic, as *ecceitas* (when he 'really meant to say *haecceitas'),* could then be a real and powerful fusion and inner reconciliation for Hopkins as poet/priest.

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[582] Ibid., p.326
[583] Ibid., p.323
[584] Ibid., p.328
[585] Ibid.

4.3. Scotus and *haecceitas*

Hopkins' possible affinity with Scotus has been discussed, and to develop how this might result in a poetic *ecceitas,* this section will explore, briefly, two relevant and distinct Scotist terms, which are univocity and *haecceitas.*

Univocity

Univocity is important for understanding how a 'Franciscan optimism' might be discerned in Hopkins' view of instress and poetry. As a member of the Jesuit order, Hopkins is moving away here from his own theological mainstream towards the Franciscan tradition where Scotus is situated. Univocity might be seen as a condition necessary for the theory of individuation which Scotus terms *haecceitas,* so it will be discussed here briefly.

Univocity is a term in logic concerning predication, and its use for language concerning God is championed by Scotus in thirteenth century Scholastic debate in a dispute with Aquinas, who argues instead for the necessity of analogical language concerning God. Scholastic debates of the thirteenth century such as that between Aquinas' analogical predication and Scotus' univocal predication regarding God show the influence of the rediscovery of Aristotle in texts translated from Arabic to Latin.

The problem for Aristotle, as a philosopher, is how to speak of the divine, and this requires a shift from physics (natural philosophy) to meta-physics, above natural philosophy. He does this by taking the analogical move from known to unknown as a conjecture. In effect, his logic is the extension of the scientific method without the facility of empirical testing. Jennifer Ashworth writes:

> Aquinas makes considerable use of his ontological distinction between univocal causes, whose effects are fully like them, and non-univocal causes, whose effects are not fully like them. God is an analogical cause, and this is the reality that underlies our use of analogical language.[586]

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[586] Ashworth, Jennifer E, "*Medieval Theories of Analogy*", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/analogy-medieval/>. 6. *Thomas Aquinas* accessed 12/05/2016

God as Prime Mover is utterly transcendent in philosophical terms; for human language, ways to talk about God

> (cannot) be purely univocal, for God's manner of existence and his relationship to his properties are sufficiently different from ours that the words must be used in somewhat different senses. [587]

In contrast to this, Scotus argues that language, in some terms at least, can be predicated of the divine and the human in exactly the same way, so that language is one, and so human and divine being can both, to some extent, partake in one linguistic world. Scotus writes:

> Univocity: Notwithstanding the irreducible ontological diversity between God and creatures, there are concepts under whose extension both God and creatures fall, so that the corresponding predicate expressions are used with exactly the same sense in predications about God as in predications about creatures.[588]

Universal sacrament

Scotus follows Hugh de Victor in a concept of sacramental participation. So Denys Turner writes that "truly, for Hugh, the sacramentality of things is universal."[589] The difference between sacrament and symbol is conflated into one, though, so that Turner can write that for de Victor "all nature, all history and all Scripture are, within the dispensation of grace, a complex of symbolic representations of the divine, a universe whose reality is sacramental."[590]

That being said, for Scotus univocity is a union in predicative terms, not ontological terms. Sacrament and symbol operate in such a way that, at least in some senses, human language is not separated from divine language, but language is one. This union at the level of language opens up the possibility of what Mary Beth Ingham calls a "Franciscan optimism" of language (see below).

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[587] ibid.
[588] Scotus, Duns, *Ordinatio* in *Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Duns Scotus, Ockham* (trans. & ed. Spade, Paul Vincent) (Indianapolis, Indiana; Hackett Publishing,1994) 1, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, n. 163, quoted in Williams, Thomas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.578
[589] Turner, *The Darkness of God* p.106
[590] Ibid. p.107

This can then be argued in terms of a poetic dwelling which Hopkins will develop in his poetic *haecceitas*.

Ingham's 'Franciscan Optimism'

In Mary Beth Ingham's reading of Scotus, the creation celebrated in Franciscan love is God's handiwork. God is artist, and creation is the art work.[591] Where Aquinas' Dominican metaphysics of analogy could be read as the pessimism of alienation from the prime Mover as the artist, Scotus' Franciscan optimism sees the world as a poetry written by God, and able to be read directly as such in sacramental poetic participation. Univocity is the metaphysics of this audacious theological claim. Here the link to autistic fascination is that God's loving delight in the art work of creation sidesteps pragmatic, ostensive language in a poetry of free flowing, unconditional love. This is a language of poetic being, leading to a metaphysics of individuation as Scotus' neologism *haecceitas*.

Aquinas stays within the Aristotelian predication of individuation in terms of natural philosophy. So in his metaphysics individuation is '*quid*-itas' (that-ness), amenable to classification and definition in the hierarchy of being. In radical opposition, Scotist individuation is '*haecc*-eitas' (this-ness). This is utter theological optimism where the individual is amenable to a predication of supernatural philosophy. This is the '*this*' particular and unrepeatable individual, which exists in the ontology of the supernatural art work. It is unrepeatable because it does not depend upon a quiddity which could be replicated. '*This*' is the valued creature of the individual sparrow, not one of which falls without your Father knowing. *Quidditas* belongs to being and matter according to material properties. *Haecceitas* hangs freely in what Scotus calls less than numerical unity.

Haecceitas is the non-qualitative nature of the individual: Scotus writes:

> Anything with a real, proper, and sufficient unity less
> than numerical is not of itself one by numerical unity —

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[591] Scotus is writing as a Franciscan, not long after the order's inception. 'God as artist' could be seen in terms of Francis' love of animals as part of the created order (also preaching to the fishes) and in the canticle to the sun, where Francis himself is also the artist, as the poem's author.

> that is, it is not of itself a *this*. But the proper, real or
> sufficient unity of the nature existing in this stone is less
> than numerical unity. Therefore the nature existing in
> this stone is not of itself one by numerical unity.[592]

Again, as in univocity, this is linguistic predication, not strictly truly even an ontology of *esse* but a kind of anti-ontology, close, even, to mysticism and poetics. In fact, it is emphatically *not* ontology because *haecceitas* stands in opposition to ontological quiddity. This non-attributive, non-quidditive being can in Hopkins become the being of poetic faith by which the art work of love exists.

This is where an autistic fascination of poetic faith can be, inhabiting metaphor only as the truly real, beyond quidditive being. By being excluded from quidditive being it more truly inhabits being, and this, when it is read autistically, is the paradox of absolute autism existing as absence and presence. It hangs by a thread, impossibly. Thinking of absolute autism as an *ecceitas*, which this chapter will, in conclusion, do, is the impossible possibility of non-quidditive sacred individuation, and this is possible as a poetic mode of being. Ellsberg gives an example of instress as a theological individuation surely haecceic:

> Hopkins described his own distinctiveness, and his taste
> for it in other things, as a mark of being "highly
> pitched." The stress of a high pitch was toward God: the
> more a thing was isolated by its particularity, the more
> it would strive to share in the infinite.[593]

Symbol and Sacrament

In Hopkins' thinking, *haecceitas* as real presence changes the dynamic of language, metaphor and symbol. Real presence in language is not quidditive, because it is *vox*, not *esse*. Cotter and Ingham both dwell on the argument that Hopkins rejects symbol in favour of sacrament: Ellsberg writes that

> Hopkins' sacramental "physicality" proceeded mostly
> from his understanding of the status of sacrament as

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[592] Scotus (ed. Spade), *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 1, q. 1, n. 8 7:395
[593] Ellsberg, Margaret, *Created to Praise: The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London, UK; Oxford University Press, 1987) p.91

<div style="text-align: right;">distinct from symbol and revealed his effort to
harmonise the details of the physical world and God.[594]</div>

Hopkins writes that "all things therefore are charged with love, are charged with God and if we know how to touch them give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring, and tell of him."[595] This would be a univocal predication of God's "isness" in creation, available for poetic instressed telling ['*uni-vox*'] which is the sacrament of poetic participation. "Knowing how to touch them" so that they *"give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring, and tell of him"* is a poetic vocation, or perhaps better, a mode of being and perception for the poet, priestly vocation or not.

However Hopkins *is* a priest, and his thinking of that God-chargedness is utterly incarnational. Where nature can "give off sparks*,"* "all things, charged with love*"* have a haecceic significance.

Haecceitas is a theo-poetic quality where symbol is much more than analogy, instead becoming sacrament. Ellsberg comments that "natural objects did not *remind him* of God, as they might have reminded the Neoclassic or Romantic poets, they were, in a sense, God."[596] [597] He writes in terms of being lifted out of a trivialising of the world which arguably he sees in the logical

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[594] Ibid. p.75

[595] Hopkins, G M (ed. Devlin, C) *The Sermons and devotional writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins* ed. Christopher (London, UK; Oxford University Press, 1959) p.195 quoted in Ellsberg, *Created to Praise* p.79

[596] Ellsberg, *Created to Praise* p.74

[597] *See also Burgess, Michael,* Gerard Manley Hopkins and Priest-poets: *"What I think gives Hopkins his unique potency in vision and poem is that ability to look and see, and see to the heart of all that is. In 1872 Hopkins chanced upon Dun Scotus' concept of haecceitas: the thisness of every individual being in God's creation. This was a eureka moment or a Damascus experience for the poet. He wrote that "it may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God". It was a mercy for it harnessed his observation of the infinite detail of the natural world to his love of Christ. Hopkins looked and looked, and he somehow unravelled the complex beauty of creation by taking the time to stand and stare: to look, to ponder, and to find the words that express the reality he was seeing. We gather here 126 years after his death, and I think that is what can provide a beacon and a light in this hectic pace of life and movement and progress which many call "the hurry syndrome". We easily get caught up in it, and it leads to an offhand way with words. It is the cult of immediate satisfaction that marks our world and prevents us from taking the time to look and think and express. Hopkins looks at sunsets and then he mines his repository of words to find exactly and precisely the ones that will convey the special quality of each sunset. As a result he likens them to yellow lilies, golden candle wax, the flowers of the wild mallow, pink and mauve, crimson ice and oil. It is part and parcel of his delight and wonder at creation around him. At Stonyhurst after a shower of rain he was often to be seen running down the path that led to the college to stare at the quartz in the pathway, glistening in the sun. "The slate slabs of the urinals even are frosted with graceful sprays," he wrote in 1870." [Talk delivered at St Bueno's, online pdf access at* www.newman.org.uk/upload/Gerard%20Manley%20Hopkins%20M%20Burgess.pdf *accessed 10/10/2016*

positivism of his contemporary culture, and this is through an utter incarnational thinking. So he writes at the time of his conversion to Roman Catholicism "I think that the trivialness of life is, and personally to each one, ought to be seen to be, done away with by the Incarnation."[598] This is a clarion call for a poetic *ecce* of a theological *haecceitas*, and John Llewellyn argues for this, in his analysis of Hopkins' term *ecceitas*, which can now be discussed as bringing them together.

4.4. *Ecceitas*

Llewellyn's argument for ecceitas

It was explained earlier that inscape and instress are Hopkins' neologisms related to the 'pitch' of identity, in three senses. Firstly, of the person as moral agent, secondly, as a quality of words as they are formed in language, and thirdly, of creation, natural and man-made, both in itself and in its reception in the person as responding agent. As shown above, inscape and instress are loosely equated by critics with *haecceitas*. However John Llewellyn refines this identification. He speculates on Hopkins' neologism *'ecceitas'* suggesting it would be, rather than a *'haec-citas,'* an *'ecce-itas.'* *'Ecce'* (*'look, behold, here is'*) could then be an *'isness'* of the kind of showing-forth Llewellyn describes as epiphany.[599] Llewellyn argues for Hopkins' neologistic strategy as an "unorthodox orthography:"

> Hopkins' unorthodox orthography gains some legitimacy
> from the fact that an earlier form of haec is haece,
> where ec is the root of the Latin word oculus, eye. … "Is
> not this pitch … eicceitas?"[600]

'Ecce' is grammatically not nominative but vocative, not stating but appealing to the hearer, as an address. Llewellyn comments:

> Address is the appeal that the sheer existence of
> something or someone makes in which the goodness for
> that entity of its existence attracts our attention. The

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appeal is the call (appeal, *geheiss*, vocation) 'Listen!' or 'Look!' It is the ecce that can be heard or seen in the haecceity of the individual singularity that according to Scotus, followed by Hopkins, is in a relation of formal distinction with a thing's common nature.[601]

This 'address' is the expression of a relationality which, again, can be thought theologically as participation in a universal sacrament of language. As such, *ecceitas* is also epiphany.

Ecceitas as Epiphany

Llewellyn observes that:

> In (a) journal entry Hopkins writes: 'standing before the gateway I had an instress …[602] This could lead one to think that having an instress is something like experiencing a hot flush or a throb of toothache. The experience could equally well be described more grandly as an epiphany. That Hopkins would describe it as an apocalypse and a grace is suggested by the apposition he makes in his sentence 'The first intention then of God outside himself, as they say, ad extra, outwards, the first outstress of God's power, was Christ.' … Outstress is a person's or persons' expression of instress, an instance of the doing that expresses his or her being.[603]

Llewellyn invokes Heidegger's gaze,[604] and following Heidegger, he can cast eicceitas as ontic rather than ontological:

> The whole inscape of (a) landscape, if an inscape could ever be whole, is what we might be tempted to call its essence, but that term is for Hopkins too liable to conjure up a traditionally philosophical conceptuality that freezes the flux, robs the 'on a sudden' flush and flash of its freshness and reduces the 'move' shot to a photographic still … Recall Heidegger's 'As for me, I never really stare at the landscape … to do that is to stunt the growth and to neglect the flush the flush implied in phusein, the Ancient Greek word for … living, active … [605]

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[601] Ibid. p.91
[602] Hopkins, G M (ed. House), *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* pp. 216-7
[603] Llewellyn, John, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Spell of Duns Scotus* p.14
[604] This is what chapter three discussed, when Dasein is able to see the tree in bloom, by 'not thinking.'
[605] Llewellyn, John, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Spell of Duns Scotus* p.25

> "What is the running instress, so independent of at least the immediate scape of the thing, which unmistakeably distinguishes and individuates things?"[606]

Llewellyn concludes that "No less than Hopkins, Scotus is concerned to provoke in his reader a sense of 'as if for the first and last time." That is one way of spelling out what they both mean by haecceity."[607] [608]

4.5 Hopkins, ecceitas and autism

Ecceitas has been established as a literary-theological category, and now this section provides the 'litmus test' as to how hospitable a discourse of *ecceitas* could be for the autistic literary-theological hermeneutic.

Fascination in Hopkins' poetry

Before arguing for autistic fascination as a reading of *ecceitas* in an autistic reading of Hopkins' writing, it will be useful to explore how that fascination operates in terms of the three traits discussed in the introduction. To recap, these three facets converge in a unity of the sense of immersion – firstly, immersion in detail, secondly, immersion in the sensory, and thirdly, immersion in metaphoricity,[609] and Hopkins' writing is immersive in all these three senses. A glorious "oddness" of autism[610] might find resonance with Hopkins' self-understanding:

> It is the virtue of design, pattern or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped.[611]

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[606] Hopkins (ed. House), *Journals and Note-books* pp.153-4 quoted in Llewellyn, John, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Spell of Duns Scotus* p.20

[607] Llewellyn, John, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Spell of Duns Scotus* p.7

[608] Further research, beyond the scope of this thesis, could look at Hopkins' essay on Parmenides, the thinking of the ontological and the ontic, and think about how this would relate to Marion's saturated phenomenon, and Heidegger's *Dasien*. Dennis Potter's and James Joyce's stretched language could also be compared to MH's enjambement and neologistic combinations.

[609] Which becomes Incarnational metaphor.

[610] See glossary – autistic personality types

[611] Hopkins, G M (ed. House, Humphry), *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose* (Middlesex, UK; Penguin Classics, 1985) vol. I, p.66, quoted in Ellsberg, *Created to Praise* p.90. Thinking of the word queer anachronistically could perhaps also find evidence to support its use for a theological queer narrative, but this is not the aim of this thesis' project.

Reading this "oddness" in an autistic hermeneutic makes it possible to argue for an "oddness" which autistic being might recognise as the potential of autistic art, in the following terms.

Attention to detail – 'the geek'

Returning to the concept of autistic fascination discussed at the start of this paper, an autistic hermeneutic can recognise its own autism in terms of fascination in Hopkins' writing. Before thinking this theologically, it is useful to revisit the traits of fascination, and see how they might play out in a reading of his work.

Firstly, absolute autism is present in 'geeky' extreme attention to detail.

The 'geek' archetype of autism[612] draws on the first aspect of autistic fascination, which is an immersion in phenomena through extreme attention to fine detail, often to the point of obsession. Hopkins' notebooks are full of his detailed observation of what he sees – art, architecture, music, science, (his paper *Statistics and Free Will* is sadly lost) and most of all the natural world. His sketches are in fine detail, complementing his writing and as a fusion of scientific curiosity and aesthetic appreciation.[613] Attentiveness is key to this. For example, a stream merits a detail-rich stanza in *Inversnaid*:

> Degged with dew, dappled with dew
> Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads
> through,
> Wiry heathpacks, flitches of fern,
> And the beadbonny ash that sits over the burn.

Sensory sensitivity

Inversnaid also embodies the second facet of autistic fascination, sensory sensitivity. It is inseparable from attentiveness to detail because both are extreme sensitivities to the environment. Sensory sensitivity means that what is

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[612] A reference to Luke Jackson's influential autistic teen autobiography (Jackson, Luke; *Geeks, Freaks and Asperger Syndrome: A User's Guide to Adolescence* (London, UK; Jessica Kingsley, 2002) and Silberman's *Neurotribes:* 'geeks' are inverted from figures of ridicule, pejoratively labelled 'odd,' to figures of creative, lateral thinking and of great value.

[613] There is a wonderfully diverse and eclectic proliferation of line drawings and maps in his notebooks, eg. Hopkins (ed. House) *Journals & Papers* pp.144-147, 448

perceived through the senses is so close as to be a source sometimes of torment and sometimes of delight. Immersion operates in the poem as not merely observation but union with the nature of the object. So, what is also evident in this example is the immersion in sound through alliteration. I have argued elsewhere that his alliteration has an onomatopoeic character, unlike what Charles Williams calls Swinburne's '*useless alliteration*'[614] So in this case, the parallelism and clustering of 'd' sounds could be the tricking of the stream, and in line three the 'f' sounds could be the rustling of the fern. This is an immersion in the sounds, as well as the visuals, of the minute observation of autistic fascination.

Alliteration, rhythm, rhyme and conjoining poetic neologisms create a texture of attentiveness to sound-image which is a meticulous seeing of nature, a meticulous thinking of image, and a meticulous listening to language. The metaphors of groin and tread, and the neologistic joining of bead and bonny are also the fruits of attentiveness to groins, treads and beads so that the metaphoric relationship of groin and the cutting of a stream path into the brae, of treading and the descent of a stream, and beads and dew, work by an attentive seeing of phenomena. It will now be seen that these relationships are strange and atypical, and are also in deep sympathy with autistic fascination.

Autistic incarnational metaphor

Hopkins' abnormal thinking of analogy is sympathetic to an autistic hermeneutic in its deviation from metaphor as straightforward 'carrying across' of referent from referred, where by analogy the referent is a symbol by analogy. Autism's relationship to metaphor is to take the metaphor literally by avoiding the ostensive, pragmatic intent of metaphors.

Insistence on abnormality of the thinking of 'taking things literally' does not mean that metaphor dies. On the contrary, it lives more fully by inhabiting the metaphor in a creative relationship. For example in *The May Magnificat*, an autistic reading of metaphor would ask '*why, how* is the bloom on the apple a

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[614] see above, section 2.2

'drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple?'' and '*why, how* is the earth 'mothering?' Blood and foam apples and the earth mother can exist in the space of the poem – willing suspension of disbelief is thought autistically as taking things literally, and revelling in that autistic privilege. Hopkins' metaphoricity differs from Coleridge's symbolism, however, because of the poetic intensity which is driven by a theological conviction rooted in sacrament. Ellsberg writes:

> The particularity of what Hopkins said in his poems revealed more about his theology than most of his carefully groomed arguments: the poems stressed out his faith. Each poem became a credo, with words as sacramental elements, his experience as the transcendent force, and Hopkins himself as the celebrant.[615]

But it could be wondered if the converse might equally be true – it could be that it is Hopkins the poet whose sensibility drives him to the need for an Incarnational theology. He is both poet and priest, and his poetry is the expression of instress and pitch, almost a guilty secret, written against his will as a 'vice,' making him, as noted earlier, 'queer.'[616]

Things "tell of (God)" but are also "charged with God," so the telling is not analogy but univocity. In poetic univocal metaphor, which properly in Aristotelian terms ought to be a contradiction, an autistic hermeneutic revels in this impossibility by taking that charged-ness literally.

4.6 The autism of the poet?

Ecceitas and ex-centricity

As this thesis has repeatedly emphasised for each of its literary-theological primary sources, this reading does not try to make Hopkins or his work 'autistic.' The argument in this section proceeds by reading his work through an autistic lens. As ever, this is "a" reading, not "the" reading. This works in all the 'trinity' of autistic aspects, although in this chapter the focus has been on autistic fascination as a way to think of participation, in terms of

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[615] Ellsberg, *Created to Praise* p.96
[616] Hopkins, *Letters* vol. I, p.66, quoted in Ellsberg, *Created to Praise* p.90.

ecceitas.[617] It also works by thinking of Hopkins' work as poet-priest in his organic, insolubly fused poetic and theological thinking, and how original, "odd," and 'ex-centric' this is. Adopting a particular autistic thinking of Hopkins' ex-centricity, the theological-poetic-autistic hermeneutic claims a privileged autistic insight into Hopkins' poetry, in terms of a neurotribal creative contribution to theological thinking. The autistic theological thinking of this argument, firstly, might validate what seems an impasse of "eccentric' and (merely) personal reality"[618] by conceiving of it as the [odd, creative] solitariness of universal autism. This in itself could still, at first sight, leave the hermeneutic open to the charge of solipsism, but this is not so. Firstly, Hopkins is not writing 'in a bubble' of subjectivity. He is "isolated" inasmuch as he is a creative, original thinker, but at the end of the day he does not engage in "flights of fancy" without forgetting his religious vocation. His poetics of *ecceitas* may be isolated phenomenon by being an original, new concept, but it is theologically grounded, albeit in a marginal theological thinking.

This chapter has argued that he is a poet-priest whose "eccentric" lyrical vision of "the thing in itself" is a seamlessly crafted resolution of his twin vocations, as poet and priest. *Ecceitas* has been considered *through [and only through]* an autistic hermeneutic and appropriation as autistic fascination; but now, a related question arises. Could autistic artists actually express an eccentric [ex-centric] *ecceitas* in their work? It is here that the glimmer of an autistic hermeneutic appreciates, in the ex-centricity of Hopkins' thought, a move which will now speculate on poetic sacramental language as expressed in art which can operate successfully within an autistic hermeneutic.

Celebrating the value of autistic literal metaphor requires moving away from stereotypes of autism. In place of seeing "failure" to decode ostensive metaphor as the end of the story, the divergence from metaphor as ostensive

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[617] Space does not permit a fuller outworking of the autistic trinity in this chapter; however mindfulness of separation is implicit at those points where *ecceitas* has been compared to apophatic fiction. Likewise, incarnational metaphor is implicitly present in this chapter, inasmuch as *ecceitas*, as a theology of a universal sacrament of language, is a theological thinking which makes metaphor theologically 'real,' so that autistic theological literal metaphor is here thought of as instress.

[618] Thinking of this "impasse" of Victorian poetry is revisiting the discussion of Cartesian subjectivity in chapter one, and again, the argument is that an autistic theological thinking is able to outwit neurotypical "common sense" narrative; this time, by its thinking in terms of *ecceitas*. In fact the "thing in itself" of *ecceitas* could in a sense be seen as Kantian.

has been what is at stake. Here there will be objections from clinical understandings of autism. The autist as literary-theological hermeneut has to have developed the ability to read figurative language; precisely what the clinical definition says s/he can't do. This section offers a radical critique of the clinical narrative's diagnostic presuppositions. It could be possible to see a circularity of the logic of diagnostic thinking. If we define autists as high systematisers of 'Silicon-valley type' 'geekiness' with non-poetic temperaments, this means that therefore we will define poetic temperaments as, by definition, non-autistic. This misses the possibility of an autism which takes its literal mindedness into a profile which can, and does, employ figurative language. This could be something precisely like the Incarnational *poiesis* which Hopkins offers, where touching things which give off sparks is seen as autistic fascination. Baron Cohen's scatter graph of the empathy-systematising quotient[619] fails to speculate on the nature of the minority of diagnosed autists who are not systematisers (even allowing that systematisation is assumed to be an unpoetic, uncreative activity).[620] There is also an argument that, just as the different female autistic profile has led to what is increasingly seen as a vast under-diagnosis,[621] so autistic poets might also be missing from understandings of autism. The argument here is that these autists might engage in fact highly creatively with metaphor and symbolism, successfully negotiating the relationship of symbol and referent, by surpassing it. The argument goes further, that this relationship is an abnormal one which is a particular gift. It's not merely the poet who is charged with love for things, it is the things which are charged themselves with love, which autistic fascination is able to discern. Autistic fascination is eccentric. Similarly, 'taking things a bit too far' is precisely the charge laid at the saint whose ex-cess makes her ecc-entric. Similarly again, 'having his head in the clouds' marks out the useless eccentricity of the poet. Poetic autism is detached from normality as a social-communicative pragmatic impairment of cognitive empathy, as the trinity of autism has explained in previous chapters. Conceivably, that detachment could be both cause and effect of a sacramental, poetic autistic fascination.

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[619] See glossary in the Introduction
[620] See Baron Cohen, *Autism and Creativity*
[621] See Stewart et al., http://www.swanscotland.com/

As Kingfishers Catch Fire

To end this chapter, the best conclusion is simply to turn to a poem, as Hopkins' quintessentially theological expression of inscape and instress, selving, pitch, univocity, *haecceitas,* in a poem employing all his rhetorical skills in sprung rhythm, rhyme, external and internal, parallelism, enjambment, and alliteration. In its incarnational nature it expresses the Franciscan optimism of a tortured Jesuit whose terrible sonnets[622] are also the struggle of the priest finding salvation in poetry and whose lyric, sacramental poetry is praise. For an autistic theological hermeneutic, its fascination is an autistic *haecceitas* where God's autism shines in sensory delight. An autistic union is possible not only in wordless sensory instress, but also in words, when these are metaphor read atypically as sacramental inscape.

> As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
> As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
> Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
> Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
> Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
> Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*
>
> I say móre: the just man justices;
> Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;
> Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
> Chríst — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
> To the Father through the features of men's faces.[623]

This selfhood is, as an autistic reading of Teresa of Àvila has made clear, the self of *autos,* not *ego.*

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[622] Terrible, in the sense of the place of anguish; *'To Seem the Stranger', 'I Wake and Feel', 'Patience', 'My Own Heart', 'Carrion Comfort', and 'No Worst, There Is None'.*

[623] Hopkins, G M, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose* (Middlesex, UK; Penguin Classics, 1985)

Chapter Five: Luigi Pirandello's novels and an autistic hermeneutic

Introduction

[Parts of an earlier draft of this chapter were published as *The Consolation of the Green Blanket and an Autistic Theology* in *Consolation - Literary and Religious Perspectives* 4 (15), Göteborgs Universitet, Göthenberg, Sweden, 2016 (http://ojs.ub.gu.se/ojs/index.php/LIRJ/article/view/3466)]

This chapter is the last of this thesis' exploration of mythical autism, the autistic hermeneutic, and incarnational metaphor. It uses the hermeneutical mode developed by this thesis to read a 'test case' study for the autistic literary-theological 'litmus test.' There would be an almost limitless number of poems, novels, plays, symphonies, songs, statues, paintings, films, video games, art installations, where an autistic hermeneutic could search for hospitable environments. This chapter, as space permits, chooses one 'representative sample,' although it will be argued that this is a particularly resonant one. So this last chapter brings an autistic hermeneutic to two novels by the Italian novelist Luigi Pirandello, to argue that the novels can be read, for the privileged reader armed with a conscious autistic hermeneutic, as an object lesson in the gift of being autistic. The chapter works as a comparative study between a lesser and a greater autistic potential for autistic incarnational metaphor. The comparison, for discerning 'levels of autistic potential,' is between an earlier and a later Pirandello novel. The first, earlier novel under consideration is *The Late Mattia Pascal*, (*Il Fu Mattia Pascal*), from here on abbreviated to *Mattia Pascal*.[624] The second novel, Pirandello's last, is *One, No-one and One Hundred Thousand, (Uno, Nessuno e Centomila)* from here on abbreviated to *Uno, Nessuno*.[625] The argument put forward will be that *Uno, Nessuno* is a narrative offering the poetential (another slip of the pen – poet-ential, as poetic

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[624] Pirandello, Luigi, *The Late Mattia Pascal* (trans. William Weaver) (New York; New York Review Books, 2005)
[625] Pirandello, Luigi, *One, No-One, One Hundred Thousand* (trans. William Weaver) (New York; Marsilio,1992)

potential) of the full gift of autism, as incarnational metaphor, while *Mattia Pascal* journeys towards this gift but turns back (like Lot's wife) into neurotypicality, missing the theological power of conscious autism.

There are good reasons for selecting Pirandello's novels for this 'case study.' Firstly, Pirandello is foundational in the Theatre of the Absurd, and the Absurd's emergence from Modernist writing is an arena where Mindfulness of Separation can be seen as increasingly conscious, as previously argued in chapter one. In fact, as will be explained, Pirandello's radical, innovative, experimental technique could even be read as proto-postmodernist, and another aim of this chapter is, in a small way, to use the autistic hermeneutic to bring his generally overlooked significance to light. In fact, this is not least because in 1934 Pirandello was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and his contribution to European literature has perhaps been overlooked by the English-speaking world, although his dramas are still popular as stage productions.

Secondly, the theme of 'madness' and the presence of 'schizophrenia' in Pirandello the writer's own family life might be seen as areas where a perceived 'pathology' of autism might recognise some traits.[626]

The novels are selected in contrast to Pirandello's more widely known plays for two reasons. Firstly, it is little known that Pirandello spent many more years as a novelist than a playwright, and his novels are worthy of attention in their own right. However secondly, and more fundamentally, the novel offers something different to the play. In contemporary Western culture, ultimately I read alone and you read alone. We may discuss our appreciation of Middlemarch, but my Middlemarch is my Middlemarch and yours is yours. This is another aspect of innerness and solitude which predisposes the novel for giving a hospitable welcome to an autistic hermeneutic. Thirdly, both novels' first person narrative offer an inner psychological space. Pirandello's drama is much more celebrated, but it is the inner voice of the first-person narrator's psychological space, rather than the acted words and actions in the social arena of drama, which lends itself to the success of an autistic hermeneutic. Autistic Mindblindess makes the 'reading' of a performance enactment difficult, with

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[626] This is far from equating schizophrenia with autism, even though early diagnostic thinking in the first half of the twentieth century at times did so. Rather, the 'madness' of the holy fool in Pirandello's work comes into dialogue with the gift of autistic seeing.

the difficulty of grasping ostensive action and the Mindreading needed to decode the actors' expressions and gestures. The plays are discussed briefly in this chapter, to outline the context in a general discussion of Pirandellian thought and its possibilities for an autistic hermeneutic. For a close reading, however, it will be his novels which offer possibilities for a more detailed response.

This chapter's exploration of Pirandello's thought also speculates on the influence of late nineteenth/early twentieth century early understandings of "schizophrenia" in his work.[627] With this possible connection, there is room to consider whether this "schizophrenia" might have more to do with autism than might appear, in hindsight, when diagnostic labels have changed.[628] Most importantly, his thinking of the absurd offers a divergent space for autistic thinking, offering ample room to think in terms of mindfulness of separation. In terms of fascination, the 'green blanket' trope in *Uno, Nessuno* offers a striking resonance with the *'brown blanket'* phenomenon of the autist Gunilla Gerlund, as will become clear. The argument will be for an 'autistic pilgrimage' which can be read in the journey towards the 'green blanket,' for the autistic reader who understands absence and immersion as separation and fascination. As in previous chapters' readings of literary texts, this is a mythical hermeneutic, re-visioning the text in a creative enactment of the trinitarian autistic hermeneutic (Mindfulness of Separation, Fascination and Literal metaphor) with their related connections to affective empathy and autistic integrity. In this sense, Pirandello's early novel *Mattia Pascal* and his last novel *Uno, Nessuno* will, in this chapter, be read as if embodiments of contrasting partial and total autism. In terms of celebrating mystical and a-theological autistic modes, this

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[627] Pirandello's wife, Antonia, suffered from severe schizophrenia. A reading of Büdel's and Giudice's biographies of Pirandello invite speculation that his relationship with Antonia, his 'beloved muse,' might yield interesting possibilities for future research. This might be by reconsidering the dynamic as he 'uses' her schizophrenia as a narrative device (or inspiration, outworking/reflective writing practice, or even enactment?) for his anti-metaphysical textual games. There could even be argued to be a case, in these games, of the "who's missing the point?" kind of pathologising issues discussed in chapter one. Could this be a transference which betrays itself, vocalised, for example, in Moscarda's rant at the reader (pp.23-25) and his self-hatred (p45). This is all the more attractive a reading in the light of Pirandello's ardent fascism (see Büdel, Oscar*, Pirandello* (UK; Fletcher & Son, 1969) p.27; see also Giudice, Gaspare, *Pirandello: A Biography* (trans. Alastair Hamilton) (London, UK; Oxford University Press, 1975)

[628] Early diagnostic constructs for autism were 'autistic psychopathy' (Leo Kanner) and 'childhood schizophrenia (Loretta Bender) See Gil Eyal et al. Th*e Autism Matrix*

comparison of the two novels will read as their relative success or failure to attain the gift of conscious autism.

There is, in Pirandello's writing, something absurd and tragi-comic which offers a possibility of its being read through an autistic lens. Carlo Salinari writes:

> Al fondo … si può trovare … il sentimento della condizione anarchica in cui viene a vivere l'uomo moderno, della mancanza di un tessuto sociale organico che lo sostenga e lo colleghi agli altri uomini, del dominio sull'uomo delle cose che sono estranee alla sua volontà, dell'inevitabile sconfitta a cui è condannato l'uomo nella società in cui si trova a vivere.

> (At the base (of Pirandello's work) … one can find … a feeling of the anarchic condition in which modern man finds himself, of the lack of an organic social fabric which sustains him and binds him to others, of the mastery of man by things which are external to his will, of the inevitable defeat to which man is condemned in the society in which he finds himself living).[629]

Straight away Salinari's vocabulary of the individual who is unable to be "bound" (connected) to others speaks to the condition of autism and is a condition to which autism speaks. This lack of "being bound" will be explored in this chapter in Salinari's sense, as the unfavourable lack of social cohesion experienced both in Pirandello's technique and protagonists. However more importantly, "being bound" is read ultimately in this chapter as neurotypicality, in what Pirandello will call "the web of life." Freedom from "the web" will be read as a figuration of the gift of autism.

James McFarlane argues that Pirandello is foundational to the Theatre of the Absurd as it develops in the Twentieth century:

> By his insight into the disintegration of personality,
> Beckett; by his assault on received ideas, Ionesco; by his
> exploration of the conflicts of reality and appearance,
> O'Neill; and by his probing of the relationship between

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[629] Carlo Salinari, *Miti e Coscienza del decadentismo italiano* (Milan; Feltrinelli, 1960), quoted in Pirandello, Luigi, *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila* (Milan; Mondadori, 1984), p. ix. (Translations by the author of this thesis unless otherwise indicated)

self and persona, actor and character, face and mask,
the work of Anouilh, Giradoux and Genet.[630]

McFarlane situates Pirandello's work within "a distinctively second-stage Modernism, a 'Neo-Modernism,' in twentieth-century European drama," through new methods of staging, particularly devices for destroying the fourth wall. This is also the case ideologically in

> a deeply and destructively ironic attitude to naturalistic reality, a determination to replace the illusionistic counterfeiting of reality by the recognition of the profounder reality of illusion (with, in Apollinaire, Yeats and Pirandello) an) obsessive preoccupation with masks.[631]

A perception of fundamental illusion is the root of a *'cataclysmic order'* in an *'apocalyptic, crisis-centred (view) of history.'*[632] McFarlane and Bradbury quote Herbert Read's similar appraisal of Modernism:

> There have been revolutions in the history of art before today. There is a revolution with every new generation, and periodically, every century or so, we get a wider or deeper change of sensibility which is recognised in a period – the *Trecento* or *Quattrocentro*, the Baroque, the Roccoco, the Romantic, the Impressionist and so on. But I do think we can already discern a difference in kind in the contemporary revolution; it is not so much a revolution, which implies a turning over, even a turning back, but rather a break-up, a devolution, some would even say a dissolution. Its character is catastrophic.[633]

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the nature of this "catastrophic dissolution" as the site of a crisis which an autistic hermeneutic can read as the opening for the gift of conscious autism.

Pirandello is best known for his plays such as *Enrico IV (Henry the Fourth), Sei Caratteri in Cerca d'autore [Six Characters in Search of an Author]* and *Il Gioco delle Parti [The Rules of the Game].* What makes Pirandellian drama innovative and challenging is that he distorts form, innovatively breaking

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[630] McFarlane, James, *Neo-Modernist Drama: Yeats and Pirandello,* James McFarlane, in Bradbury, R & McFarlane, J, (eds) *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1939,* (Middlesex, UK; Penguin Books 1991 (1976)) p.569

[631] McFarlane, *Neo-Modernist Drama: Yeats and Pirandello,* p.651

[632] McFarlane & Bradbury, *The Name and Nature of Modernism,* in McFarlane & Bradbury (eds), *Neo-Modernist Drama* p.20

[633] Herbert Read (1915-1968), (citation not given), in McFarlane & Bradbury, *Neo-Modernist Drama* p.20

the fourth wall in a metanarrative which makes the work subvert itself. It has a strong sense of anticipating Barthes' death of the Author.

In his drama, Pirandello's most fundamental technical device is the play-within-the-play. However this is more than the previous usage in the pre-Modern period. Where the Shakespearean play-within-a-play is a set piece, clearly bounded within the primacy of the play itself, Pirandello's plays-within-plays 'take over' the setting of the purported play to subvert it from within. McFarlane describes the play-within-the-play as "the spectacle of a spectacle which is ... not so much a play *within* a play as a play *beyond* a play."[634] McFarlane is right, but the even more subversive nature of this 'beyond' is the inversion where 'beyond' itself takes primacy.

In *Sei Caratteri,* for example, a play begins, but six people come out of the audience and onto the stage. They announce that they are six characters in search of an author. They have a desperate need to make their story real, and proceed to replace the 'original' play planned by the director with their own play, which they then act. This play completely displaces any trace of the purported original play. It ends in violence and death, not resolving the problems the characters bring to the plot but enacting their tragedy. This device is an existential challenge to the audience, to enact this questioning of their own constructed realities. McFarlane calls this

> the discovery of the inner contradiction to which all mimesis is exposed: that reality is not immediately distinguishable from the imitation, and that spuriousness has a genuine and enduring reality which is not often recognised.' (my emphasis).[635]

"Spuriousness," accorded value in this way, might invert the conventions of mimesis and by implication, as will emerge, metaphysical representation (as another 'mimesis').[636] In this inversion, the play itself is invested with a fuller reality.[637]

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[634] Bradbury & McFarlane, *Neo-Modernist Drama* p.567
[635] Ibid. p. 566
[636] This relates to the deconstruction of meta-physics as meta-phor in chapter one.
[637] This relates to a poetic *haecceitas – ecceitas* – as discussed in chapter four.

5.1. Pirandello's thought

The loss of faith

Pirandello's essay *Arte e Coscienza d'oggi* articulates a profound sense of the loss of faith, with rhetorical style not unlike Nietzsche's:

> I am amazed that something which is in fact pitch dark should be called God … science has assigned man a pitiful place in nature compared to the place he once thought he occupied … What has become of man? What has this microcosm, this king of the universe become? Alas poor king! Can you not see King Lear hopping before you, armed with a broom, in all his tragic comicality? What is he raving about?[638]

> As for the old … they return to God … The young present a still sadder spectacle. Born in a feverish moment, when their fathers thought less of love that of war to reconstruct the country; born in the din of debates … amid the swirl of opposed political and philosophical currents … we feel dazed, lost in a huge, blind labyrinth, surrounded by an impenetrable mystery[639] … The old norms have vanished and new ones have not yet been established: so it is not surprising that the concept of the relativity of everything should have succeeded in making us lose our sense of judgement almost completely … Nobody manages to have a firm and unshakeable viewpoint … never before has our life been more disjointed ethically and aesthetically. Disconnected, with no principle of doctrine or faith.[640]

Importantly, Diego Fabbri comments that this is not a project of reform but a suspension of belief:

> (Pirandello) is not a *reformer*. What is *tragic* in him comes precisely from this: he does not have any model to propose or suggest, let alone impose on anyone. On the other hand, what would such a model serve? He is like a policeman who has to be satisfied with shadowing and following and inquiring round after his suspects without ever being able to stop them and make an

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[638] *Arte e Coscienza d'Oggi (Art and Consciousness Today),* in *La Nazione Letteraria*, Florence 1893, quoted in Giudice, *Pirandello: A Biography* p.55

[639] Similar sentiments to those of Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* and Yeats' *The Second Coming*

[640] *Arte e Coscienza,* in Giudice *Pirandello: A Biography* pp.55-6

arrest and handcuff them in the name of some law or other.[641]

Son of Chaos

Pirandello was born in the district of Cavasù in Sicily. *Cavasù* in dialect means chaos, digging things up and turning them upside down. Whereas contemporary Sicilian culture was oppressively conformist, Pirandello struggles with and challenges norms. He writes:

> Io dunque sono figlio del Caos.
>
> Nietzsche diceva che i greci alzavano bianche statue contro il nero abisso, per nasconderlo. Sono finite quei tempi. Io le scrollo, invece, per rivelarlo.
>
> (So I am the son of Chaos.
>
> Nietzsche said that the Greeks raised white statues against the black abyss, to hide it. Those times are gone. Instead, I shake them to reveal it.)[642]

In *Arte e Coscienza d'oggi* Pirandello also anticipates Sartre's nausea and *ennui*:

> Those who, to find even a momentary way out of the complete moral shipwreck of the world, have shut themselves into themselves, have cut themselves off … they start to feel themselves alien to life … (with) an invincible disgust for daily vulgarity; and the cold, dispassionate observation of the sentiments and actions of others, more or less always the same, makes them feel a heavy tedium and boredom … we are at the discretion of life.[643]

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[641] Fabbri, Diego, Pirandello, poeta drammatico (Pirandello, dramatic poet), in Atti del congresso internazionale di studi pirandelliani 1961, 37-49, quoted in Bassnett-McGuire, Susan, Luigi Pirandello (London, UK; The McMillan Press Ltd., 1983) p.101

[642] Autobiographical fragment, 1923, quoted in Büdel, Pirandello (London, UK; Bowes & Bowes 1969 (1966)), p.7

[643] Pirandello, Arte e Coscienza in Giudice, Pirandello: A Biography p.56

Much of Samuel Beckett's work[644] is also anticipated by Pirandello. Basset-McGuire writes about Pirandello's play *Tonight We Improvise:*

> Tonight We Improvise is a play about the relativity of freedom … just as actors are doomed to the confines of the stage in order to have any being, so human beings are doomed to the spatial and temporal limits of their own life span. Freedom is therefore impossible, and all the escape routes such as dreams, imagination, illusion lead to dead ends.[645]

Büdel rightly summarises Pirandello's despair regarding freedom, and sees this bondage in terms of the kind of social pressure which Giudice has identified in the strictly reactionary conformist values of Pirandello's Sicilian background, as well as in bourgeois society.[646] In this non-conformity, Pirandello's passionate rhetoric already starts to make him seem like a good autist, choosing "difference over indifference"[647] in glorious ex-centricity and its authenticity and integrity.

Relativism and irony

Oscar Büdel devotes a chapter of his study of Pirandello to him as '*The Relativist.*' He recounts the following story:

> When Pirandello toured Germany with his Teatro d'arte, Albert Einstein reportedly approached him after one of the performances and said: 'We are kindred souls.'

This is anecdotal, but Martin Esslin also describes Pirandello as "the "Einstein of the drama,"'[648] and this is certainly important, although subversive, deconstructive irony is perhaps equally vital to his work. Pirandello approaches anti-rationalist relativism through the lens of philosophical irony, which he is able to employ in and as his writing. In his essay *L'idea Nazionale* he writes:

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[644] For example, in *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days* the protagonists wait for a deliverance, a purpose or a revelation, and the play ends with none of these materialising. See Bassnet-McGuire, *Luigi Pirandello* pp. 45, 69

[645] Bassnet-McGuire, *Luigi Pirandello* p.57

[646] See Giudice, *Pirandello: A Biography* pp.49-50

[647] A reference to the National Autistic Society's 2015 campaign slogan.

[648] Esslin, Martin, *Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre* (New York; Doubleday, 1971) p.47, quoted in Bradbury & McFarlane, *Neo-Modernist Drama* p.569

> Hegel explained that the subject, the only true reality, can smile at the vain appearance of the world. It stipulates it, but it can also destroy it; it does not have to take its own creations seriously. Hence we have irony, that force which, according to Tieck, allows the poet to dominate his subject-matter. And, according to Friedrich Schlegel, it is through irony that the same subject-matter is reduced to a perpetual parody, a transcendental farce.'[649]

Perhaps it is in looking at this idea of irony that it becomes possible to cut through the numerous cross-currents of critics who repeatedly affirm and deny Pirandello as a philosopher. If his philosophy is not merely ironic but actually irony itself, then this philosophy as irony cancels itself out, leaving *Maschere Nude* (*Nude Masks*)[650] – 'nude masks' are not masks at all, or else nudity as un-masking is itself yet another mask. Similarly, the "nude mask" of philosophy is only another mask, which he deconstructs, and ironic (non)philosophy underpins and imbues his work.

Being "Not responsible" for philosophy

Pirandello remarks "I have never taken upon myself any philosophical responsibility. I have always intended to make art, not philosophy,"[651] stating in another interview that "In Italy there is a trend started by some critics to see in my work a philosophical content that is not there, I assure you."[652] Setting the undeniable presence of philosophy in his work alongside his disavowal of being a philosopher raises interesting possibilities for the autistic hermeneutic of incarnational metaphor. It could be that the dead metaphors of metaphysical narrative are being deconstructed, so that Pirandello is, indeed, being "irresponsible" with them. These statements by Pirandello in fact sound similar to Derrida's ironic denials, where Derrida's point is to interrogate narrative.[653]

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[649] *L'Idea Nazionale (The National Idea),* 27 February 1920, quoted in Giudice, *Pirandello: A Biography* pp.113-4

[650] The title of the collection of dramas published in 1919.

[651] Interview in DiGaetani, John (ed), *A Companion to Pirandello Studies* (Santa Barbara, California; Greenwood, 1991) p.17

[652] Bini, Daniela, *Pirandello's Philosophy and Philosophers* in DiGaetani (ed) *Companion to Pirandello Studies* p.17

[653] See Derrida's *Denials: How to Avoid Speaking,* discussed in chapter One.

Bini's anti-philosophy and Vattimo

In her essay *Pirandello's Philosophy and Philosophers,* Daniela Bini writes:

> With his violent polemic, Pirandello was giving the final blow to an idea of philosophy on which Western thought had rested for two thousand years: philosophy as order, as systematic thought, [654]

quoting Pirandello's 1893 essay *'Arte e Coscienza d'oggi' (Today's Art and Consciousness):*

> "The old laws having collapsed, the new ones not yet established, it is natural that the concept of the relativity of everything has widened so that ... nobody is any longer able to establish a fixed, unshakable point."[655]

Bini then performs a fruitful retrospective reading of Pirandello through Gianni Vattimo. If this holds good, it can be argued that Pirandello's work as *farceur*/philosopher in a sense has helped, alongside the philosophers she cites, to prepare the ground for Vattimo's non-foundationalist thought. Bini writes:

> The Weak Thought of Gianni Vattimo's school, which through Gadamer and Pareyson goes back to Sartre, Heidegger, and Nietzsche, has suggested the theory[656] that the only possible philosophy left to man is that which constantly questions itself, totally aware of the precariousness of each statement as of the weakness and limitations of his tool: thought.[657]

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[654] Bini, Daniela, *Pirandello's Philosophy and Philosophers* in DiGaetani (ed) *Companion to Pirandello Studies* p.17

[655] Pirandello, Luigi (ed. Taviani, F), *Saggi e Interventi* (Milan; Mondadori, 2006) quoted in Bini, Daniela, *Pirandello's Philosophy and Philosophers* in DiGaetani (ed) *Companion to Pirandello Studies* p.18

[656] Bini's choice of the word 'theory' betrays a reluctance to break with rationalism, whereas Vattimo's work is perhaps more fruitfully read as an existential choice, taking cognizance of the subject-ivity of the living and thinking subject.

[657] Bini, Daniela, *Pirandello's Philosophy and Philosophers* in DiGaetani (ed) *Companion to Pirandello Studies* pp.18-19

5.2. Anti-metaphysics as art, and its sympathy to an autistic hermeneutic

Pirandello and philosophy

This is why Pirandello's work is a place where an autistic hermeneutic can recognise and read itself. The non-foundational anti-metaphysics of Pirandello's work offers the possibility of giving mindfulness of separation an existential home, just as earlier chapters have identified in Teresa, Altizer and Blanchot. Critically, this happens because Pirandello writes art, and short circuits the labyrinth of critics who, as the few examples above demonstrate, both alternately affirm and deny the philosophical implications of his work. Drama and fiction bear the heavy responsibility of rhetoric, but can deny philosophical accountability by offering the text as a living enactment rather than a formula subject to logical rules.[658] This is the point Ricoeur will make in 1975:

> 'Philosophical discourse sets itself up as the vigilant
> watchman overseeing the ordered extensions of
> meaning; against this background, the unfettered
> extensions of meaning in poetic discourse spring free.[659]

Pirandello's art deconstructs metaphysics by subjecting it to scrutiny in the form of art, which is able to stand outside it by 'springing free.'

The existential backdrop of Pirandello's absurd is that, if philosophy is unmasked as rhetoric, then only rhetoric remains. Pirandello is not "un-rational," lacking philosophical ballast, but actually "anti-rational," deconstructing philosophy by means of the rhetorical strategies of drama and fiction.

Daniela Bini makes this point, drawing again on Vattimo's Weak Thought:

> As Vattimo says, the borderline between philosophy and
> art has disappeared. Philosophical statements[660] can
> often be made through art much more forcefully, since

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[658] Pirandello, ironically referring to the ideological construct or 'form' of Fascism, states publicly that he aims for 'life, not form' in his work and thinking (Interview in *L'Impero* September 23, 1924, quoted in Büdel, *Pirandello* p.12

[659] Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor* p. 308

[660] Bini's language again betrays that she has missed the power of what theatre of the absurd achieves, and why it is so seminal. Art making a 'philosophical statement' becomes a mere vehicle, in the terms of what Jacques Rancière sees Mandelstam's liberation has achieved away from, in resisting the symbolism of Stalinist art. (See Rancière, *The Flesh of Words) details

> it uses as a vehicle the synthetic power of imagination …
> having learned Heidegger's lesson, (quoting Vattimo[661])
> "the work of art can be an actual realisation ('messa in
> opera') of the truth, because truth is no longer a
> metaphorically stable structure, but an event."[662]

To return to a mythological autistic hermeneutic, autistic archetypes would be able to read Pirandello's "anti-philosophy" as incarnational metaphor in the following terms. If Pirandello's work is read as an embodiment of Vattimo's assertion here that "truth is no longer a metaphorically stable structure,"[663] mindfulness of separation will see this undermining of a stable relationship between reader and "truth." Similarly, art is the presence-in-this-absence which is fascination. Both these qualities are realised in the text when literal metaphor has the guileless inability/refusal to 'decode' into a "stable truth;" Pirandellian "anti-rationalism" is read here as the problematising of metaphor, to enter into the space of fiction, a-theologically, exactly as previous chapters have discussed. Incarnational metaphor might be seen here as an expression of Pirandello's anti-philosophy. Incarnational metaphor, reading Pirandello, could be an anti-theology (equally as theological as theology, in the sense that apophatic theology is excess, precisely by its denial).

The reading of Pirandello's novels will now explore how this is worked out in his texts.

"Pantheism?"

Büdel sees the short story *Quand'ero Matto (When I was Mad)* and the play Lazzaro (Lazarus) as 'permeated with pantheistic ideas.'[664] Following Rauhut, he sees this 'pantheism' as "some kind of Pirandellian substitute for religion … practically identical with Gentilean Immanentist views according to which death is neither a limit nor an end of life." The danger here is to confuse pantheism with mysticism. Pirandello calls himself a mystic[665] (although it is

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[661] Vattimo, Gianni, *La Fine della Modernità, (*Milan; Garzanti, 1985), p.84
[662] Bini, Daniela, *Pirandello's Philosophy and Philosophers* in DiGaetani (ed) *Companion to Pirandello Studies* p.19
[663] This will be the argument in the reading of these novels which follows
[664] Büdel, *Pirandello* p.42
[665] ibid. (citation not given)

always important to bear in mind his ironic attitude) but if he uses mysticism, it is in the sense which views it as an unknowing immersion in what he has frequently called 'Life, not Form.'[666] Büdel returns to the essential point of Pirandello's work as a subversive meta-narrative

> When we look for the origin of Pirandello's relativism, we find, not surprisingly, that it comes to him from his anti-rationalist convictions and beliefs, consonant with contemporary philosophical insights. Pirandello sees the basic evil in *ratio*, in human reason, which creates, indeed fabricates all the fictions with which man lives.[667]

A *ratio,* even of pantheist theology, would miss the point of Pirandello's doubling of 'fiction' as the narrative of his writing and the 'fictions we live by.' This sets the stage for an ironic conscious autism, which consciously refuses to 'play the game' (*'Il Gioco delle Parti').*[668]

5.3. One, No-one and a genuine autistic integrity

Constructions, Mindreading, and their deconstruction

Uno, Nessuno is a novel about the erosion of epistemological assumptions leading to a descent into madness, and this is an expression of the kind of anti-metaphysical games discussed in section one. The first-person narrator/protagonist, Vitangelo Moscarda, journeys from the role of "toothless conformist"[669] to the madness which is truly wise, by means of radical doubt leading to madness, and the madness is the cure for itself in his final identity as a holy fool. Pirandello's comic irony operates at full stretch in the novel, but its final supreme irony of the holy fool can equally and thereby be read as the irony of ironies, where the biggest irony of all is the final ability to transcend irony, but in the biggest irony of all, the wisdom of the holy fool. The plot is comic and absurd. Following his wife's comment that his nose is crooked in a way he had not himself been aware of, he looks at his nose in the mirror[670] and from

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[666] Interview in *L'Impero* September 23, 1924, quoted in Büdel, *Pirandello* p.12
[667] Büdel, *Pirandello* p.36
[668] Pirandello's play of that name
[669] His wife's pet name for him is *'Gengè' ('Gummy')*
[670] The chronology of Moscarda's nose yields a quirky speculation: Pirandello is working, intermittently, on *Uno, Nessuno* between 1909 and 1926. Before this, in 1836, thirty years

there, he descends into obsessive doubt of doubt, of himself, all identity, and ultimately of epistemology itself. He sees "the outsider, opposite me, in the mirror,"[671] arriving at "the awareness of madness, fresh and clear… precise as a mirror."[672]

The descent into radical doubt is expressed repeatedly as a negotiation of constructions which Moscarda demolishes, one by one. Pirandello uses the trope of construction several times in the plot,[673] until Moscarda states that everything "for (humankind) is building material,"[674] and history is merely a construction.[675] Identity, too, is a construction:

> Man takes as material even himself, and he constructs
> himself, yes, sir, like a house (and)… I accept the fact
> that for you inside yourself, you are not as I see you
> from outside.[676]

The Neurotypicality of the One and the One Hundred Thousand

The narrative's critique of the construction of identity makes sense, in an autistic hermeneutic, as a critique of neurotypicality and the complacency of its assumptions of Mindreading:[677] "No one doubts what he sees, and every man walks among things, convinced they appear to others the same way they are for him."[678] For an autistic reading, Moscarda's critique resonates with neurotypical resistance of the challenge of a universal autism:[679] "Solitude frightens you. And then what do you do? You imagine many heads. All like your own … the presumption that reality, as it is for you, must be and is the same for everybody else. "(p.25) These "presumptions" read as a refuge from the fear of autistic insight. The people Moscarda sees around him can be read as suffering from

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before Pirandello's birth, Gogol's satirical short story *The Nose* has its main character Kovalyov becoming co-protagonist with his own nose, and immediately after Pirandello has published about Moscarda's nose in *Uno, Nessuno*, in 1927 Shostakovich writes his opera *The Nose,* based on Gogol's *Nose.* This writer has so far found no references to this in the secondary literature, but wonders if there could have been something in the air.

[671] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.17
[672] ibid. p.75
[673] ibid. eg. pp.25, 33, 34 ,37,
[674] ibid. p.41
[675] ibid. p.79
[676] ibid. p.31
[677] See glossary of original terms, in Introduction.
[678] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.102
[679] see glossary of original terms, in Introduction.

unconscious autism, since they too, equally are victims of the gaps between differing views, but remain unaware of these differences.

Moscarda's awareness that epistemological certainty (neurotypicality) is a sham brings him to the moment of his own fear of this insight, where he realises that there is a fundamental separation even in the intimacy of his marriage. He becomes painfully aware that 'her' Gengè[680] is not Moscarda himself, but only her image of him. So he comes to view himself as an enigma, simply because his wife's trivial remark about his nose has led him to question the reality of his own perception when measured against the perceptions which others have. The moment of horror holds him, because at this stage he is still "hostage" to the need for a construction which is denied to him: "I was unable ... to see myself as others saw me" [681] ... "An outsider whom only the others can see and know, but not I."[682] The 'One, No-one and One Hundred Thousand' of (neurotypical) constructions is being 'de-constructed,' in his scrutiny of it:

> I still believed this outsider (himself as he sees himself
> in the mirror) was only one person: only one for
> everybody. But soon my horrible drama became more
> complicated: with the discovery of the hundred
> thousand Moscardas that I was, not only for the others
> but also for myself.[683]

Communicating adequately with others or even with himself has become an insoluble problem. William Weaver's translation of this book in the 1992 Marsilio edition has the following cover matter:

> It is Pirandello's genius that a discussion of the
> fundamental human inability to communicate, of our
> essential solitariness ... elicits such thoroughly sustained
> and earthy laughter. [684]

Pirandello's novel is certainly humorous but he himself makes it plain that the novel's aim is not only or merely to entertain, as there is a deeper agenda: so the same cover matter, quoting Pirandello himself, says that

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[680] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.42ff
[681] ibid. *p*12
[682] ibid. p.13
[683] ibid. pp.13-14
[684] Cover matter, *Uno, Nessuno, Centomila* (Milan; Oscar Mondadori, 1984)

> One, No-One and One Hundred Thousand arrives at the
> most extreme conclusions, the farthest consequences.[685]

The ultimate consequence is to expose the One and the One Hundred Thousand as constructions, to affirm the No-One in an act of ironic affirmation. In an autistic hermeneutic, Moscarda is breaking free of the complacency of neurotypical Mindreading. Mindreading fails even to be able to construct the self in the mirror of the one hundred others of social life: "I could see (my eyes) in me, but not see them in themselves … He (Moscarda's reflection) knew nothing, nor did he know himself."[686]

The autistic nature of language as holding an inherent hermeneutical gap finds a further resonance in the novel when Moscarda says "the trouble is that you, my dear friend, will never know, nor will I ever be able to tell you how what you say is translated inside me."[687] This "loss in translation" is the hermeneutical gap which has been exposed in earlier chapters, and Moscarda is becoming so Mindblind that he cannot even read himself. His journey is to travel from experiencing this as horror, to the recognition of conscious autism as an emancipation.

Moscarda's journey is to be liberated from his names - the impotent, toothless Gengè, the religiously constructed Vitangelo, and the irritating Moscarda[688] all need to be left behind as he travels towards the *Nessuno*.

Approaching conscious autism

As Moscarda becomes "The outsider inseparable from (him)self,"[689] increasingly he now exists "(w)ithout … giving any thought to the others."[690] When he looks at people who have been coming into his garden for years, suddenly he sees their presence not as normal features of his everyday life but

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[685] ibid.
[686] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.18
[687] ibid. p.31
[688] Gengè, 'Gummy' (toothless) is Moscarda's wife's pet name for him; his 'Christian' name, Vitangelo, is the 'living angel' of the constructions of religion; 'Moscarda' in Italian echoes the noun 'mosca' (fly; the insect).
[689] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.12
[690] ibid. p.15

as an "(i)nvasion by others."[691] Under the mosquito nets he feels happy, with "the bed isolated; the sense of being wrapped in a white cloud."[692] He becomes unconventional, an outsider to society's norms. Where others go ahead 'pulling the cart' of their daily lives, Moscarda tells the reader "I wasn't pulling a cart, no, not I; and so I had neither reins nor blinders".[693]

In an autistic hermeneutic, Moscarda can be seen in his journey to be travelling into the solitude of Mindblindness, excluding him, as autist, from the social world. This begins, now, to seem a liberation, where he has neither reins nor blinders, and in autistic terms, he is approaching autistic non-conformity and autistic integrity.

The exclusion from the social world leads Moscarda into the gift of being "in a world of his own".[694] Moscarda exhibits the characteristics of being "in a world of his own" as the gift of autistic fascination. This is manifest in another autistic feature, namely his close attention to detail. This is reminiscent of how, in an earlier chapter, this thesis discussed St Francis who "was too busy looking at the beauty of individual tees to care about seeing the forest; he didn't want to see the wood for the trees."[695]

So as early as p.3 Moscarda has become obsessed with detail, looking at his nose in the mirror. This quickly becomes a narrative of intense obsessive rumination -

> I … was made to plunge, at every word addressed to me,
> at every gnat I saw flying, into abysses of reflection and
> consideration that burrowed deep inside me and
> hollowed my spirit up, down and across, like the lair of
> a mole, with nothing evident on the surface.[696]
>
> I would pause at every step; I took care to circle every
> pebble I encountered, first distantly, then more closely;
> and I was amazed that others could pass ahead of me
> paying no heed to that pebble … a world where I could

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[691] ibid. p.26
[692] ibid. p.29
[693] ibid. p.5
[694] See introduction
[695] Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* pp.89-9, 178; this also echoes Hopkins' *ecceitas*, with the intense mindfulness to what is seen; equally, to Chauncey Gardener's ability to see the tree instead of the White House.
[696] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.4

> easily have settled … my spirit filled with worlds – or
> rather pebbles; it's the same thing[697]

The (de)construction of God: Marco di Dio

Stepping back from the protagonist's point of view, the plot's narrative again plays games with names, this time for an allusion to the post-Christian ideas Pirandello's essays and letters indicate, as discussed earlier. In fact, the novel enacts the eviction of God, which might be read as a precursor of the death of God, half a century later.[698] In an autistic literary-theological hermeneutic, the deconstructive potential in the text reveals another game the narrative is playing, with the incident of the tenant Marco di Dio's eviction.

Moscarda's experiments in shattering others' expectations of him include his odd speech and primarily his experiment in being an active decision-maker at the bank where he has previously been only the passive, titular head. He does this by evicting Marco di Dio from his rent-free house and then giving the property back to him as a gift. It might be possible to see Marco di Dio as a figure for God – his name, "Mark of God" could suggest that Moscarda's experiment is also an attempt to evict God, then to invert God as humanity's gift, not God's. Pirandello suggests elsewhere that God has been 'living rent-free' for too long in Catholic Italy.[699]

The *Marco* in the original Italian has the name not only of the evangelist – "(Mark) but also the meaning of "marco" as the note (mark) in the margin of a financial ledger – he is erasing the trace of God from the ledger. This will become significant when viewed alongside the spiritual material which emerges later in his madness. In the distress of madness, he finds salvation in absolute renunciation, divesting himself of this ownership of the same bank's capital. The case becomes even stronger when Moscarda finds his ultimate spiritual rebirth in the novel's conclusion, with its overtones of Christian death and resurrection, and the text's close echoes of Paul's remark that as a Christian he 'dies daily' – precisely what Moscarda does, minute by minute, in order to escape the tyranny of images and names. A nameless God, free of the 'ledger

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[697] ibid. p.5; echoing William Blake's words about seeing eternity in a grain of sand.
[698] Anticipating Altizer and Taylor
[699] See eg. the burlesque 'holy stoup' scene in *Mattia Pascal,* discussed below.

mark,' is evicted and welcomed simultaneously, and this will be the madness ultimately of *Moscarda* as the holy fool.

God within

A God who has been evicted and erased becomes significant when Moscarda "finds God" by the discovery that this evicted, erased God is within him,[700] but "hostile to all constructions."[701] Religion, which he embodies in the church building which people have built for God[702] is as much a neurotypical "construction" as any other; he has instead "the sense of God inside, in (Moscarda's) own way."[703]

This interior God is reminiscent of the inner fictions this thesis has previously discerned in the writing of Christian mystics. It is 'madness' because it has absented itself removed from the social fabric of material gains and losses. The "quick" of God within him could be interpreted as the "no one" which escapes definition and construction. This "God within," "hostile to all constructions," can be read in sympathy with the mystical theology of God which exists by not existing, beyond being, in the terms used by Dionysius and Meister Eckhart, as previous chapters have discussed.

Moscarda's act of surrendering all his assets to convert them to pure gift is resonant of Jean Luc Marion's thinking of the father's (true) prodigal generosity to the (falsely) prodigal son as the gift which outwits ontological difference.[704] The conclusion of this chapter will argue that this pure gift is an embodiment of absolute autism in its total affective empathy. It looks like madness.

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[700] "That *quick* wounded in me when my wife had laughed … was God, without any doubt: God who had felt wounded in me" (Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* pp.139-140).
[701] ibid. p.144
[702] ibid. p.139
[703] ibid.
[704] See Marion, *God Without Being* pp.97-99

Towards Incarnational metaphor – the Green Wool Blanket

In his journey of discovery, Moscarda sets out to 'undo' the images others have of him, and people react by seeing him as insane: "Have you heard? The usurer Moscarda has gone crazy!"[705] The play between sanity and insanity reaches a climax when the crowd denounce him as a madman, but he gives his own very sane reasoning: "All because I had wanted to prove … that I could be someone different from the man I was believed to be."[706] In fact it is Moscarda, penetrating the falsity of constructions, who is sane, and this irony persists, at the next level, when being is possible only as nonbeing. This is where incarnational metaphor can be seen in a theological thinking of fascination.

The climax of Moscarda's movement away from the human world to a mystical union with the non-human happens in chapter 8.II, in his description of his experience with the green wool blanket. Whereas Moscarda's self has been a 'hundred thousand' in his journey through self-doubt, at this point he says, "I found myself truly there."[707] This is authentic self-knowledge, but in Pirandello's supreme irony, it takes the guise of apparently puerile fascination. In Moscarda's contemplation, as he convalesces after being shot, a green blanket becomes a microcosm of an idyllic natural world in his imagination:

> "I stroked the green down of that blanket. I saw the countryside in it: as if it were all an endless expanse of wheat; and, as I stroked it, I took delight in it (p.155).[708] Ah, to be lost there, to stretch out, abandon myself on the grass to the silence of the heavens; to fill my soul with all that empty blueness, letting every thought be shipwrecked there, every memory![709]

From there on, there is only one place where he can continue to live, and that place is detachment and asceticism; because a life enmeshed in social conventions and material possessions would simply keep Moscarda prey to the workings of the One Hundred Thousand from which he needs to escape. So he gives away everything he owns and becomes a beggar and an ascetic.[710] His experience with the green blanket has figured a kind of salvation (alleviation of

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[705] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.75
[706] ibid. p.95
[707] p.155
[708] ibid. p.155
[709] ibid.
[710] ibid. p.158

misery) and all his language is of delight – he is consoled. By stroking and touching the green blanket Moscarda finds a pathway out of obsession and into serenity – just as the autistic subject finds solace in an extraordinary relationship to the sensory world. In fact, there is a strikingly similar image from the autist Gunilla Gerlund:

> Gunilla found the place to be left in peace – behind the
> armchair, where she was able to shut out everything
> and simply be – absorbed in the material of the brown
> armchair.[711]

Moscarda's similar 'green blanket' experience is fascination – lost "in a world of his own," he perceives the "expanses" of it in fascination. This is prefigured in his attention to detail as he contemplates the natural world as an escape from 'constructions,'[712] and fascination happens precisely in the place of the end of religious or metaphysical concepts which the narrative calls "no conclusion."

Büdel sees a dichotomy between tragedy and "mysticism," where Pirandello apparently gives up his lifelong ironic stance and 'plays it straight:'

> A further way out for Pirandellian characters is to die
> the death of the unio mystica. Of the two modes of
> experience which … lead to a complete loss of the Self,
> the tragic and the mystic, Pirandello has chosen the
> latter … in the tragic experience the Self is destroyed at
> the very moment of its truest, highest, and most
> complete realisation and assertion; whereas the mystic
> in fusing – as it were – with the All and One, gives up,
> renounces his individual essence.[1]

There are two problems with this. Firstly, Pirandello's tragedy is always tragi-comedy, so that his characters do not in fact die as their "truest" and "highest" selves. Secondly, and in light of this, it is perhaps unwise to lose alertness to ironic strategies at work in the text. Religion is anathema to Pirandello (see earlier) and a conversion to "mysticism" seems improbable, as he is writing this, his last and greatest novel, immediately prior to his greatest output as an extremely ironic, tragicomic playwright. Perhaps Moscarda is a fool, addled and insane, and a figure of fun, stroking his green blanket and

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[711] Gunilla Gerlund (1997) quoted in Bogdashina, *Autism and Spirituality* p. 191
[712] *Uno, Nessuno* pp.36-39

giving away his fortune.[713] Yet in the end, after all his absurd, neurotic introspection, he becomes a sympathetic character in the unusually lyrical language of the final chapter.[714] Moscarda states in his final, most "mystical" state, that the church bells, ringing for prayer, are irrelevant for him. He has killed God by evicting Marco di Dio, and Pirandello has not suddenly become a Christian. This next section now argues that rather, in fact, the novel is playing yet another Pirandellian language game, where the "mystic fusing" which "renounces individual essence" is in fact closer to an a-theology of the text.

No Conclusion

The wording of Pirandello's last chapter, 8.IV, "No conclusion," is a paradox. "No conclusion" is the paradox of the dilemma of the author who must bring the book to a close while leaving its characters still alive beyond the book, since the imaginary construction of fiction leaves any arbitrary conclusion detached from the imaginary space where the characters might continue to live in the mind of the reader. So in this sense, the conclusion is "no conclusion."

However there is another possible reading of this title. "No conclusion" might mean a conclusion where "no" is itself the book's conclusion. If this is the case, it is a profound conclusion because the "no" is the "no" of the "no one" of the book's title. In the experience of the green wool blanket, Moscarda has arrived at a place where he wants to be no one. The one and the one hundred thousand appear to have been left behind; he tells the reader "I no longer look at myself in the mirror, and it never even occurs to me to want to know what has happened to my face and to my whole appearance.[715] He discusses his old self which bears his name, in the third person. So he says, "No name … leave it in peace, and let there be no more talk about it. It is fitting for the dead … life knows nothing of names."[716] Moscarda's name is dead – and this is the only way

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[713] Pirandello's output has to increase to salvage the family fortune after bankruptcy; he is unlikely to subscribe to idealism about poverty. (See Büdel, *Pirandello,* and Giudice, *Pirandello: A Biography*)

[714] Pirandello's earliest writing was poetry, and he is 'allowing' poetic diction to enter the text here.

[715] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.159

[716] ibid.; earlier, he has alluded to his name as an irritant, because '*Moscarda' is so close to 'mosca,'* the irritating fly that buzzes around (p.49)

he can be alive. This life is a kind of death. In the loss of all names and constructions, he is free from 'conclusions.' His freedom from the selfhood of his name means he can experience life in any form – "I am this tree. Tree, cloud; tomorrow book or wind; the book I read, the wind I drink." [717] [718]

It is important to remember that Pirandello's ironic subversion is always playing games with the reader. While the whole novel has worked to construct a character as the first-person subject, it has been easy to overlook that the character Moscarda, who works so hard to rid himself of constructions, is himself only a fictional construction. 'No conclusion' pulls the rug out from under the reader's feet. Moscarda/non-Moscarda is not, in the end of the day, a pantheist, or anything else, but a fiction. He 'gives the game away,' finally, when he tells the reader that "I am ... this book."[719] The whole narrative construction of the selfless self collapses into a mere playing with words, bringing the first person to re-attach itself to "tree, cloud … book or wind," so that the "I am" exists purely rhetorically as part of 'the book.' In a sense, this is nothing new. In Pirandello's drama, the action tends to hinge of the disruption of the willing suspension of disbelief, as was discussed earlier.

What is at stake here, however, is to consider Pirandello's own words that *Uno, Nessuno* "arrives at the most extreme conclusions, the farthest consequences."[720] "The most extreme conclusions" are, in fact, "no conclusion;" because as universal subject, I/We/One/No-one/One Hundred Thousand draws "one's own conclusions." Moscarda is "no longer inside (him)self, but in every thing outside,"[721] and this is, decades before Barthes or Derrida, the Death of the Author as the death of the transcendental signified, taking responsibility for 'who' or 'what' her/his protagonist 'is.'[722] Decades after Pirandello, Barthes writes:

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[717] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* pp.159-60; nb. It would be easy to read "the wind I drink" as a mis-spelling of "the wine I drink" but "the wind I drink" is a translation of "il vento che bevo" (Oscar Mondadori 1984 p. 224).

[718] It is easy to see here why Büdel would read this as pantheism (see section 1); but pantheism is a 'theism' and an 'ism,' and Moscarda is free from all 'isms.'

[719] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.160

[720] Cover matter, *Uno, Nessuno, e Centomila*, Oscar Mondadori 1984 edition

[721] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* p.160

[722] The death of the author: "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in

> ... today the subject apprehends himself elsewhere, and subjectivity can return at another place on the spiral: deconstructed, taken apart, shifted, without anchorage: why should I not speak of 'myself,' since this 'my' is no longer 'the self?' [723]

and Derrida writes:

> One must be separated from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in its darkness.[724]

This act is mimed by Moscarda, who confronts the reader with what it is to be separated from oneself, in order that the pure work, the living of constant death and rebirth, can be experienced. Derrida adds that

> Only pure absence – not the absence of this or that, but the absence of everything in which all presence is announced – can inspire, in other words, can work, and then make one work.[725]

Pirandello's novel 'works' by exploring the absence of Moscarda's self – finally Moscarda is able to function (or 'work') with some sense of authenticity by embracing pure absence, even from his own name.

Derrida describes this 'non-place:'

> This universe articulates only that which is in excess of everything, the essential nothing on whose basis everything can appear and be produced within language. [726]

In this way, Pirandello's most supreme irony is realised, that when the subject dies ("No Names"), the universal subject can speak in fullness ("I am" – "I am this tree. Tree, cloud; tomorrow book or wind; the book I read, the wind I drink.").[727]

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which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash." (Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author* in *Image, Music, Text,* trans. Stephen Heath p.146 details

[723] Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes (trans. Richard Howard) (New York; Hill & Wang 2010) p.168

[724] Derrida, *Writing and Difference* p.8

[725] Ibid.

[726] Ibid.

[727] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno* pp.159-60; [a-theologically, we read I am that I am]

The Green Blanket as universal subject

To return to the aim of seeing *Uno, Nessuno* in an autistic light, the green blanket offers a theological thinking which might bring an absolute autism of incarnational metaphor into view. Moscarda's fullest life is as fullest death:

> I die at every instant, and I am reborn, new and without
> memories: live and whole, no longer inside myself, but
> in every thing outside.[728]

This is the death of God and the death of the subject, and the resurrection and complete incarnation of both. It might be remembered, here, that the site of this death-unto-resurrection is the green blanket.[729] It is as Moscarda strokes the green blanket that he becomes able to perceive 'eternity in a grain of sand,' and be liberated into 'this wind I drink.'

Thinking of (non)Moscarda as incarnational metaphor, he is the subject who is 'mad' – he is the holy fool who 'makes no sense.' As autistic metaphor, in terms of the pragmatism of language, by 'making no sense' and having no constructions, he is dead, having no name. Equally, as autistic literal metaphor, in terms of the resurrection of dead metaphors, he is alive to the image, in a state of *ecceitas*:

> I go out every morning, at dawn, because now I want to
> keep my spirit like this, fresh with dawn, with all things
> as they are first discovered.[730]

This is theologically the incarnation of the kenotic Christ in the text, embodying nothing which is everything, poured out utterly in total autistic affective empathy which delights in the fascination of the text. It could be said that, in an autistic hermeneutic, the myth of absolute autism is read most fully at this "most extreme conclusion," where the green blanket offers the sensory connoisseur the absolute death and absolute life of incarnational metaphor which is nothing and everything.

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[728] Ibid. p.160
[729] Moscarda is wrapped in the green blanket as he convalesces after being shot by Anna Rosa – is this in fact (or fiction), life after death?
[730] Pirandello, *Uno, Nessuno p*.160

5.4. The Late Mattia Pascal: the unsuccessful autist

Il Fu Mattia Pascal, The Novel

The aim of this section's reading of *Il Fu Mattia Pascal* is to compare its potential to the autistic possibilities of *Uno, Nessuno.* This section now argues that in *Mattia Pascal,* the narrative stops short of a space where the absolute autism of God can recognise itself. This comparison will highlight the autistic 'badge of honour which belongs to the previously considered novel,' in order to show that as Incarnational metaphor, the former novel has achieved what neurotypicality in this novel fails to do. The argument is that *Uno, Nessuno's* Moscarda achieves what an autistic hermeneutic recognises as autistic integrity, in a way that *Mattia Pascal's* eponymous protagonist does not. However, Pascal's failure reads, equally incisively for an autistic hermeneutic, as a critique of neurotypicality. Here, a retreat from autism to neurotypicality is read as the failure to attain the spiritual insight which chapter four described as the autism of God. So where Moscarda has been shown to attain a full autism of incarnational metaphor, it will now be argued that Mattia Pascal travels towards it, but stops and turns back to neurotypicality.

Il Fu Mattia Pascal narrates the story of how the narrator protagonist Pascal fakes his own suicide in order to escape family and financial problems. The novel turns on Pascal's difficulty in constructing a new identity for himself, and ends with his return to his home and family, to resume his old identity. This is, as has been discussed earlier, a key Pirandellian theme, where the idea of identity is challenged in comic enactments of its difficult nature. Pascal re-invents himself with the name Adriano Meis, only to return ultimately to the name Mattia Pascal, styling himself *Il Fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal).* This means that the protagonist will appear under either or both names at different points.

Mattia Pascal, the character

The narrative chooses the protagonist's first name to be Mattia (Matthias), not the more common Matteo (Matthew). Mattia is one of Christ's disciples, easily confused with Matthew, the gospel writer. In contrast with

Matthew, all that is known about Matthias is that he replaced the dead Judas.[731] Playing with the name, the narrative casts Mattia Pascal as an obscure figure, aimless and marginalised, and as a 'replacement Judas' he also betrays Christ, commits suicide, and becomes, in the end, a true disciple, if an obscure one without identity.

His surname, Pascal, suggests Blaise Pascal as an archetype, firstly for the wager of faith (Mattia Pascal's wagers, instead, are both at the casino and in his choices to bet on the opportunities offered by outrageous coincidences); and secondly, for that wager's significance in deconstructing philosophy. Both of these symbolic references to religion and philosophy will be picked up in fundamental to this section, but at this point it is also important that Pirandello's narratives always use comic irony, so that the disciple Matthias and the philosopher Pascal are being used as figures of fun.

Metaphysics and Religion

As was discussed earlier, Pirandello can be seen as a proto-postmodernist, challenging the conventions of fiction. This was argued above as an enactment of an anti-metaphysical project. This is evident in *Mattia Pascal,* as the 'fiction of the fiction' (the reader is reading the fictional identity of a protagonist who creates a fictional identity). '*Uno, Nessuno'* contrasts Moscarda's God as the 'quick' of his wounded soul with the 'constructions' of religion and philosophy. However, religion and philosophy are approached differently and more satirically in *Mattia Pascal.'*[732]

Stepping back from the protagonist's point of view to look at games the narrative plays with him, satire of religion is most obvious concerning the

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[731] Acts 1.12; and even Matthias' status as a (lucky or unlucky?) 'thirteenth apostle' rests on mere chance, because he is chosen by casting lots; in the same way, Mattia Pascal, both character and plot, relies on the narrative device of chance, throughout the novel

[732] Names invite allusive possibilities: as already noted, Mattia is the lesser known disciple of Christ, and Pascal the philosopher of the leap of faith. Pascal is unable to think of a new name for himself, so he appropriates names from an overheard farcical conversation between theologians, and facetiously comments that "they've baptised me!" When a genuine suicide is mistaken for him, enabling his escape, he makes an allusive joke of Christ's substitutionary death: "Fortune had strangely smiled on me ... another man had died in my place" (p.72) Is his home village of Miragno something to ad-mire, or a mirage?

resurrection, when the narrative plays with echoes of it. For example, Mattia mockingly refers to himself as having 'come back from the dead' in chapter 17 - and the narrative echoes the resurrected Christ's words in John ch.20, when Mattia says "It's me, Mattia! Don't be afraid, I'm not dead ... can't you see me?... Touch me! It's me, Roberto! I've never been more alive than I am now!" [733]

Catholicism is lampooned most of all in the irreverent image of Meis using a holy water stoup as an ashtray, just as he has irreverently disposed of the sacrament of marriage by flushing his wedding ring down the toilet. In addition to these actions of the protagonist, the narrative has him working as a library housed in a deconsecrated church, where the books have "the smell of mould and old age."[734] Pascal immediately adds that "this fate befell me too," with the joke turning on whether he means the fate of the previous inept librarian or the fate of the books. People don't use the library because they believe the books are about "religious matters,"[735] and when he returns to the library at the end to write his story, it is preserved by the curator there "as within a confessional."[736]'Books' and 'papers' both suggest living 'within the law,' whether civic or religious, but in leaving the church/library and his name behind, he is 'outwith the law,' and can't even buy a puppy for company, let alone remarry, because he doesn't have his identity papers to buy a dog license or get a marriage license.[737]

If Meis manages to discard Catholicism, or at least thinks he does, the next set of books to deal with is that of his landlord, Paleari, who sets out to convert Meis to theosophy. As a synthesis of theology and philosophy, theosophy was in vogue when Pirandello was writing in the early twentieth century, basing many of its claims on the paranormal as demonstrated in séances and developing a quasi-religious Gnosticism of 'enlightenment.' The narrative plays with its claims, as follows.

After undergoing corrective eye surgery, Meis has a forty-day recuperation[738] in the dark where he becomes the captive audience for Paleari's

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[733] Pirandello, *Mattia Pascal* p.222
[734] Ibid. p. xiv
[735] Ibid. p.1
[736] Ibid. p.243
[737] Ibid. pp. 93, 226
[738] Another biblical echo, of Exodus and of Jesus in the wilderness

extended rhetoric on enlightenment and "the lamp of faith."[739] Meis undercuts
Paleari's arguments, exposing them to ridicule – but the narrative plays with the
reader as the narrator himself is literally 'becoming enlightened' through the
healing process in the dark. It also teases the reader by drawing her/him into
the narrator's suspense and doubt, and waiting for a verdict on whether the
séance is bogus or proof of theosophical claims. The reader, waiting for Meis'
vindication as the rationalist sceptic, is confounded by the inconclusive end of
the evidence. The narrative, and Meis, both hang in an emptiness where truth
as a construction is always an empty concept, implicitly offering the kind of
detachment from metaphysics which *Uno, Nessuno* achieves. So *Mattia Pascal*
can be read, in the terms discussed regarding *Uno, Nessuno,* as a journey into
the freedom of death of the world, through mindfulness of separation.

However, the difference is whether this is an authentic understanding,
because the protagonist and the narrator are both unreliable, and liars.[740] In
this sense, the novel functions as the failure to attain the truth-telling of
autistic integrity. The question is whether to read him as a 'true' liar or not.[741]
Meis tries to break free of the book (religion and civic law) but this chapter will
ultimately argue that ultimately, he fails to do so. Where Moscarda in *Uno,
Nessuno* has broken free of 'constructions,' it will be seen that Meis/Pascal fails
to do so, not least because he constructs fictions which are not 'true lies,' but
morally inauthentic lies. This will now be explored in order to examine his
credentials as an autistic truth-teller.

Mattia Pascal, the liar

For Pascal, a lie is just a lie (see previous footnote above), part of the
kind of construction Moscarda has truly renounced. Pascal has no awareness of
the possibility of true fiction such as those of the kind discussed as apophatic
fiction in this thesis. In no sense do his elaborate lies realise themselves as
creative acts; Adriano Meis is "an absurd fiction" to be destroyed when he

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[739] Pirandello, *Mattia Pascal* p. 116, 154ff.
[740] See next section.
[741] His view of the job of librarian as merely a "rat catcher," conserving the book but oblivious
to the text (p. xiv); "Novels, what do I care about any of that? Copernicus, my dear Don Eligio,
Copernicus has ruined humanity for ever" (p.3) – ironically, as a liar, (and a fictional creation –
of the author, Pirandello's) he has no insight into the truth of fiction.

becomes inconvenient.[742] This section will now examine the lie of the text as a portrayal of inauthentic autism, because Pascal is a liar who works by cognitive rather than affective empathy. In terms of Baron Cohen's theory of impairments of cognitive and affective empathy, Pascal (and the text) operates more as psychopath than autist.[743]

The psychopath is an expert at reading people, with excellent Mindreading skills, but with cruel and manipulative intent. He lacks affective empathy. At the very outset, before his suicide, Pascal has excellent 'people skills' which he uses to exploit his friend Pomino's gullibility, stealing Pomino's girlfriend from him. Next, his entire reason for faking his own death is to escape his family responsibilities, filled with hate for them all.[744] When he returns, at the end, back into the truth of his real identity, it is not out of remorse or a sense of responsibility but for his own comfort, to be able to live a normal life again. So his attitude to his family is still unloving: "I'll come alive again! I'll revenge myself!";[745] "Go to hell, you old shrew! I'm alive!";[746] "I want to have my papers in order. I want to feel alive, even if it means having to take back my wife."[747] When Meis' lies to the Paleari family unravel, he is faced with a possible 'moment of truth,' to redeem himself morally. He has the chance to be honest with himself about his elaborate fiction: "to avoid lying to her now, must I admit that I had told her nothing but lies till now?"[748] Instead of facing this potential moment of truth, he re-enacts the entire lie of his existence by faking a second suicide.

He shows himself a psychopath also as he doesn't take responsibility for his situation, but blames others: "they [his family] had got me into this situation."[749] This lack of self-accountability extends into lying not only to others but also to himself, where he defends the morality of his seduction of Mino's girlfriend, and when he has abandoned his family states that he was

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[742] Pirandello, *Mattia Pascal p.*213
[743] See cognitive and affective empathy, glossary, Introduction
[744] When his wife is in labour, he hurries home now to be with her but to run away from himself (p.45); when his brother sends money for their mother's funeral, he spends the money on himself (p.47)
[745] Ibid. p.212
[746] Ibid. p.231
[747] Ibid. p.226
[748] Ibid. p.198
[749] Ibid. p.212

"forced to seem fickle and cruel."[750] An alert as to the unreliability of the narrator is the aside to the reader, only a single line, in the narrative: "But out of pique now, I won't describe what happened."[751]

Of course, the deeper possibility is that it is the narrative, not the protagonist, which is lying; is Pascal lying to himself, or to the reader? An ironic reading of his self-justification would lift the narrative into using an unreliable narrator as a way of becoming a lying narrative, inviting the reader to examine its fictive status by casting doubt into the narrative itself. This is not unlikely, given Pirandello's tendency to play games with the reader; does this make the text into a psychopathic narrative? In an autistic hermeneutic, the argument of this whole chapter lies precisely here. The issue is how much the portrayal of impaired empathy in Pirandello's work invites a psychopathic interpretation, and how much it would in contrast be autistic.

The narrative itself invites the reader to view not only Pascal's actions but also the narrative itself as a tissue of lies. The plot rests on outrageously improbable *deus ex machina* devices. The success of his initial alibi of suicide depends on the highly improbable co-incidence of a mysterious stranger committing suicide on the very same day of his departure. The success of his new identity depends on the hugely improbable luck of winning a fortune at the casino. This raises the question of Aristotle's theory of dramatic plot which argues that a plausible impossibility is better than an implausible possibility, and by this logic the novel would be a failure. However Pirandello writes in an ironic way about this in his epilogue, justifying himself (like Pascal) about his 'lies' of fiction. Given the anti-Catholic subtext, it is reasonable in fact to read the entire story of a man who dies and comes back to life as a satire of the gospel narrative, and the fiction of Meis as a 'lie' which Pirandello wants to equate with the 'mere story' of Christ in the gospels.

To see how this relates to an autistic hermeneutic, *Mattia Pascal* as a 'tissue of lies' does play the kind of textual games which invited a resonance with mindfulness of separation in *Uno, Nessuno*. However the narrator is not embodying a necessary retreat from the known world (where Moscarda's doubt

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[750] ibid. p.190
[751] Ibid. p.242

about his nose leads him away from any epistemological security). Instead, Pascal the unreliable narrator is choosing to deceive, tricking the others in his life into an illusory mindfulness of separation. The reader knows throughout that Pascal is not dead, so any genuine mindfulness of separation is replaced by the portrayal of someone who is only pretending to enter the gift of autism.

More fundamentally, in terms of mindfulness of separation as a concept, the next two sections will now argue that *Mattia Pascal* would be read in an autistic hermeneutic as an unsuccessful approach to the possibility of an apophatic fiction of Incarnational metaphor.

Lacking a spirit of fascination

Pascal may be an elaborate liar, but as a poet and a contemplative he has no ability. It was indicated above that he has no appreciation for story as a source of truth. His capacity for fascination is absent, because his entry into the story of Adriano Meis soon changes from bliss to lonely torture (see next section). Whereas Moscarda observes his environment and muses on it, and comes to cherish a *haecceitas* of the green blanket, Pascal/Meis refers the world always to himself.[752] If Moscarda offers a narrative in sympathy with apophatic fiction's fascination, Pascal/Meis has no sense of celebration. He 'tries the water' of separation, but because it is an inauthentic act, his separation does not lead to any kind of union of fascination. In fact 'trying the water' is an apt comparison: if the fake drownings of Pascal and Meis are spoof baptisms, the resurrection of Pascal as Meis is as a "corpse,"[753] like the "putrefied corpse"[754] of the real suicide who is pulled from the water "in [his] place."[755] The fascination of the glory of the resurrected body, for him, is simply putrefaction, and Pascal is no poet.

However the most important way in which he fails to attain the gift of autism is in his retreat from mindfulness of separation.

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[752] Eg., The closed windows representing the world closed to him (211); the suicide of the gambler at the casino prefigures (perhaps inspires) his own fake suicide. (p.64)
[753] Ibid. p.181
[754] Ibid. p.69

[755] Ibid. p.72

Failing to be autistic

This section examines the most important sense in which Pascal/Meis fails to attain the gift of holy autism. This will show the contrast between *Mattia Pascal* and *Uno, Nessuno* to argue that together, read autistically, they can demonstrate the difference between autism and neurotypicality, where to be neurotypical is to fail to experience the gift of autism.

This chapter earlier discussed ways in which *Mattia Pascal* can be read as a narrative of resisting the book, in terms of religion and of the law. Initially, both suicides are blissful escapes, but separation soon becomes torture. Freedom is "a tyrant;"[756] he must "kill that fiction,"[757] and his dilemma becomes clear:

> I saw myself excluded from life forever ... the fear of falling again into life's trap would make me stay farther than ever from mankind; alone, utterly alone, distrustful, gloomy; and Tantalus' torment would be renewed for me.[758]

An autistic reading of Pascal/Meis which examines him as a candidate for apophatic fiction finds him wanting. Tempted by separation, he is unable to bear it, not least because it is morally inauthentic but also in its lack of fascination for him. A comparison with *The Interior Castle*'s soul makes this clear. Separation for the *Interior Castle* soul character is morally grounded (the whole point of the exercise is to be rooted more deeply in love which enables genuinely good works), whereas Pascal's entry into separation is selfish and irresponsible. Separation for him is only, in the end, intolerable loneliness: "sentenced to lie, I could never have another friend ... friendship means confiding."[759] [confiding: con(with)-fides(faith); his loneliness is intolerable because he is without faith] In contrast, *The Interior Castle*'s soul character suffers anguishes of loneliness, but it is also a blissful loneliness because it happens within the fascination of the presence of Christ. In *Uno, Nessuno,* Moscarda has in fact become closer to *The Interior Castle*'s soul, living a saintly

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[756] Ibid. p.93
[757] Ibid. p.212
[758] ibid. p.191
[759] Pirandello, *Mattia Pascal* p.101

life of renunciation and charity empowered by the mystical experience of fascination in the green blanket. Where the *Interior Castle*'s soul enjoys holy madness as bliss, and Moscarda is similarly blissfully and holily mad, the joy of madness terrifies Pascal/Meis. Even at the very start, he says "I felt so drunk with freedom I was almost afraid I'd go mad, that I couldn't bear it very long,"[760] and eventually, facing "Tantalus' torment, I left the house, like a madman,"[761] and at that point he cannot endure madness, so decides to return from the fiction of Meis to the reality of Pascal. Pascal, in the end, only "played dead and ran off,"[762] but *The Interior Castle*'s soul knows death as the consummation of the spiritual marriage, and Moscarda, too, lives only by dying, and thereby lives completely.

Pascal's retreat from the anti-metaphysical freedom from the book is indicated when with the Palearis, he realises that he is once again "caught in life's net."[763] Seeking a second freedom through a second suicide, however, he can only return to the 'slavery' of the original identity he sought to escape, because freedom is "a tyrant".[764] Here, as in chapter four, there is a suggestion of the parable of The Grand Inquisitor.[765] The freedom of living in Christ is, for the Grand Inquisitor, a torment too great for humanity. It is also beyond Mattia Pascal's capacity. So Pascal returns to the deconsecrated church which is the site of lifeless religion, and his story is held in safekeeping by the 'rat catcher' custodian as if "in a confessional."[766] With a deft double meaning, the narrative at the outset prefigures this. When Pascal describes his job at the library, he writes that the previous incumbent "didn't even have to look at [the books]; all he had to do was bear for a few hours a day the smell of mould and old age. This fate befell me too."[767]

Is this the fate of the custodian, or the fate of the mouldy old books? It is certainly the fate of the retreat back from freedom into the book and the letter

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[760] Ibid. p.88
[761] Ibid. p.191
[762] Ibid. p.233
[763] Ibid. p.160
[764] Ibid. p.93
[765] Dostoevsky's parable in *The Brothers Karamazov*
[766] Pirandello, *Mattia Pascal* p.243
[767] Ibid. p. xiv

of the law. This is most evident in the final persistence of the lie, which ends the book:

> Every now and then I go out there [to the cemetery] to see myself dead and buried … Who are you, after all? I shrug, shut my eyes for a moment, and answer: "Ah, my dear friend … I am the late Mattia Pascal.[768]

This is a false death, but also a false name: the person in the grave is not Mattia Pascal, but the real unknown, who is nameless. Pascal has moved from false name to false name, unable to be nameless. This echoes Beckett's *Nameless,* as was discussed earlier, and it also echoes Moscarda's triumphant death-into-life where "I am alive and I do not conclude. Life does not conclude. And life knows nothing of names."[769] Mattia Pascal may affect to be 'dead,' but his 'death' is diametrically opposed to (non)Moscarda's constant death and rebirth. Moscarda renounces names, but Pascal goes back to his dead, old name as the late Mattia Pascal, having learnt nothing of conscious autism.

At this start of this chapter, Pirandello was quoted saying that *Uno, Nessuno* "reached the most extreme conclusions,"[770] and as his last novel it might be seen as the goal towards which his work has been working. Thinking of it as a triumph of autism over psychopathy would make sense because (non)Moscarda has found humility, reverence and charity. In comparison, *Mattia Pascal* has been read in this chapter as the portrayal of the non-autistic, manipulative cognitive empathy which fails to attain the costly, selfless incarnational metaphor of apophatic fiction. This makes *Mattia Pascal* a salutary tale for the neurotypical reader. Recalling the earlier autistic reading of Karl Barth, the gift of an autistic Krisis is offered to the neurotypical reader, as the gift of failure.

5.5 The "artist of failure"

In an interview late in life, Pirandello reflects:

> When I was a child I had difficulties even with my mother, and as for my father, it appeared to be quite

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[768] Ibid. p.244
[769] Pirandello, Un*o, Nessuno* p.159
[770] Cover matter, *Uno, Nessuno (*Mondadori edition)

> impossible to communicate with him, not just when I
> was preparing myself to do so but when I had actually
> tried and had failed abysmally. As an artist I owe a great
> deal to him for the agony of those moments.[771]

A good example of Pirandello's art as the failure of communication is in the F/father's words ('F/father' as the Autistic God), in *Sei Caratteri*:

> But if it is all here, the evil! In the words! … And how
> can we understand each other, dear Sir, if I put into the
> words I say the value of things as they are in me;
> whereas whoever listens to them inevitably understands
> them in the sense and with the value they have for him,
> of a world as he has it inside himself? We think we
> understand each other; we never do![772]

Pirandello (the man) is not being read as autistic here[773] - but he is articulating a "failure" which autism might inhabit in a theologically creative way. To be an artist of failure is to return to the starting point of this thesis, and to think through Rowan Williams' words that we must endeavour to be "learning 'difficulty' itself."[774] To be an artist of failure could be seen as a supreme ability for the articulation of what a universal autism can recognise as the authentic understanding of a tear in the (metaphysical) fabric. This is an endless "Chinese box" of enactment without the possibility of final answer.[775] Susan Bassnett McGuire writes that

> (In Sei Caratteri) Pirandello has created a play about the
> processes of artistic creation, a study of the relativity of
> form enclosed within a formal framework. It is therefore
> not only a play that contains within it another play, it is
> a play about the nature of the play constructed on a
> Chinese box principle, where the answering of one
> question merely opens the lid to another.[776]

The 'Chinese box' is the play-within-the-play:

> Like Shakespeare, Pirandello is concerned with using the
> stage as a metaphor for life, but unlike Shakespeare

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[771] *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, 23 June 1935, quoted in Giudice, *Pirandello: A Biography* p.6
[772] Büdel, *Pirandello* p.57
[773] In fact, although it is not germane to this thesis, an interesting future research direction could be the possibility of viewing Pirandello as he is portrayed in biographies such as Giudice's. There would be a case to make for Pirandello's obsessive use of his schizophrenic wife as muse, and the way he keeps her imprisoned, as a profile of the zero degree of empathy tending towards high cognitive empathy and low affective empathy; the mirror image of autism.
[774] Williams, *The Edge of Words* p.116
[775] Which can be seen as an influence in Samuel Beckett's work – for example, *Waiting for Godot* or *Happy Days*, in the hoping for a definitive message which never arrives.
[776] Bassnet-McGuire, *Luigi Pirandello* p.47

> there is the added ironical dimension arising from
> Pirandello's particular vision of the dichotomy between
> art and life, between the fixed and the movable.[777]

Bassnet-McGuire is right to see irony as the contrast between Shakespearean and Pirandellian absurd tragedy, but the issue is not of a dichotomy between art and life, but their confluence in the gestalt psychology of 'construction' used by Pirandello, as was seen in the construction trope in *Uno, Nessuno.* To think of this enactment of the tragi-comic, a surprisingly apt image takes this chapter, in conclusion, back to the metaphor of universal autism as a tear in the metaphysical fabric. In *Mattia Pascal,* the narrative relentlessly lampoons the theosophist Paleari's imagery of enlightenment,[778] but the narrator Pascal/Meis remarks "Who could contradict him, after all?"[779] Paleari comes up with a strange image, connected with the comic event of "the tragedy of Orestes in a marionette theatre!"[780]

Paleari speculates on this event, that if a hole were torn in the paper sky, "'(Oreste's) eyes … would go straight to that hole, from which every kind of evil influence would crowd the stage, and Orestes would suddenly feel helpless. In other words, Orestes would become Hamlet. There's the difference between ancient tragedy and modern, Signor Meis – believe me – a hole torn in a paper sky."[781]

It seems that Paleari, despite his quasi-Platonist metaphysics, has expressed something essential both to Pirandello's thought and to the autistic hermeneutic. A "hole torn in a paper sky" works to "pierce" the illusion of the play – Orestes becomes Hamlet, tortured and rendered paralysed by doubt. This hole in the sky can be read in terms of Pirandello's work as the fundamental interrogation prompted by his disruption of the willing suspension of disbelief, "tearing open" the conventions by which we live. The hole in the sky, for a universal autism, is the tear in the fabric which challenges all neurotypical mindreading complacency. Neither Pirandello nor the autistic myth-maker will let the reader off the hook, and as marionettes, readers are 'left hanging'

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[777] ibid. p.69
[778] particularly in chapter XIII, *The Little Lantern,* pp. 154ff; Meis comments that Paleari's eccentric fascination with the metaphor of enlightenment could be called *lanternosophy* (p.155)
[779] Ibid. p.160
[780] Ibid. p.139
[781] ibid.

irrevocably in the suspension of suspension. The absolute autism which Pirandello's last novel achieves is its "no conclusion." After that, Pirandello turns to play writing, because only play-acting is now possible. In the autistic hermeneutic, absolute incarnational metaphor is 'black and white,' 'all or nothing' immersion in the play. Taking the metaphor literally means inhabiting it because there is nothing else, and there is no possible ostensive intent towards which any decoding would turn.

To bring this autistic thinking full circle, there is Pirandello's remark, recorded by Büdel, that "tutto è favola a tutto è vero" ("everything is a story, and everything is true"). The paper sky has been torn, meaning that we now know it to be only paper, yet it remains our sky. Our paper sky is where we draw our paper fairies, and write our apophatic, absurd and haecceic stories.

Conclusion

Pirandello's *Nessuno* offered a space of the text where names are not fitting, and the conclusion is "no conclusion." For this thesis, which has travelled towards Pirandello's 'honest atheism,' the task of this conclusion is to articulate what this non-conclusion means. It needs to come to a conclusion about (or in) a non-conclusion. To do this, a return to the initial metaphors set out in the introduction frames how each chapter has worked towards a conclusive non-conclusion.

In the introduction, the initial premise was that if it seemed that 'deep called to deep,' in a meeting of LTA and autism, the thesis would be to explore if that were true and if so, how. Operating by means of literary discourse, a tissue of spatial metaphors opened this question up: trembling on a bridge; standing in a paradoxically dazzling darkness; finding identity at the margins which might in fact be a truer centre. The conviction the thesis set out to test out was that a particular authenticity might find itself sharing space on an inter-disciplinary bridge, and the goal was to consider if that inter-disciplinary silent conversation between silences might become a new place in its own right.

In order to build this bridge and argue for a new mode of being on it, there had to be a framework building from, and to, both sides. On the side of literature theology, Michel de Certeau's mystic fable and Maurice Blanchot's space of literature provided a register where a mythologising hermeneutic could be developed. On the side of autism, thinking itself as a literary form led to constructing a mythological autism. The mythology was drawn from archetypes which became mindfulness of separation, fascination, incarnational metaphor, autistic integrity, conscious autism and, finally, the absolute autism of the affective empathy of divine love.

This absolute autism could become the voice of radical theology in the hermeneutical world of autism, where absolute autism, conceiving itself in the death of God, could become the autism of God. This autistic God was a mythical archetype, and exploring a poetics of this archetype was the project of chapters four and five.

What has this achieved? Firstly, it has created a space where literature might open itself up to autism. Secondly, it has offered a space where, equally, theological thinking might be possible for autism. Both of these are possibilities, offered to autism, perhaps to some autists who stand at that particular bridge over that deep calling to autistic deep. These are idiosyncratic possibilities, not as an attempt to create a definitive *ex cathedra* literary-theological autistic thinking, but as one speculative venture as to how the journey might be attempted.

However, the third, and perhaps most politically significant achievement of this thesis has been to bring the divergent, creative modes of autistic being into view of theology, to hope that the theological reader will hear autism speak not as the monster of the "I am Autism" scaremongering narrative, but as a spiritual gift, in the terms suggested by John Swinton of autistic love. This will, perhaps, offer a deeper understanding of the kenotic Jesus, and of the beatitudes which invert ability and disability as we stand in the grace of God who stands with us.

Post-script – an anonymous, anecdotal, (non) conclusion

The above is a linear, logical conclusion. It is, in fact, and necessarily, a successful 'thesis,' but perhaps thereby fails to capture the necessary 'failure' at its heart, which in fact gives it life. Perhaps a conclusion needs the counterweight of a non-conclusion.

This is, as Raschke reminds us,[782] forever a Barthian *theologia viatorum,* where autism is not 'cured' or 'resolved,' and we can never really draw conclusions. The poor (whose spirits are blessed in the Beatitudes) are, in Jesus' words, "always with us,"[783] and the gift is to return to Rowan Williams' phrase, "learning difficulty itself." [784] There will always be the glorious, subversive power of autism's (dis)ability, in the universal autism of Blake's and Altizer's universal humanity of the anonymous Jesus. This will be the spiritual insight of a second naivete where we inhabit Little Gidding and "know the place for the first time" precisely by not knowing. Like (non)Moscarda we are free by having no name and no conclusion. Coming back to our uncured selves in our glory, we can inhabit the Wake where

> … p. s. fin again …
> Far calls. Coming, far! End here. Us, then, Finn,
> again![785]

To answer to the non-conclusion which, finally, Pirandello's *Nessuno* led, an inconclusive conclusion might be possible, by returning to the beginning. Heather Walton's thinking about the poetic as answering to that to which theology cannot answer. This might outwit the illusory compromise of a conclusion, and yet conclude. It is an answer, thereby, which, in Blanchot's terms, is a non-answer. Moscarda relinquishes his name, but in so doing he becomes the pure 'I' of the text. Reluctantly, 'I' will follow Moscarda, as the I of the text, and I am now speaking to you, in the first person. I will count the

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[782] Raschke, *Theological Thinking: An In-quiry,* (Atlanta, Georgia; American Academy of Religion/ Scholars Press,1988) p.2
[783] Mark 4.17
[784] Williams, Rowan, *The Edge of Words* p.125
[785] Joyce, James, *Finnegan's Wake, (*Middlesex, UK; Penguin Classics, 1999 (1939))

ways of the improbable journey to the nexus of autism, literature and theology. I am an autistic voice. This is, in Aristotle's terms, an improbable possibility. [786] I am improbable, on multiple levels, or rather, as an autistic person, I have ended up in improbable places. Or perhaps not.

Aristotle also writes:

> as Agathon says,
> One might perchance say that was probable --
> That things improbable oft will hap to men.
> For what is improbable does happen, and therefore it is
> probable that improbable things will happen. [787]

Things improbable also happen to women, and the confluence of improbable probability is perhaps also the place where moments of unexpected interdisciplinarity come to be. The "I" of this thesis's author/creator would be (perhaps by chance?) a woman, a literary reader, a theological thinker, and an autist.

The stereotypes of autism:

1. Autism happens in children[788]
2. Autism is a male condition[789]
3. Autistic people only read non-fiction[790]
4. Autistic people don't believe in religion[791]

And yet, here we are. Is this an outrageous improbability? Perhaps not:

1. Catriona Stewart's work with SWAN (Scottish Women's Autism
   Network)[792] has pioneered deeper understanding of autism and

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[786] Aristotle, Rhetoric II.24.9
[787] ibid.
[788] but not exclusively - UK NICE guidelines for assessing adults for an autism diagnosis: "core autism signs and symptoms (difficulties in social interaction and communication and the presence of stereotypic behaviour, resistance to change or restricted interests) that have been present in childhood and continuing into adulthood"
https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/CG142/chapter/1-Guidance#identification-and-assessment
[789] Possibly not – eg., "New research suggests the disorder often looks different in females, many of whom are being misdiagnosed and missing out on the support they need," **Maia Szalavitz, Autism—It's Different in Girls, Scientific American/Mind/Mental Health March 1ˢᵗ 2016, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/autism-it-s-different-in-girls/**
[790] But special interests often include the imaginary worlds of TV dramas – texts which are read obsessively, avidly and perhaps more deeply than by neurotypicals
[791] The large number of people with autism who attended the ASPARRG (Autistic Spectrum People and Religion Research Group)/Glasgow University one day seminar on autism and religion in September 2013 suggested that this might be an over-generalisation.
[792] http://www.swanscotland.com/

gender, and argues persuasively that autism is under-diagnosed in women – we are socially conditioned to learn to adopt roles – we mask our autism, learning to mimic, at the cost of expressing our real selves.

2. Autistic children grow up into autistic adults – diagnostic structures only came into general use around the 1970s, and only in the framework of looking for developmental delays in children. So, untold generations born before the 1970s have been creatively peppered with undiagnosed autists, and some of us 'twigged' that we might belong to that branch of the family tree.

3. And oh, of course - Autistic people don't do metaphor.

But Oops, I just did – with the branches of the tree where I 'twig,' and relentlessly as the rhetorical base of this whole thesis. Which is

4. in the end, really all about God.

How improbable is it that somebody Mindblind, hyper-sensitive and woefully unconventional (asked at one point in life, why "someone so clever can be so stupid"), can be so clearly autistic and yet still – somehow – feel the irresistible need for poetry and for god? I didn't come to poetry, or the novel, or film, or drama easily. They baffled me. Watching an episode of the police drama *Z Cars* as a child, I saw a scene where the police discovered a dead body in a boat. I was baffled by how the producers managed to find a dead body to use. And yet. Words, music, art held something, just as behind all the incomprehensible nonsense of religion, something was also there. Words described, and the world cried out to be described. The branch of an organization was the branch of a tree, and somehow trees, and organisations, and genealogies, and things to hang shoes on, all cried out to be described. To de-scribe is not to de-cipher. Ciphers are the conventions of the Neurotypical world, too easy for autistic creative perplexity.[793]

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[793] An echo of Italo Calvino's phrase 'systematic perplexity;' Calvino's work, in its poetic taxonomies of the visible world, has also been a hospitable environment. See also http://theses.gla.ac.uk/1961/

In the Introduction, I spoke about darkness and quoted Dante's pregnant words as he begins the journey:

> nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,
> mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
> ché la diritta via era smarrita.
> [Midway in the path of our life
> I found [rediscovered] myself in [by means of] a dark wood
> Whose right path was lost][794]

Deep calls to deep in the overwhelming of the waters, and in overwhelming darkness the urgency of Bishop Jenkins' words, which permeate LTA as witnessed by both Walton and Jasper, becomes felt.

A strange experience of darkness as personal reality became understandable as autism *in mezzo del cammin,* with an autism diagnosis not in childhood but "midway in the path of our life," and I began to wonder whether autism might also be a way approach also the darkness of LTA's abyss.[795] This felt anything but negative (as the whole of this thesis has argued, negativity/disability is the paradoxical key), as it assumed a profoundly positive negativity. The hell of Milton's darkness visible is to languish in the diminishing returns of the de-cipherment project. So, the decision to look at the dark wood, and the path in it. The decision to look at autism, and to look at the un-de-cipherment of theology. Instead, permission to not understand liberated something. I think it was the Emperor's New Clothes of "what the text means."

I'm not convinced that honest autistic atheists are spiritually "thin" people (to return to John Swinton's considerations about autism). Listening to some young, bright autists, I sense that they have wonderful creative potential and need only to be given permission (which also means support). Like them, I 'need my own space.' I'll always be mindblind, I'll always need to escape from noisy, overstimulating environments. Am I sad to miss the party? To be honest, it's kind of boring, when I could be reading a poem instead.

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[794] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia [The Divine Comedy] – Inferno* 1.1 [this writer's own translation]; *mi ritrovai* suggests, perhaps (another direction to be reserved for future research) re-finding the self is *as per* the wood, not as an unfortunate error.
[795] This "I" was midway through writing on a literary-theological abyss in Italo Calvino's work when the 'thunderbolt' of the autism diagnosis arrived (recalling Mark C Taylor's use of the *paysage foudroyé* image, could this be both a shock and an illumination – a 'light bulb moment?')

Another level of autistic understanding emerged as the thesis progressed. The oft-sung lines from my childhood, of the Glasgow Victorian hymnist George Matheson came back again and again, from childhood: "Oh Love that wilt not let me go/I rest my weary soul in Thee." Matheson's lines can seem sentimental, with their images of oceans, rainbows and blossoms, but Matheson was a blind poet – comparisons with Milton would yield many dissimilarities, however.[796] When Matheson writes: "O light that followest all my way, I yield my flickering torch to thee," he too is invoking a dazzling light in darkness; the light is behind him, not before him, and he has only a flickering torch. Too easy, perhaps, to conclude with the happy ending of "seeing" God in the darkness. Matheson "trace(s) the rainbow through the rain" (tracing it with his blind eyes), holding on only to the conviction that "Thy promise is not vain." He does not sing in triumph that "mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

It did, however, come to me that just as God "would not let me know" (my slip of the pen at the keyboard, like Hopkins' - I meant to say "let me go"), it was just as true that, despite every darkness, I would not let God go. Perhaps this was another aspect of autism, where we 'simply won't let go,' following things relentlessly to their conclusion (even the autistic bafflement of the non-conclusion). So I wrote my way into the search for the painful autistic integrity of self-knowledge and acceptance.

When I see Jesus in a fallen sycamore leaf I am incomparably blessed. Like Matheson I stay (mind)blind, but the promise can exist, perhaps more profoundly, in the space of the lack of ciphers. Is this lonely, without belonging to the ciphering community of religion? Not really, when I have the un-deciphering Osip Mandelstam as my friend.[797] Mandelsam sees only the swallows, and when, as Hopkins would, I trace Jesus in the veins of a fallen sycamore leaf, the promise is not vain but vein. This vein is not only a seam in the rock, yielding precious stone. It also became the vein of the kenotic Christ,

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[796] Where Milton writes "they also serve who only stand and wait," Matheson is, with great difficulty, getting a Divinity degree from the University of Glasgow, and then, as an ordained minister, engaging in parish work.

[797] Mandelstam's poetry of exile: Jacques Rancière examines the way in which Mandelstam's poetry, is a reaction against a symbolist poetry co-opted to Soviet propaganda. In contrast, the swallows of Mandelstam's poem fly free of constraint, exiled from referentiality - see Rancière, Jacques, *The flesh of words: the politics of writing* (trans. Charlotte Mandell) (Stanford, California; Stanford University Press, 2004)

blood poured out in communion with the suffering discerned by intolerable affective empathy. Nevertheless, this is all emphatically word games, not theology. The promise is held in poetry, and Jesus does not 'appear before me' in an allegorical conclusion. So my truest autistic self, for all my patient teachers have taught me, resists the symbolic temptation and traces simply the fragility of the autism (another slip – the autumn) leaf with its colour, texture, shape, and, as irreligious as an Altizer or a Pirandello, I am incomparably blessed.

I learned it all back to front. For a start, I was making heavy weather, not least of writing, when I learned I had autism, or received the name for it, so literature and theology was already the site of the disaster where autism, right at the end, entered the field.[798] In the light of conscious autism seeking coping strategies, my teachers helped me learn to read, and 'read.' 'Reading' people can be learned when it is not intuitive.[799] Learning that I didn't know, and what I didn't know, made it possible to adapt.

In terms of reading, permission not to know meant that the reading journey was a back to front, archaeological historical project. Starting (as instinctively I did) with postmodern fiction, I found a hospitable space where the emperor's new clothes were already out the window, and the game was to not know. This was a text I could enter. Moving backwards from there, modernist fiction's unreliable narrator also gave me permission to not know, and to validate my Mindblindness. Armed with this permission, I could now travel back, forwards, and in any direction with permission to enter the text and wonder, and work at empathy with an act of conscious imagination. So I allowed myself to picture the read room (another slip – red room) where the child Jane Eyre is locked up by her cruel aunt, and to linger on the description of her distress, and imagine it happening. What was happening was the nuts and bolts of the learned pleasure of reading. My instinctive, fascinated awareness of *ecceitas* finally could be coherent because it had been liberated with room to breathe. My honest atheism with its longing for God finally validated that

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[798] Dunster, Ruth M. (2010) *The abyss of Calvino's deconstructive writing: an apology for non-foundational theology* MTh(R) thesis, University of Glasgow.
[799] Samuel Baum's 2009 Fox TV series *Lie to Me* and Alex Gardiner's 2015 UPI film *Ex Machina* are two imagined examples of learned Mindreading.

ecceitas. I am grateful to my teachers for making this 'I,' the text, able to read and write, drawing my own conclusions, inconclusively, so that in one small corner of the beautiful diversity of autistic world, this autism speaks.

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