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CONFESSIONAL IDENTITY, EATING AND READING: CATHOLIC IMITATIONS OF DU BARTAS'S *SEPMASSE**

KATHRYN BANKS

This essay seeks to examine how, in the period of the Counter-reformation, conceptualisations of reading and imitation were inflected by confessional difference. As is well known, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed considerable anxiety about the power of the printed word, as manifested by competing attempts to control it, and, arguably, by the relatively high numbers of booksellers and printers murdered during the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres of 1572; the printing press had enabled reading material to be made available on a scale vastly beyond any previously known, and, in the context of religious division and civil war, this possibility had been exploited in the service of polemic.¹ Even where Protestant-authored texts make no religiously divisive arguments, concerns about their influence may be detected on the part of Catholic readers. This essay will explore anxieties about reading and imitating the confessional 'other', that is, anxieties that beneath an apparently unproblematic textual surface there might lurk dangers which cannot be fully countered by censorship or by care taken while reading.

Therefore, whereas Richard Scholar's contribution to this volume examines the cognitive benefits perceived in imitating writers considered as 'friends', I will analyse concerns about imitating those who could not straightforwardly be portrayed as 'friends', and who might even be described as 'adversaries'. Imitation, I will argue, emerges as a problem of relating to the 'other', not in the form with which we are most familiar – that of a Greco-Roman other who is distant and desired, if also threatening – but rather that of a Protestant other whom a Catholic imitator might wish to maintain at a distance and to avoid

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1. Henri-Jean Martin, *The French Book: religion, absolutism, and readership, 1585-1715*, translated by Paul Saenger and Nadine Saenger (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), chapter 1; Francis Higman, 'Le Levain de l'Évangile', in *Histoire de l'édition française*, 4 vols, vol. I: *Le Livre conquérant. Du Moyen Âge au milieu du XVIIe siècle* (Paris : Promodis, 1982), pp. 305-26; Georges Minois, *Censure et culture sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris : Fayard, 1995). The murders of booksellers and printers – together with the burning of books – feature prominently in accounts of the events by clerics: Denis Pallier, 'les réponses catholiques', in *Le Livre conquérant*, pp. 327-47 (p. 328).

‘incorporating’ into himself or his text through the ‘digestion’ of reading. Commonplace notions of Protestantism as a poison which endangers individual and collective Catholic bodies make it particularly problematic to ‘eat’ or ‘incorporate’ a Protestant text, especially since the Protestant ‘threat’ to Catholic ‘bodies’ was conceptually bound up with not only eating but also that symbolic act of eating crucial to defining confessional difference in the Counter-reformation, namely the Eucharist.

The suggestions above will be substantiated and explored through a case study of poems by two Catholic imitators of the Protestant poet Du Bartas. There are a number of reasons why these poems are a particularly promising testing ground for the investigation. Firstly, Du Bartas was, of course, exceptionally popular; his works were rapidly produced in hundreds of editions published throughout France,² as well as being translated into languages including English, Dutch, Latin, German, Italian, Polish, Danish and Swedish.³ Secondly, Du Bartas’s work was central to the promotion and renewal of Christian poetry, and was read and imitated by Catholics as well as Protestants; Catholics deeply concerned with the religious role of poetry adopted a model of it which had been most clearly furthered by a Protestant.⁴ Thirdly, Du Bartas’s work was very predominantly irenic; while it does contain some politically controversial material,⁵ it tends to avoid points of theological contention. The poem received the authorisation of the Sorbonne, and no Catholic reader was able, to my knowledge, to identify more than a very small number of problematic passages (and just as many or more were

2. There were at least two hundred editions of Du Bartas’s works between 1574 and 1632. See Yvonne Bellenger, *Du Bartas et ses divines semaines* (Paris: SEDES, 1993), pp. 163-67; Gilles Banderier, ‘Une édition inconnue de la première *Sepmaine*’, *Bibliothèque d’humanisme et renaissance* 58 (1996), 681-83.
3. Bellenger, *Divines Semaines*, pp. 158–61.
4. On the varied imitations of Du Bartas’s poetry, see: Klára Csürös, ‘Dans le sillage de du Bartas : l’inventaire épique d’un monde menacé’, in *Du Bartas: poète encyclopédique du XVIIe siècle*, edited by James Dauphiné (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1988), pp. 109-20; Michel Magnien, ‘Du Bartas en France au XVII^e siècle’, in *Du Bartas 1590–1990: actes du colloque international d’Auch-Le Bartas-Pau (6–8 avril 1990)*, edited by James Dauphiné (Mont-de-Marsan: Éditions Interuniversitaires, 1992), pp. 45–80; Philippe Chométy, « *Philosopher en langage des dieux* »: *La Poésie d’idées en France au siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris: Champion, 2006), pp. 200-202 and *passim*.
5. Kathryn Banks, *Cosmos and Image in the Renaissance: French Love Lyric and Natural-Philosophical Poetry* (Oxford: Legenda, 2008), pp. 65-90; id., ‘Royal Authority and Commonplace Similitudes in French Natural-Philosophical Poetry: Duchesne’s *Grand Miroir du monde* and Du Bartas’s *Sepmaine*’, in *Commonplace Culture: Reformation, Counter-Reformation and Revolt*, edited by David Cowling and Mette Bruun (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming), pp. 133-54.

identified by some Protestant readers).⁶ Yet, as we shall see, poems by some of Du Bartas's Catholic imitators point to a fear that, given the poet's confessional identity, there must be much more of harm buried in the depths of Du Bartas's poetry than those few short passages which could easily be identified and then avoided, corrected, or excised.

This study will concentrate upon passages from Catholic poets which both consider the potential dangers of reading and also allude (indirectly) to Du Bartas; the extracts are also significant because of the ways in which they themselves (to varying degrees) imitate and transform some of Du Bartas's own reflections on the role of poetry. One discussion in particular seems to have seized the attention of a number of Du Bartas's imitators, most obviously the Catholics Michel Quillian and Jude Serclier, in, respectively, the *Derniere Semaine, ou Consommation du monde* (1596)⁷ and the *Grand Tombeau du monde, ou Jugement final* (1606),⁸ and the Protestants Christofle de Gamon and Abel d'Argent, in the *Semaine, ou creation du monde, du Sieur Christofle de Gamon, contre celle du Sieur du Bartas*

6. François Feu-ardent located lines in Du Bartas's poetry which he considered misleading with reference to the Trinity, Hell, and whether Adam and Enoch could enjoy beatific vision immediately after their deaths: *Sepmaine premiere des dialogues, ausquels sont examinez et confutez cent soixante et quatorze erreurs des Calvinistes, partie contre la tres-sainte Trinite et unite de Dieu en commun, partie contre chacune des trois personnes en particulier* (Paris: Sebastien et Robert Nivelle, 1589), ff. 27^v-29^r; *Theomachia calvinistica, sedecim libris profligata, quibus mille et quadringenti huius sectæ novissimæ errores [...]* (Paris: apud Sebastianum Nivellium, 1604), vol. I, book V, pp. 182-3, and vol. II, book XIV, pp. 179-82. Feu-ardent's objections are discussed in Leone Couture, 'Les Poèmes de Du Bartas et l'orthodoxie', *Revue de Gascogne*, 11 (1870), 451-67, 485-92. On the other hand, the Protestant Simon Goulart felt it necessary in his commentary to direct the interpretation of some of Du Bartas's lines, including those about the Trinity, and Christofle de Gamon, in his *Semaine, ou creation du monde [...] contre celle du Sieur du Bartas* (1609), found a large number of errors in Du Bartas's poem (although many pertain to natural philosophy more than theology).
7. *Derniere Semaine* (Rouen: Thomas Daré, 1597), pp. 25, 27-28, beginning of 'Day' II. All citations will be from this edition. The *Derniere Semaine* had also been published in Paris in 1596.
8. *Grand Tombeau* (Lyon: Jean Pillehotte, 1606), pp. 226-46, beginning of Book 3. All citations will be from this edition. The *Grand Tombeau* was republished in 1628 in Paris as well as in Lyon. The *Derniere Semaine* and the *Grand Tombeau* have been the object of a relatively large number of article-length studies, some of which discuss thematic relationships between these poems and Du Bartas's *Sepmaine*. These include: Kathryn Banks, 'Les Mondes nouveau-né et vieillissant: *La Sepmaine* de Du Bartas et la poésie apocalyptique', in *Veillir à la Renaissance*, edited by Colette Winn and Cathy Yandell (Paris: Champion, 2009), pp. 319-37; Thierry Victoria, 'Les "Tombeaux du monde": fin du monde et fins dernières au soir de la Renaissance', *Réforme, Humanisme, Renaissance*, 65 (2008), 7-24; Frank Lestringant, 'L'Apocalypse entre deux siècles: Michel Quillian et Jude Serclier, émules de Du Bartas (1596-1606)', in *D'un siècle à l'autre: littérature et société de 1590 à 1610*, edited by Philippe Desan et Giovanni Dotoli (Fasano: Scena / Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2001) pp. 233-50; Violaine Giacomotto-Charra, "'Trois

(1609)⁹ and the *Semaine d'Argent, contenant l'histoire de la seconde creation, ou restauration du monde* (1629).¹⁰ The passage, located at the opening of the second 'Day' (or Book) of Du Bartas's *Sepmaine*, focuses upon the powerful and pernicious effects which poetry can have upon its reader, opposing harmful poetry to Du Bartas's own poetry.

Like Du Bartas, the poets listed above evoke dangerous poetry while defining their own mode of poetry, and do so in prominent positions at the opening of a book; they also employ, as Du Bartas had done, the vocabulary of eating and poison to describe reading and detrimental reading-matter; Quillian, Gamon, and d'Argent also imitate very closely the vocabulary and structures used in Du Bartas's discussion (and in some cases in the imitations of it penned by each other). What is striking, though, is that three of the four poets imply that Du Bartas's own poetry might harm readers: whereas Du Bartas and d'Argent criticise only love poetry, which they contrast with their own poetry dedicated to God, Gamon, Quillian and Serclier all convey concern about the influence of Du Bartas's popular poem. The unease is not restricted to Catholic poets: the poem of the Protestant Gamon is written 'against' that of Du Bartas and proceeds for the most part by careful correction of Du Bartas's 'errors' (which often consist, for Gamon, in his not following the Bible closely enough); and, in Gamon's imitation of Du Bartas's discussion of poetry, the poet suggests that 'architectes d'erreurs' – such as 'le Chantre Gascon', Du Bartas – 'poison' their readers whereas he, Gamon, provides them with 'good food' (pp. 67-69). However, the case of the Catholic poets Serclier and Quillian is particularly interesting, since, as we shall see, anxieties about reading and about the effects of Du Bartas's influential poem become bound up with confessional difference, and the potential 'poison' of poetry with Protestantism, with its depiction as disease or corruption, and even with its perceived attack upon the body of Christ. Moreover, whereas Gamon's

Parques Étranges": Modalités et enjeux de la représentation de l'Apocalypse dans la *Dernière Semaine ou consommation du monde* de Michel Quillian', *Eidolon*, 57 (2000), 105-15; François Roudaut, 'D'un désordre à l'autre: Michel Quillian continuateur de Guillaume du Bartas', in *Du Bartas: actes des premières journées du Centre Jacques de Laprade tenues au Musée national du château de Pau le 19 novembre 1993*, edited by James Dauphiné et Paul Mironneau ([Pau]: J. & D. Éditions, 1994) pp. 89–102.

9. *Semaine, ou creation* (Lyon: Claude Morillon, 1609), pp. 67-69, beginning of 'Day' III. Gamon's *Semaine* was published in two editions in 1609, followed by a third edition in 1610. Despite indications to the contrary in the BnF catalogue, there was no earlier edition; see Claude-Gilbert Dubois, 'Une réécriture de la *Sepmaine* de Du Bartas au temps d'Henri IV: *La Semaine ou création du monde* de Christophe de Gamon (1609)', in *Du Bartas: actes des premières journées du Centre Jacques de Laprade[...]*, pp. 45-66 (pp. 46, 62 n. 4).
10. *Semaine d'Argent* (Sedan: Jaques de Turenne, 1629), p. 76, beginning of 'Day' IV. The poem was republished in 1630 and 1632, again in Sedan, but under a slightly different title, namely *La Semaine d'Argent, contenant l'histoire de la seconde creation, ou restauration du genre humain*.

poem suggests that Du Bartas's 'errors' should be dealt with by a process of systematic correction, both Serclier and Quillian appear to fear, to a greater or lesser degree, that 'poison' seeps through Du Bartas's poem in such a way that it cannot be properly extracted or corrected.

Quillian and Serclier differ enormously in their attitudes towards Protestantism, and so together their poems provide insight into how both a hardline Catholic and also a more moderate one might have approached questions of reading Du Bartas or Protestants more generally. Quillian, a Breton minor noble, appears to have been close to the League. 1588 saw the publication of a poetic *Discours* dedicated to Henri de Guise and signed by '[v]ostre perpetual et tres-obeissant serviteur, M. Q. Breton'.¹¹ The poem, explicitly intended as an 'heroique chant',¹² celebrates the duke's victories over the Protestants, as well as vilifying the latter and appealing to the former to 'kill the Huguenot monster' (p. 8); it was republished in 1589, after the murder of the duke, under the titles *Panegyric, ou Discours sur les faitz héroiques de feu Mgr le duc de Guise*,¹³ and *Grandeurs et vaillantises de monsieur de Guyse, prince de Jouinville*.¹⁴ Seven years later, after the conversion and crowning of Henri IV, Quillian dedicated his *Derniere Semaine* to the new king (albeit in a somewhat ambivalent manner), and sought to obtain a position with Henri, offering legal or poetic services,¹⁵ as well as demonstrating through his poem the willingness to write in the style of Du Bartas who, as was well known, had served Henri closely;¹⁶ the opening of the

11. *Discours dedié à Monseigneur le Duc de Guyse Grand Maistre de France, Gouverneur General pour le Roy* (n. p.: n. publ.), p. 4.
12. Sonnet au lecteur.
13. Paris: Jacques de Varangles.
14. Paris: Michel Jouin. I have not been able to consult this work but Bruno Méniel states that it is the same as the *Panegyric ou discours (Renaissance de l'épopée: la Poésie épique en France de 1572 à 1623, Geneva: Droz, 2004, p. 521)*.
15. Quillian suggests that he would not wish to 'escrire en vers selon la passion / Des grands, ou de l'amour' but rather to 'faire service / Aux cliens implorant l'aide de la Justice'; however, he concludes by saying that he would be happy either to fulfil 'quelque honorable office' or to glorify the king in writing ('en arrosant au champ de mes cahiers, / De mon encre immortel, vos penibles Lauriers'); 'Epistre au roy', non-paginated.
16. Du Bartas became Navarre's *écuyer tranchant* in 1576 and fought in his service, as well as participating in the Academy at the Court of Navarre and serving as a kind of court poet there. He became Henri's *gentilhomme-servant* in 1580 and his gentleman in ordinary of the bed chamber in 1585, and was sent by him on a diplomatic mission to Scotland and England in 1587. The poet's connection with Henri was well known enough that a figure named 'Bartus' appears by Henri's side in Christopher Marlowe's play *The Massacre at Paris* (despite the fact that we know of no claims that Du Bartas actually was in Paris during the massacres); see *The Works of Guillaume De Salluste Sieur Du Bartas*, edited by Urban Tigner Holmes Jr, John Coriden Lyons, Robert White Linker and others, 3 vols (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935-40), I, 11-20, and also Yvonne Bellenger and Jean-Claude Ternaux, *Du Bartas* (Paris: Memini, 1998), pp. 134-35, and James Dauphiné, 'Du Bartas et Henri de Navarre', in *Du Bartas 1590-1990: actes du colloque international d'Auch*, pp. 131-41.

poem, too, includes a section making it clear that Quillian is not on the side of those who resist the king or of their Spanish supporters (p. 2). However, in places the *Derniere Semaine* demonstrates an intransigent and aggressive attitude towards Protestants. For example, just as God sometimes punishes men straight away, so the French kill Huguenots (p. 149). Likewise, in the passage about poetry and reading, Quillian displays hostility, suggesting, despite his own debts to Du Bartas, that texts by Protestants should never be read. Serclier, on the other hand, was an Augustinian canon regular of the minor order of St Ruff in Avignon; he combined interests in eschatology and demonology, publishing a treatise, *l'Antidemon historial* (1609), as well as a number of works on religious topics. By contrast with Quillian, Serclier expresses admiration for Du Bartas's work. However, as we shall see, arguably he nonetheless shares with Quillian a sense of Protestantism as a 'poison' which might be 'consumed' through reading, giving rise to 'disease' or 'corruption'.

For Serclier and Quillian, as for Du Bartas, poetry is a powerful and potentially 'poisonous' force, which can lead the reader away from the divine as well as towards it, and can deceive as well as enlighten.¹⁷ All three fear poets who are *pipeur[s]*.¹⁸ However, Quillian's discussion recalls that of Du Bartas more immediately than Serclier's does. Quillian, like Du Bartas, situates his treatment of the question at the outset of the second 'Day' and, linguistically speaking, echoes Du Bartas very closely. His opening line – 'que je hay ces esprits, dont la voix flateresse' – recalls that of Du Bartas, 'Tous ces doctes esprits, dont la voix charmeresse'.¹⁹ Like Du Bartas, Quillian uses images of 'bait' and hidden 'poison' to portray the potential pitfalls of poetry. However, whereas Serclier, like Du Bartas, compares different possible sources of subject-matter for poetry, and suggests it is better to celebrate God than Cupid or ladies,²⁰ Quillian's argument differs radically from Du Bartas's, as the following extracts from the two poets demonstrate:

Tous ces doctes esprits, dont la voix flateresse
Change Hecube en Helene et Faustine en Lucesse,
Qui d'un nain, d'un bastard, d'un archerot sans yeux,
Font, non un dieutelet, ains le maistre des dieux,
Sur les ingrats seillons d'une infertile arene,
Perdent, mal-avisez, leur travail et leur graine,

17. For Serclier, love poetry 'poisons', undermines the honour of the divine, and disguises as if with a 'fard', 'masque' or 'voile' (pp. 229, 244); poets should focus instead on the 'veritable' (pp. 236, 238). Elsewhere, too, he suggests that poetry can induce real sin (pp. 68-70). See also quotations from Du Bartas and Quillian later in this essay, as well as Du Bartas's 'Uranie' (1574).
18. Du Bartas, p. 222; Quillian, p. 27; Serclier, p. 230, p. 240 (mis-paginated 204).
19. Italics are mine, here and throughout the essay.
20. For a discussion of thinking about Christian poetry and the rejection of other modes of poetry in the period 1570-1630, see Christophe Bourgeois, *Théologies poétiques de l'âge baroque: la Muse chrétienne (1570-1630)* (Paris: Champion, 2006), pp. 39-171.

[...]

Mais bien que nous n'ayons rien plus cher que le temps,
 Peu je regretteroy la perte de leurs ans,
 Si par ces vers pipeurs leur muse trop disert,
 Se perdant, ne trainoit des auditeurs la perte.
Sous le mielleux apast de leurs doctes escrits
Ils cachent le venin que les jeunes esprits
Avalent à longs traicts, et du vin d'amour yvres,
Leur mauvais estomach aime les mauvais vivres.
 D'un rude eslacement leurs carmes enchanteurs
 Precipitent en bas les novices lecteurs,
 Qui font à mieux glisser d'une folastre envie
 Par le pendant glacé du mont de ceste vie.

(Du Bartas, *La Sepmaine*, in *Works*, II, pp. 193-440 (222); beginning of 'Day' II)

Que je hay ces esprits, dont la voix charmeresse
 Censure de si pres la bouillante jeunesse,
 De nos Cygnes Gaulois, qui finissent leurs jours,
 A plaindre les regrets de leurs tendres amours.

Car si n'est que je voy que la trompeuse amorce,
 De ces Esprits pipeurs, cache sous son escorce,
 Un haim envenimé,

[...]

Mais d'autant que peut nuire a l'egaré nocher,
 De ramer vers les feus d'un Capharé rocher,
 Plustost que la roideur de ses courbes antennes
 Ne le conduise au port des folastres Syrenes,
Nos peu sages lecteurs souffrent autant de tort,
Qui postposent un mal à l'Eternelle mort,
Quand mollement flattez par la douce parole
D'un Poëte naissant d'une infidelle escolle,
Ils rejettent craintifs, l'air brulant, et le son
D'un vers remply d'amour pour prendre une leçon,
Dont l'effet merveilleux rend l'esprit hydropicque,
Le corps pasle d'effroy, et l'ame letargique.

L'un des deux n'est pas bon, et l'autre ne vaut rien,
 Celuy là sert d'amorce, et cestuy de lien,
 Mais il vaut beaucoup mieux s'abstenir de bien faire
 Que de prendre conseil d'avecq son adversaire.

(Quillian, *Derniere Semaine*, pp. 27-28, beginning of 'Day' II)

Although Quillian's opening line recalls that of Du Bartas, the word 'esprits' of Quillian's first line evokes not love poets, as it does in the corresponding line in Du Bartas, but rather poets who censure love poets: according to Quillian, poets who stem from an 'infidelle escolle' might lead readers to reject love poetry in favour of a poetry which threatens their salvation. Whereas Du Bartas warns his readers against love poets, Quillian warns his readers against poets who warn against love poets while themselves offering up a far more harmful reading-matter, namely religious poetry of a heterodox nature. Such reading does not simply 'poison', as

love poetry does, but rather produces ‘illness’, an image which seems to bear here its commonplace connotation of sin, as well as, perhaps, that of ‘swelling up’ (‘l’esprit hydropicque’) with false doctrine; the language of poison and resulting illness recalls that used by Ronsard to describe Protestant polemic in the early years of the Wars of Religion.²¹ While love poetry may serve as bait, Quillian suggests, problematic religious poetry resembles the line which draws the reader in. Quillian also highlights his view of heterodox religious poets in the opening line of the ‘argument’ which precedes and summarises his second ‘Day’:

[A]vant que de commencer, il [Quillian] blasme quelques Poètes de nostre aage, qui font estat de reprendre ceux qui ont escrit de l’amour estans euxmesmes reprehensibles, en ce que de leur part, ils opinent assez mal de la Religion Catholique et Romaine, employans parmy leurs œuvres beaucoup de Discours qui sont du tout reprouvez [...]

(Quillian, *La Dernière Semaine*, ‘Argument du Second Jour’, p. 25)

Quillian does not explicitly refer to Protestants in general or to Du Bartas in particular. He prefers to describe those he maligns as belonging to a ‘faithless’ group (‘infidelle escole’) or as ‘failing to grasp’ Catholic beliefs (‘ils opinent assez mal de la Religion Catholique et Romaine’) rather than as belonging to a different confession or as having different beliefs. His choice not to criticise Du Bartas explicitly might be attributed to the popularity of the deceased poet and his well-known relationship with the king, to whom Quillian has addressed his poem and expressed his desire for a position. In the context of late sixteenth-century France, though, an ‘infidelle escole’ clearly implies Protestantism, and Du Bartas would surely have been the first Protestant poet to spring to any reader’s mind. Moreover, as we have seen, Quillian’s discussion closely imitates Du Bartas’s censure of love poets within a poem which imitates Du Bartas’s poem; even as Quillian borrows an opening line from Du Bartas, he expresses his hatred of those who have made arguments like that of Du Bartas. Therefore those readers familiar with Du Bartas’s poetry would have perceived a jibe pointed – through parodic borrowing – at Du Bartas in particular. For those who did not recognise the borrowing from Du Bartas’s *Sepmaine* (including those who had not read his poetry at all but knew it only by repute), there is still a suggestion that Protestant-authored Christian poetry – and *a fortiori* that of Du Bartas, by far the most well known – is dangerous and to be avoided. Quillian’s *Dernière Semaine ou consommation du monde* appears, then, not as a sequel to the Protestant-authored *Sepmaine ou creation du monde* but rather as a substitute for it, designed to undermine the influence of the popular text.

21. Katherine Maynard, ‘« Miel empoisonné »: Satire and Sickness in Ronsard’s *Discours des Misères de ce temps*’, in *La Satire dans tous ses états*, edited by Bernd Renner (Geneva: Droz, 2009), pp. 245-64 (pp. 248-51).

For Quillian, the confessional identity of a poet appears to be central in determining the worth of his poem, as if the text served as a transparent depiction of all the supposed beliefs of its author. One can be sure that reading one's 'adversary' will be worse than not reading religious poetry at all ('il vaut beaucoup mieux s'abstenir [...]'), and indeed may contribute to one's damnation ('l'Eternelle mort'). While it was far from unusual to consider Protestant-authored texts as 'poison',²² for Quillian this is necessarily the case even where the content of the text does not appear controversial. Confessional difference is perceived in antagonistic and oppositional terms: Quillian opens his second 'Day' with an emphatic expression of hatred for the religious poets he criticises, then goes on to describe them as 'reprehensibles' and 'adversaire[s]'. In the 'argument' placed at the outset of the book, too, Quillian states that the poets he reproaches write much that is entirely forbidden or condemnable ('*beaucoup de Discours qui sont du tout reprouvez*'), as if a Protestant poet would, by definition, compose large amounts of pernicious material. In addition, Quillian's formulation suggests that he imagines this material to be scattered about in Protestant-authored works: '*employans parmy leurs œuvres*'. Quillian has quite obviously read at least one passage from the *Sepmaine*, and so presumably could have read the poem attentively, checking it for material which would be 'du tout reprouvez'. He could not have found much fitting that description; the *Sepmaine* had been approved by censors, and even François Feu-ardent in his *Sepmaine premiere* and *Theomachia calvinistica* only managed to find fault with a handful of passages.²³

While Quillian clearly believed that an apocalyptic depiction of the universe was more useful to readers' salvation than Du Bartas's relatively youthful one,²⁴ this is nonetheless a far cry from locating lines in the poem which are 'du tout reprouvez' and might bring about the reader's 'Eternelle mort'. The Catholic poet apparently did not believe that the power of Protestant print could be countered by simply rectifying or excising particularly problematic statements, as official censors did for many texts (although not the *Sepmaine*), or by highlighting and correcting them as François Feu-ardent did for writers including Du Bartas. Given the shortage of confessionally or dogmatically contentious material in Du Bartas's poem, Quillian's hostile attitude seems to indicate a general anxiety about the effects of reading Du Bartas or other Protestant poets, a sense that, even where no threat has been located, there might be danger concealed beneath the surface of the text, dispersed throughout its different sections in a way which could be difficult to spot.

22. One thinks, for example, of Artus Désiré's *Contrepoison des cinquante-deux chansons de Clément Marot*. Quillian's aforementioned *Discours* describes Protestants and their doctrine as poison (p. 8 and *passim*).

23. See n. 6.

24. On this point see further Banks, 'Les Mondes nouveau-né et vieillissant...' (article cited above, note 8).

By contrast with Quillian's *Derniere Semaine*, Serclier's *Grand Tombeau* does not express open hostility towards poets with heterodox religious beliefs. Indeed Serclier praises Du Bartas. Affirming that Serclier's own subject, divine justice, is better than those of other poets, the Catholic poet adds a rhetorical question, asking his muse whom she thinks 'gave wings' to the poet, and replying that it certainly was not Cupid, implying, of course, that the poet is inspired by the Christian God rather than a pagan one, and therefore should sing about that God. 'The poet' who gained his wings from God subsequently seems to represent not 'the poet' in general but rather Du Bartas: 'the poet' is said to have sung eloquently of the universe, and to have been crowned with laurels above his contemporaries, a description which most obviously calls to mind Du Bartas; moreover the accompanying commentary – written by Serclier himself and published together with all editions of his poem – refers to the 'auteur de la sepmaine'.²⁵ So, although Serclier refrains from mentioning him explicitly within the poem itself, 'the poet' whose divine gift justifies Serclier's own choice of subject-matter appears to be Du Bartas; the reference to the winged poet follows a list of poets whom Serclier does not want to follow because, while talented, they chose unworthy subjects (p. 236), so the implication is that Serclier considers the winged poet, Du Bartas, more worthy of imitation, as indeed Serclier's poem as a whole would suggest. The commentary heaps praise on the Protestant poet, describing him as one of the most excellent French poets, to whom everybody will give one of the foremost ranks. The first *Sepmaine* is a 'masterpiece of poetic art', and in it Du Bartas 'sings like an angel':

Si leurs discours sont doux, les miens sont veritables
 Les leurs sont empoullez, et les miens profitables
 Donc muse ne les suy, ains d'un subject plus beau
 Parfay Chrestienement ton esbauché Tumbeau,
 Auûi qui pense [sic] tu avoir donné des ayles
 Au docte truchement des lyricques pucelles,
 Pour avoir si facond de ses resonans vers,
 Par l'oreille tiré apres soy l'univers
 Qui l'admire beant ores sur Thytorée,
 Honneur Phocydien, ou dessus l'hyampee
 Sur ses contemporains d'Appollo couronné
 Des plus mignars cheveux de sa chiere daphné
 Cupido ce n'est pas ...²⁶

25. The note about Du Bartas in the commentary lacks a corresponding footnote marker in the text but, given that it must correspond to the material before the next footnote marker, and that the poets criticized at the top of the page have subjects different from that of Du Bartas, it is clearly supposed to gloss the idea of the winged poet and / or that of Christian poetry ('un subject plus beau', p. 237).
26. *Grand Tombeau*, p. 236. Although, like Du Bartas and Quillian, Serclier begins one of the books of his poem with a consideration of poetry, the extract cited is some eight pages into that discussion, a long one in which Serclier, like d'Aubigné in the *Tragiques*, selects Melpomene to be his Muse, and discusses the proper role of poetry.

Entre les plus excellents poëte [sic] François, chacun meritoirement donnera l'un des premiers rangs, au noble, docte et bien disant auteur de la sepmaine, chef d'œuvre de l'art poëtique, et premier de la posterité [...] il est a estimer en ce que comme Ange il a chanté en sa premiere sepmaine. (p. 237)

However, Serclier stops short of proclaiming Du Bartas's value as a model and furthermore he proceeds, after all the praise of Du Bartas, to suggest – euphemistically, through citation and metaphor – that there are problems inherent in imitating him. Somewhat parenthetically, and in Latin, Serclier cites, without giving the source, 1 Corinthians 5:7, 'Modicum fermentum corrumpit totam massam' ('a little leaven corrupts the whole lump'). In the Biblical passage from which Serclier's quotation is taken, Paul admonishes the Corinthians for not 'purging out' the 'leaven' which will 'corrupt' the whole, that is, for accepting the presence within their Church of sinners and thus risking the corruption of the whole body of the Church. In addition, in the same chapter of Corinthians, leaven is opposed to the 'unleavened bread' of 'truth', and, for example, in Matthew 16:11-12, it represents the false doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The citation, which bears the weight of Biblical authority, points to the dangers of contamination or corruption by heretical doctrine, untruth, and sin. For Serclier, then, as for Quillian, Du Bartas's poetry appears to contain a threat not unlike that perceived in love poetry, namely that of a falsehood opposed to divine truth. Furthermore, this 'leaven' of falsity or sin corrupts 'the whole', implying – not unlike Quillian's reference to material dispersed 'parmy leurs œuvres' – that dangers 'seep through' the entirety of Du Bartas's poem.

Serclier does not mention Protestantism or confessional difference as such, yet, as in Quillian's discussion, this seems to be what is at stake. 'Leaven' points to 'false' doctrine and, in addition, Protestants were the source of leaven in a more literal sense: at Geneva leavened bread was used for the Eucharist, and Calvin and Bèze maintained that any kind of bread was suitable, whereas the 1570 papal bull, *De Defectibus*, stated that, if the bread had begun to corrupt, or contained leaven, the celebrant would be guilty of grave sin. Protestants also foregrounded and made use of the corruption of bread in a conceptual sense, since, like bread being vomited or defecated, it could serve to mock the Catholic belief that the bread really was the body of Christ.

More importantly, though, the 'corruption of the whole' recalls the perception, promoted by some Catholic preachers during the Wars of Religion, of Protestantism as a 'pollution' within the collective ecclesiastical and social 'body'.²⁷ After all, in its original context in Corinthians, the 'whole' which is

27. Cf. Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 28-48, 145-58, and Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Rites of Violence', in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: eight essays* (California: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 152-87.

corrupted in Serclier's citation is indeed the body of the Church; thanks to the fundamental links in Christian thought between bread, the body of Christ, and the body of the Church, leaven could logically be thought of as corrupting the collective body. Moreover, during the Wars of Religion, the conceptualisation of the ecclesiastical and social collectivity as 'one *bread* and one *body*' was a powerful one: Parisian preachers highlighted it in their sermons and vernacular treatises, emphasizing that this body was threatened by the 'disease' or 'corruption' within it, namely Protestantism (and its 'disease-bearing' books, 'livres pestilentiels').²⁸ In addition, the hypothesis that Serclier's citation betrays a concern with the pollution of 'heresy' sits well with the apocalyptic interests which are the central focus of his poem: the defilement of the collective body by Protestantism was often attributed an apocalyptic significance.²⁹

Furthermore, the notion of Protestantism as a disease within the collective body or 'bread' gained energy from the fierce debates around Eucharistic doctrine, 'the focus of more theological controversy [...] than any other item of Christian confession and practice',³⁰ and central to the definition of confessional identity. The conceptualisation of society as one body (or bread) was tightly bound up with Catholic Eucharistic devotion, and Catholic writers had a tendency to link the Protestant threat to the social body with the Protestant challenge to Catholic Eucharistic doctrine. Since the social body and the body of Christ were 'so closely intertwined as to be inseparable',³¹ the 'disease' of Protestantism seemed to affect the body of Christ as well as the social body, and this perception was reinforced by the Protestant challenge to the body of Christ as understood by Catholics, that is, as present in the bread displayed by the priest.³²

Thus, used with reference to a Protestant poet in the immediate aftermath of the Wars of Religion, Serclier's brief citation from Corinthians was rich in meaning, recalling a nexus of ideas around the contamination of Catholic 'bodies' by Protestants and by Protestant thinking or writing. In the context of Serclier's poem, the citation arguably betrays a fear that the 'leaven' or pollution of Protestantism might be insidiously working its evil within Du Bartas's apparently holy poem and might threaten the community of Catholic readers. The development of the passage after the citation demonstrates that Serclier is concerned precisely about the possibility of absorbing leaven through his reading. Serclier insists that he consumes Du Bartas's work carefully and selectively. In two parts of a threefold

28. Diefendorf, pp. 28-48, 145-58; Christopher Elwood, *The Body Broken: The Calvinist Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 137-44.

29. Diefendorf, especially pp. 150-52.

30. Elwood, pp. 3-4.

31. Diefendorf, p. 48.

32. Elwood, pp. 137-44; Diefendorf, pp. 28-48, 145-58.

repetition of this point, Serclier exploits commonplace images associated with imitation – eating, bees, and flowers – but they do not carry their usual connotations of reading diverse materials in a transformative way in order to create new writing, or of combining materials gathered from diverse sources: Serclier does not claim to gather from a diverse range of ‘flowers’, or to ‘digest’ material in order to create something new.³³ Rather the images are used to underline the selective and careful way in which Serclier ‘ingests’ material. The poet ‘sucks the flower and leaves the stem’, and ‘takes the rose but rejects the thorns’:

[...] chacun meritoirement donnera l’un des premiers rangs, au noble, docte et bien disant auteur de la sepmaine, chef d’œuvre de l’art poëtique, et premier de la posterité, mais pource que *Modicum fermentum corrumpit totam massam*, je succe avec les Avettes, la fleur et laisse la tige, je prens la rose de son riche et sacré argument, et rejette les espines, qui si [sic] pouvoient mesler. (p. 237, italics in the original)

The semantic field of food and eating is still present, as it was in the reference to leaven, but the shift of image to bees and flowers enables Serclier to suggest that ‘eating’ (or reading and imitation) can be selective: while we cannot avoid the leaven in leavened bread, bees can and do take from flowers but not from their poisonous stems or their thorns. This depiction of a careful imitative practice seems designed to hold at bay the threat of ‘poisonous’ reading, and also, by the same token, a sign of anxiety about that threat. Reading, according to sixteenth-century conceptions of imitation, is like taking the other into one’s own body; this seems particularly problematic when the other belongs to the confession commonly conceived to poison or to pollute the collective body.

Thus, in Serclier’s *Grand Tombeau*, issues of reading and those of the Protestant ‘threat’ intersect through images of eating and food. Eating and confessional identity thus become linked in a very different way from that in Protestant polemic about Catholic ‘cannibalism’ or ‘theophagy’.³⁴ The analogy between reading and eating – or reading-matter and food, or imitation and digestion – was commonplace,³⁵ and one version of it, employed in the passages

33. On the diverse uses of the apian metaphor, see G. W. Pigman III, ‘Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 33 (1980), 1-32 (pp. 3-7); Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), *passim*; Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), *passim*.

34. It has more in common, though, with some references to purging a corrupted ‘cooking pot’ in the Catholic response to Protestant use of the ‘marmite papale’ images; Jeff Persels, ‘Cooking with the Pope: The Language of Food and Protest in Calvinist and Catholic Polemic From the 1560s’, in *Mediaevalia*, 22 (1999), 29-53.

35. Michel Jeanneret, *Des Mets et des mots: banquets et propos de table à la Renaissance* (Paris: José Corti, 1987), pp. 123-29, and by the same author, ‘Banquets poétiques et métaphores alimentaires’, in *Ronsard en son IV^e centenaire*, edited by Yvonne Bellenger, Jean Céard, Daniel Ménager, Michel Simonin, 2 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1989), II, pp. 73-80.

by Du Bartas and Quillian cited earlier in this essay, was to conceive dangerous reading as poisonous eating. However, Serclier combines this analogy with another fairly commonplace image derived from the domain of food, that of a figurative foodstuff, leaven, understood to represent false doctrine or sin. In addition, Serclier implicitly creates a connection between the endeavour of literary creation – understood more than it is today as a *collective* endeavour, which draws on the texts of others in the construction of one's own – and that of salvation, understood as 'at least in part a *collective* enterprise', achieved within and through the 'one bread, and one body' of society.³⁶ I would suggest, tentatively, that this might bolster Michel Jeanneret's hypothesis according to which conceptualisations of reading had borrowed something from the notion of Eucharistic 'communion':³⁷ the context in which Serclier employs his citation from Corinthians seems to make a link between reading or imitation and that collective body or bread modelled on communion in the body of Christ. Certainly my analysis suggests that the conception of literary creation as involving a 'communal' element – that is, incorporating the creations of others – caused unease in an age of religious schism: for Serclier, at least, the 'poison' or 'leaven' of Protestantism seems to endanger the collective enterprise of textual creation by the same token that it threatens the collective health of society.

So, Serclier's discussion of Du Bartas implies that the latter's poem contains a Protestant 'leaven' which contaminates the whole text and could harm those who 'consume' it: Du Bartas's Protestantism seems to define the nature and threat of his poetry. However, Serclier, unlike Quillian, also resists this idea, drawing a clear distinction between man and poet. While Du Bartas the man might have erred, Du Bartas the poet sang like an angel, that is, like a being closer to the divine than any man, Catholic or Protestant, could hope to be: 's'il est a mespriser en ce que comme homme il a failli, il est a estimer en ce que comme Ange il a chanté en sa premiere sepmaine'. Thus Serclier underplays any sense that the poet's confessional identity necessarily determines the value of his poem. Moreover, while the image of leaven suggests a corruption which would seep through the whole of the poem, Serclier concludes his discussion of Du Bartas by stating that only 'deux ou trois mots' of Du Bartas's poem detract from its status as the 'work of an angel'. Serclier tells the reader where these troublesome words can be found, and what topics they concern: one passage concerns the Trinity and is situated in 'Day' I; the other criticizes celibacy and is found in 'Day' VI.³⁸ By

36. Diefendorf, p. 34.

37. 'Entre les deux parties, une communion s'établit, à laquelle l'idéal de l'eucharistie, qui hante alors les consciences, n'est peut-être pas étranger' (*Perpetuum mobile: métamorphoses des corps et des œuvres de Vinci à Montaigne* (Paris: Macula, 1997), p. 276).

38. 'il est a estimer en ce que comme Ange il a chanté en sa premiere sepmaine, deux ou trois mots au premier et sixiesme jour ostez, l'un pour la sainte Trinité, l'autre contre le Cœlibat' (p. 237).

implication, then, the problems in Du Bartas's poem can be identified and located; readers can be warned of them and can take due care when encountering them. This holds at bay any sense that Du Bartas's Protestantism resembles leaven which would insidiously sweep through and infect the whole; instead, if leaven there is, it can, in the words of one patristic gloss on Corinthians, be 'purged [...] *with accuracy*'³⁹. In addition, as we have seen, the shift in image from leavened bread to flowers assists Serclier in suggesting that readers can 'consume' Du Bartas's poetry without – to use Serclier's metaphor – the 'stem' or 'thorns' of his beliefs.

Furthermore, whereas Quillian says pretty unequivocally that poetry by Protestants (or at least by one's 'adversaires') is poisonous, Serclier does not definitively assert that Du Bartas's poem contains leaven, although he makes it clear that, at the very least, he reads as if it might do.⁴⁰ In addition, arguably the euphemistic nature of the discussion at this point – based in metaphor and unreferenced citation – signals tension.⁴¹ Serclier cites the verse from Corinthians in Latin, without any gloss, and without naming its source (so that the reader is not invited to read the quotation in its original context and thus to align Du Bartas or his poem with the sinner or sin which must be purged from among the Corinthians). While admittedly Serclier often provides short citations in Latin and without a source, the euphemistic and parenthetical nature of this quotation does seem telling. Serclier does not state openly the connotations of leaven but instead refers to it somewhat parenthetically and without further explanation as the reason why, despite Du Bartas's excellence, Serclier reads him carefully: 'mais pource que *Modicum fermentum corrumpit totam massam*, je succe avec les Avettes, la fleur et laisse la tige, je prens la rose' and so on.

One could argue that Serclier provides no gloss simply because he could expect most of his readers to understand the quotation and its implications. On the other hand, in general Serclier does seem to conceive of his poem – or rather of its commentary – as performing a vulgarising function, a conception which corresponds well to what appears to have been a common view of Du Bartas's

39. *The homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the first Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Oxford: J. H. Parker / London: F. and J. Rivington, 1845), p. 199.

40. Serclier was not the only reader who expressed concern about Du Bartas's Protestantism yet found the *Sepmaine* relatively unproblematic: the Jesuit *recteur de collège*, P. Mongailhard considered that there was 'very little poison' in Du Bartas's works yet nonetheless thought it necessary to remind readers of Du Bartas's Calvinism (Couture, 'Les Poèmes de Du Bartas', pp. 490-91). The problem for Serclier is more acute insofar as his poem imitates and engages in dialogue with the *Sepmaine*, potentially increasing the threat of 'consuming' any 'poison' it might contain.

41. While Greene (*The Light in Troy*) suggests that in general the use of metaphors in discussions of imitation signals tension, by 1606, of course, images such as the bee, or eating are commonplace with familiar meanings; however, here they are recast and used together with the image of leaven.

poem accompanied (as it was for most readers) by Simon Goulart's commentary;⁴² accordingly, Serclier, like Goulart, often includes knowledge of a non-specialist nature. Indeed, later in the same book of his poem, Serclier appears to consider that the term 'leaven' might helpfully be glossed: Mary, interceding with God on behalf of mankind, reminds him that he was conceived 'sans le *levain* du vice', and the commentary explains that 'le levain est ordinairement prins en l'écriture pour le *peché*'. Serclier then discusses this at some length, beginning, as it happens, by making the link with bread and eating, explaining that the Paschal lamb should be eaten 'sans souilleure, et peché qui est le pain sans levain' (pp. 316-17). Arguably, then, when Serclier does not gloss his earlier reference to leaven, this suggests an unwillingness to draw out the implications of his suggestion that 'leaven' might be present in Du Bartas's poem. A similar reluctance can be discerned when Serclier refers to 'thorns' amid poetic 'flowers' since Serclier, while protesting that he rejects them, avoids asserting that they exist, referring to 'les espines, qui si *pouvoient* mesler'. Likewise, the supposed failings of Du Bartas are presented not as fact but in terms which leave some room for doubt: '*s'il* est a mespriser en ce que comme homme il a failli'. Finally, of course, while Serclier suggests that reading a Protestant author is fraught with danger, he nonetheless differs from Quillian in that he admits to reading Du Bartas and refrains from suggesting that Protestant-authored material should necessarily always be avoided.

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While to observers in the twenty-first century the negative face of imitation most easily recognisable is that of plagiarism, for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers and writers the possibility of 'poisoning' might seem far more menacing. And, while some modern textual interpretation has tended to emphasise the 'death of the author', in some early-modern reception authorial identity is central in determining the meaning of texts, as Michel Jeanneret argues in his own contribution to this volume. The two poems analysed in my essay indicate concerns, on the part of both a former Leaguer and a more moderate Catholic, that hidden dangers in Protestant-authored texts may be inadequately countered by Counter-reformation mechanisms of censorship and correction; confessional identity may appear central in determining the value of a work, so that Protestant-authored ones contain a 'poison' or 'corruption' which is conceived in ways bound up with commonplace conceptions of the Protestant 'threat'. In an age of mass circulation of texts and religious schism, conceptions of reading and imitating as 'eating' and 'digesting' produced anxiety about 'consuming' the confessional 'other', even where very few signs of Protestant beliefs were present.

42. Violaine Giacomotto-Charra, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un livre scientifique? À propos de la poésie encyclopédique de du Bartas au XVI^e siècle', *Cahiers d'Epistémè*, II (2008), 59-79.



Might there be signs of similar anxieties on the part of Protestants about Catholic texts? Certainly the particular shape taken by Catholic anxieties analysed here is inflected by ideas about Protestants, for example as a poison concealed within the common body. More generally, Catholic anxieties might be fuelled by the particularly effective and early use by Protestants of printing for propagandistic purposes. Furthermore, Protestants certainly did make use of Catholic-authored religious material, excising and adding sections of text as appropriate; possibly this suggests a relative lack of concern about hidden 'leaven', although one would need to pay close attention to how this practice was represented before drawing any conclusions. The anxieties of Serclier and Quillian, on the other hand, are fuelled by conceptualisations of Protestant 'contamination', and also by the familiar notion that poetry has powerful effects which should be harnessed to bring the reader closer to the divine. They indicate the problematic nature of imitation in a world of confessional schism, of collective literary creation in the face of the Protestant 'threat' to the collective body or 'bread'.

