Elizabeth Singer Rowe:

Dissent, Influence, and Writing Religion, 1690-1740

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the religious poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe, arguing that her Dissenting identity provides an important foundation on which to which to critically consider her works. Although Rowe enjoyed a successful career, with the majority of her writing seeing multiple editions throughout her lifetime and following her death, her posthumous reputation persists as an overly pious and reclusive religious poet. Moving past these stereotypes, my thesis explores Rowe's engagement with poetry as a means to convey various aspects of Dissent and her wider religious community.

This thesis also contributes to the wider understanding of Dissenting creative writing and influence in the years following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, using Rowe's work as a platform to demonstrate complexities and cultural shifts within the work of her contemporaries. My argument challenges the notion that Rowe's religious poetry was a mere exercise in piety or a display of religious sentimentalism, demonstrating powerful evolutions in contemporary discussions of philosophy, religious tolerance, and the relationship between the church and state.

A popular figure that appealed to a heterodox reading public, Rowe addresses many aspects of Dissent throughout her work. Combining close readings of Rowe's poetry and religious writings with the popular works of her contemporaries, this study explores latitudinarian shifts and discussions of depravity within her religious poetry, the impact of the Clarendon Code and subsequent toleration on her conceptualisation of suffering and imprisonment, as well as her use of ecumenical language throughout her writings.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other University. All sources are acknowledged as references. Parts of my introduction and first chapter have been published as a biography of Elizabeth Singer Rowe in the online database *The Literary Encyclopedia* (October 2016). Part of Chapter Two is currently under peer review and accepted to be published under the revised title of "My Bright Love shall all this blackness chase": The Theological Poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe" in the Summer 2018 Special Edition of *The Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*.

Introduction

In a meditation entitled "A Covenant with God", Elizabeth Singer Rowe reflects on a solemn commitment to the Divine and the ensuing implications for both her actions and words. Citing the "Articles" of faith entered into between herself and an "Almighty God", Rowe sets a very particular and vivid picture for her intended reader, one of divine contract and devoted worshipper:

> Incomprehensible Being, who searchest the Heart, and tries the Reins of the Children of Men, thou knows my Sincerity, and my Thoughts are all unveiled to thee: I am surrounded with thine Immensity; thou are a present, tho' invisible Witness of the solemn Affair I am now engaged in. I am now taking hold of thy Strength, that I may make peace with thee, and entering into Articles with the Almighty God [...] And now let the surrounding Angels witness for me, that I solemnly devote all the Powers and Faculties of my Soul to thy Service; and when I presumptuously employ any of the Advantages thou hast given me to thy Dishonour, let them testify against me, and let my own Words condemn me.[1]

At first glance, Rowe's idea of a covenant with God may appear to be straightforward, an indication of her religious fervour and a marker of personal piety. In committing herself to a "sacred and everlasting Obligation", Rowe gives the impression of renewing the bonds between herself and the Divine. However, a deeper understanding of both Rowe's particular religious beliefs and the Dissenting world in which she inhabited colours this meditation with a new hue. Offering the modern reader a fresh insight into the complexities and subtleties of political and religious life during Rowe's lifetime, "A Covenant with God" invokes a flood of differing theological readings. This meditation presents Rowe's acknowledgement of the Articles of the Christian Faith, otherwise

[1] Elizabeth Rowe, "A Covenant with God" in *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), 25-27.

known as the Apostle's Creed, as a marker of heterodox liturgy and a defining factor in her own private religious practice.

Rowe's allusion to the Apostle's Creed is profound, pointing to a writer acutely aware of an evolving theological landscape and sensitive to readers with varying doctrinal backgrounds. In making the reference to the Apostle's Creed, Rowe is not only acknowledging foundational elements of the Christian faith, but also putting herself in an ecumenical position. A defining Christian doctrinal statement, the Apostle's Creed first evolved in the days of the early Christian church and found formal expression for the first time by the Synod of Milan in 390 AD where it became absorbed into foundations of Catholic doctrine.[2] With the advent of the Protestant Reformation and the publication of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), the Apostle's Creed found new life in Reformed doctrine as Calvin found it a "clear and succinct […] statement of [the Christian] faith".[3]

The Apostle's Creed later became an integral part of the liturgy of the Established Church, first appearing in the 1638 iteration of the *Book of Common Prayer*, as something to be "said or sung" by both the minister and congregation as part of the evening prayer.[4] In the years following the Interregnum and Restoration, particularly with the coronation of Charles II in 1660 and enactment of the Clarendon Code in 1661, the Apostle's Creed became a platform for ecumenicalism within the Established Church, with a particular emphasis upon reconciling Dissenters. In anonymous publication *The Reuniting of Christianity* (1673), circulated the year before Rowe's birth, the Apostle's Creed was proposed as a model for pure doctrine for "all Christians" to become "joyned [sic] with this Word".[5] Accordingly, Rowe's inclusion of the Apostle's Creed in "A

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[2] Jack Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confession* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1991), 62.
[3] Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MN: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 452.
[4] The Church of England, *The book of common prayer and administration of the sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the Church of England* (London: Imprinted by Robert Barker, 1638), 2.
[5] *The Reuniting of Christianity, Or, The Manner How to Rejoin All Christians under One Sole Confession of Faith Written in French by a Learned Protestant Divine* (London: Printed by John Winter, 1673), 142-3.

Covenant with God" becomes a platform from which she recognises changing currents within both the Church of England and its intersection with the Dissenting community to which she belonged.

"A Covenant with God" appears in Rowe's posthumous collection of religious meditations *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737), compiled by the author the year before her death and gave effective control of her literary estate to Isaac Watts.[6] *Devout Exercises* has evolved to become a defining touchstone in Rowe's legacy and literary memory, selling thousands of copies and going into multiple editions throughout England and the Americas.[7] Rowe is known to history primarily for her seminal work *Friendship in Death* (1728), a series of fictional letters written by the dead to notable friends and family. Born in Ilchester, Somerset to a devout Presbyterian family in 1674, and rigorously educated by Henry Thynne (1675-1708) and Bishop Thomas Ken (1637-1711), Rowe became well acquainted with the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as a range of theological texts. Rowe began her publishing career at the age of seventeen in the *Athenian Mercury*, submitting poetry under pseudonyms such as 'Philomela' and the 'Pindarickal Lady'. Between 1691 and 1699, Rowe published over thirty items in the *Athenian Mercury,* the amount rivalling only those of Samuel Wesley, who had previously provided the bulk of the periodical's poetry.[8] The experimental nature of the journal provided the ideal testing ground for her amateur poetry, which featured a great deal of Williamite verse, pastorals, translations of Tasso, and various religiously-themed poems.

As a writer, Rowe epitomised the ideal woman of the Athenian Society and garnered praise from editors John Dunton, Richard Sault, John Norris, and Samuel

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[6] Isaac Watts, Preface to *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), x.
[7] Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 105–106.
[8] Heidi Laudien, "Birthing the Poet: Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Athenian Mercury," *Ideas, Æsthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era* 22 (August 2015): 1–2.

Wesley.[9] Additionally, Rowe saw enthusiastic responses from recognisable figures such as Alexander Pope, Matthew Prior, Isaac Watts, and Dr. Johnson, affirming the importance and credibility of her early work.[10] However it was poetry that most interested her and she became an active writer of religious verse throughout virtually her entire career, contributing a compilation of sacred and secular poetry in *Poems on Several Occasions: Written by Philomela* (1696). By 1704, Rowe was considered to be one of the most respected English woman poets of her time, publishing eight poems in Jacob Tonson's *Poetical Miscellanies: The Fifth Part* (1704) along with headlining the first edition of *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions. By Philomela and Several other ingenious Persons*, which printed thirty-five of her poems.[11]

Her marriage to Thomas Rowe (1687–1715), a poet and biographer thirteen years her junior, was regarded as a match of intellectual and spiritual equals. First meeting in Bath in 1709, the pair married the following year and relocated to London.[12] Thomas Rowe, the son of Dissenting minister Benoni Rowe, was firmly situated in the intellectual world of Dissent, having been educated at Epsom and the University of Leiden. Their marriage was happy but brief, as Thomas unexpectedly died of consumption on 13 May 1715 at the age of twenty-eight. Following his death, Rowe moved back into her father's house in Frome and it was there that she remained for the rest of her life. Rowe's father died in 1719, bequeathing her a large inheritance and property in both Ilchester and Frome. She would never marry again, choosing to live in her father's house until her death.[13] From Frome, Rowe would continue to publish popular collections of poems with both religious and secular themes, a notable example being her *Poems on Several Occasions* (1717). She eventually branched out to longer and

[9] Ibid., 3.
[10] Ibid., 2.
[11] Paula Backscheider, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe: Lifestyle as Legacy," in *New Contexts for Eighteenth-Century British Fiction: "Hearts Resolved and Hands Prepared": Essays in Honor of Jerry C. Beasley*, ed. Christopher Johnson (Newark, NJ: University Of Delaware Press, 2011), 51.
[12] Theophilus Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe", *MW*, 1: xxviii-xxix.
[13] Henry Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome: A Study in Eighteenth-Century English Pietism* (Frankfurt: Herbert Lang, 1973), 53.

more complex works such as the Biblical epic *The History of Joseph* (1736) and the aforementioned *Devout Exercises of the Heart.* Rowe died of apoplexy on 20 February 1737 and was interred at Rook Lane Congregational Church next to her father.

Posthumously, brother-in-law Theophilus Rowe compiled the majority of her published works and letters into a two-volume collection. *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe* (1739) featured multiple poetic tributes and included a biography full of private anecdotes regarding her friendship with France Thynne and Isaac Watts, lengthy descriptions of her father and husband, and transcriptions of letters describing aspects of her piety. Theophilus' description of Rowe gushes with praise; at one point, for instance, he describes her as one who singularly "[pursued] the perfect and divine felicity of heaven and immortality".[14] This characterisation of Rowe as a woman of pure, unadulterated Christian piety went on to become an enduring feature of her reputation from the eighteenth century to the present day.

The historical moment that Rowe occupied saw a dramatic change in relations between the Established Church and Dissent, moving from the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and subsequent ascension of William III. This thesis places Rowe's religious writing within its proper historical context, showing that it does more than simply convey aspects of piety or signal godly devotion. As I will explore throughout my chapters, Rowe's religious poetry addresses issues of public and private manifestations of Dissenting faith. Her verse not only exhibits philosophical shifts and latitudinarian theological perspectives, but also articulates the experiences and reactions of a community suffering at the hands of persecution throughout the years of the Clarendon Code. Additionally, her recognition of the doctrine of providence provides an insight into shared and ecumenical language used by both the Established Church and Dissenters. Far from a casual heterodoxy, Rowe's poems provide a

[14] Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe", *MW*, 1: liii.

discursive and provisional space in which questions about theological truth and its impact upon her larger community become possible.

Despite her rise to literary fame throughout her lifetime and for much of the following eighteenth century, Rowe's writing and overall legacy fell from scholastic recognition for some time, with a small resurgence in the late twentieth century. Thus it was not until fairly recently that scholars took a closer look at Rowe's work in some degree of isolation from her reputation. Of the critical pieces written about Rowe, only one comprehensive biography remains, drawing upon Alnwick's MS 110 and *Miscellaneous Works*. Henry Stecher's *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome* (1973) details Rowe's life in Somerset, giving critical background to her relationship to the Thynne family and networks, and discussing her major works in relation to some contemporaries. Despite these strong features, Stecher's biography is not without its problems, particularly those arising from the discrepancies between MS 110 and letters appearing in published forms, such as *Letters Moral and Entertaining* and *Miscellaneous Works.*[15] More recently, Paula Backscheider, Susan Staves, Melanie Bigold, and Sarah Prescott have all published on Rowe's prose works, and textual connections, and her contribution to the rise of the English novel.[16]

Notwithstanding the efforts of scholars, Rowe's reputation for piety has continued to cloud critical reception of her work and its intersection with her Dissenting environment. Backscheider makes the observation that despite a growing interest in Rowe's writing, her reputation persists amongst scholars as a "one-note, pious poet".[17] As a result, very little critical attention has been paid to the theology of Rowe's religious

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[15] Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 20.
[16] Examples of contemporary studies of Rowe's work and influence include Paula R. Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Sarah Prescott, *Women, Authorship, and Literary Culture, 1690-1740* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[17] Paula R. Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 7.

poetry. Sarah Prescott has noted that the piety and sentimentality attributed to Rowe's legacy has obscured aspects of her work, leading to an "almost wholesale neglect of her poetry."[18] As a result, the intersection of Rowe's piety and poetry has not yet been fully explored. Heidi Laudien has even argued that a focus on Rowe's "religiosity" is a disservice to her intellectual contribution, going so far as to say that such an approach "overlook[s] the depth and complexity of her work."[19] These are the perceptions that I wish to address throughout my thesis. In my chapters, I argue that Rowe's religious views provide a foundation upon which to consider her works and, in particular, her manipulation of the poetic form as a means to convey important aspects of Dissenting thought.

Challenges for Research

The primary challenge to the study of Rowe's life and writing is the almost entire absence of Rowe's correspondence and manuscript, coupled with the abundance of her published works and large number of posthumous biographies and tributes. Timothy Whelan makes the perceptive observation that very few of the private papers and manuscripts of women writers active during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries received the degree of careful and attentive preservation that was considered appropriate for those of their male peers.[20] Throughout his series *Nonconformist Writers 1720-1840* (2011), Whelan makes use of a rare but expansive treasure trove of archival and manuscript sources, carefully preserved to memorialise the writings of the Steele Circle. The scope and breadth of this collection shines a necessary and compelling light on their manuscript circulation of poetry and exchange of ideas, which makes the poverty of the Rowe archive all the more apparent. There are significant gaps in archival

[18] Sarah Prescott, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737): Politics, Passion and Piety," in *Women and Poetry, 1660-1750,* ed. Sarah Prescott and David Shuttleton (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 71.
[19] Heidi Laudien, "Reading Desire in the Pastorals of Elizabeth Singer Rowe," *Women's Writing* 19, no. 4 (November 2012): 605.
[20] Timothy Whelan and Julia B. Griffin, eds., *Nonconformist Women Writers, 1720 - 1840*, vol. 1, 8 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), xvii.

records that render attempts to understand aspects of Rowe's work challenging and inconclusive, with little of her correspondence and unpublished writing surviving to aid researchers and to inform the reading of her pieces. For scholars of Rowe, the primary means to access her poetry is not primarily through original manuscripts or handwritten copies, but through digitized and early editions of her publications. As for her correspondence, the few bits that do remain have been passed through the hands of editors such as Frances Thynne, Isaac Watts, and Theophilus Rowe, all of whom have either published or hand-copied selected letters. As a reader it is, therefore, hard to know the extent to which her work has been altered or if, in some cases, it has been altered at all.

Despite Rowe's celebrity and influence during her life and after her death, very little manuscript or correspondence remains outside of Thynne's "Green Book" or Theophilus Rowe's *Miscellaneous Works*. Although she participated in private manuscript exchange and approved of Thynne's transcription of their correspondence, Rowe committed the bulk of her literary legacy to the publications completed throughout her lifetime, including her posthumous collection of religious meditations. Rowe was a woman whose life and works were equally known to her public, her reputation both during and after her life being held as an exemplar of piety and propriety. Significantly, critics considered Rowe to be a singular exception to the dishonourable female authors who captivated the public's attention.[21] In some of her letters transcribed in Thynne's "Green Book", Rowe showed an awareness of having her work displayed to and read by a critical public. She was conscious of her popularity and the effect her words would have on future readers. Bigold makes the observation that Rowe's sense of critical distance from her readership enabled the "construction of a performing other" in an attempt to control the interpretation of her work.[22] In this

[21] John J. Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns, 1700-1739* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 240.
[22] Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century*, 38.

respect, Rowe's fabrication of identity and authorship raises questions about her relation to her public and the legacy that she knew would be left behind. Felicity Nussbaum considers the role that diaries, journals, and autobiographical writings have upon constructs of narratological identity, writing that they have become the "representations of our imagined relation to reality, mediated by narrator and reader".[23] Although Rowe never wrote an autobiography, she left parts of her correspondence and meditations behind, apparently in order to define her own literary space and mediate public memory on her own terms. While Nussbaum does consider the "self" and identity formation to be an ideological construct, there is also the profound sense that Rowe fabricated not only her literary legacy, but also the authorial relationship to her readers that would persist after her death.[24]

Although it is unlikely that we will uncover the extent to which Rowe maintained control over potential misunderstandings of her work, her stormy relationship with poet Matthew Prior (1664 - 1721) gives some indication. It is likely that Prior met Rowe in the autumn of 1703 during a visit to Longleat, having maintained a friendship with Lord Weymouth and his family since 1694. It is also probable that Prior would have been familiar with Rowe's published works through the *Athenian Mercury* and recently published *Poems on Several Occasions* (1696).[25] Prior would eventually go on to help place five of Rowe's poems in the prestigious *Poetical Miscellanies: the Fifth Part* (1704), edited by Jacob Tonson.[26] Even after both of their deaths, Prior and Rowe would be committed to posterity as a love-match gone awry, with various editions of Rowe's biographies detailing Prior's affection and Rowe's subsequent rejection. In a biography written by Theophilus Cibber, there are multiple descriptions of Rowe's personality and "shining merit", making specific note of Prior's attraction and poetic dedications.[27] In

[23] Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, xiii.
[24] Ibid., xii.
[25] H. Bunker Wright, "Matthew Prior and Elizabeth Singer," *Philological Quarterly* 24 (January 1945): 71.
[26] Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel*, 9.
[27] Theophilus Cibber, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 4, 5 vols. (London: Printed for R. Griffiths, 1753), 327.

Theophilus Rowe's biography, it is made evident that Prior dedicated and wrote poems in Rowe's honour with the intent to win her affections:

> Among others, 'tis said, the famous Mr. Prior would have been glad to share the pleasures and cares of life with her; so that, allowing for the double license of the Poet and Love in the manner of expression, the concluding lines in his answer to the pastoral on *Love and Friendship*, by Mrs. Singer, were not without all foundation in truth. She was the nameless lady to whom the following copy of the same author is inscribed. But Mr. Thomas Rowe was the person reserved by Heaven to be the happy man; both to be made, and to make happy.[28]

Shortly after their introduction, Rowe and Prior began a flirtatious correspondence and exchange of poetry. However, their relationship soured for undisclosed reasons and the falling out of Rowe and Prior became a minor scandal. Unsurprisingly, Rowe's letters to Prior do not survive but a small amount of Prior's correspondence remains, held in archives at Longleat. On February 15, 1704, Prior gave a sardonic and witty reply to Rowe's request for a more formal and distant correspondence:

> I have recd [sic] your Letter and will obey your Commands in the Stile of Answering it, which shal not be Familiar or Impertinent […] So therefore, I addore [sic] you with a Passion, and Salute you with respect, I look over your Epistle with a profound Bow & end every Period of my own with a Deep Sigh. I will always form my words according to what I find your pleasure Orders me, I will never dare to offend you or cease to Love you. Oh brave Mrs. Betty how d'y like me now! You will see I have both my Boots on, & so rest your most Obedient, most humble, and most Devoted Slave at the very bottom of the Paper.[29]

Given Rowe's popularity through the *Athenian Mercury* and her own publications at this time, coupled with Prior's own influence and literary fame, it is possible that their interactions and friendship would have been made known to members of their social

[28] Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe," *MW*, 1:xviii.
[29] Wright, "Matthew Prior and Elizabeth Singer,", 72; Matthew Prior to Elizabeth Singer, 15 February 1704, Warminster, Longleat Archives, Prior Papers, XIII, 40.

circle and to a larger audience.[30] Prior's response can be attributed to Rowe's desire for privacy and an attempt to keep aspects of their relationship private. Later that year, in a letter dated November 2, 1704, Prior writes to Rowe that he (against her explicit wishes) had not burned one of her previous letters, instead promising that its contents would remain secret and away from the general public.[31]

> I did not answer your first Letter till I had received your Second, because you commanded that omission, which is the only reason upon which it can be justifyed; I have not had an equal deferrence [sic] to your command in burning your letter, tho' it shall be as safe from any ones knowledge, as if it were burnt, and to confirm my assertion if you repeat your command (however rigorous I may think it) it shal be obeyed a la Lettre[.][32]

This letter provides one of the few insights into Rowe's concern that the public should never gain access to intimate and potentially compromising information. Prior emphasises the rigorousness of Rowe's "command", suggesting that a request to burn her letters was a conditional part of their continued correspondence. Despite their combative exchange, Prior would continue to recognise Rowe's poetic talents a few years later at the end of the preface to his own *Poems On Several Occasions* (1709), noting that she had provided him with a Pastoral for the collection and praising the "softness of her sex, and the Fineness of her Genius".[33] Given the scarcity of Rowe's personal correspondence and the lack of original manuscripts for her most popular works, it is reasonable to assume that Rowe destroyed a large part of her writing as a means to protect her reputation or control the public's access to her personal affairs.

In life and in death, Rowe closely monitored and edited what would become her literary estate, maintaining tight control over her public image and unpublished copies

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[30] Wright, "Matthew Prior and Elizabeth Singer", 72.
[31] Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome*, 80.
[32] Wright, "Matthew Prior and Elizabeth Singer", 72; Matthew Prior to Elizabeth Singer, 2 November 1704, Warminster, Longleat Archives, Prior Papers, XIII, 38.
[33] Matthew Prior, Preface to *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1709), xxiv.

of her work. Towards the end of her life, Rowe collected and arranged her poetry with the intention of posthumously bequeathing the majority of it to Theophilus Rowe, which suggests an awareness of her literary popularity, and his intention to produce *Miscellaneous Works,* and other compilations of her work that would eventually be published after her death.[34] Even posthumously, her last commission to public print was heavily edited before being committed for dissemination. Isaac Watts, for example, admits in the preface to *Devout Exercises* that Rowe had given him the liberty to "review and commit to the press" her religious meditations as he saw fit. By explaining to the reader that he had received the full manuscript and these instructions "by her own hand," Watts justified his own editorial slant.[35] Despite her successful career, the details of the composition and publication of Rowe's writing remain vague.

A large number of Rowe's letters and poems went through significant revisions at the hands of secondary editors before ever seeing publication. Theophilus Rowe published one of the largest collections of Rowe's poetry and letters in *Miscellaneous Works* (1739), carefully selecting and adapting her work to appeal to her reading public, and Frances Thynne, one of Rowe's frequent correspondents and a close friend, hand-copied selected letters and fragments into what is today known to the Alnwick Castle Archives as MS 110, or the "Green Book." Rowe herself was aware that Thynne had this collection of her letters, having made previous reference to rereading her own correspondence and commenting on the green colour of the letter-book.[36] Melanie Bigold comments that Thynne's "Green Book" even formed an epistolary pattern that would form the basis for Rowe's widely successful *Letters Moral and Entertaining*, noting the *Letters*' heavy reliance on coterie exchange and Thynne's editorial hand.[37] Even after Rowe's death, her brother-in-law Theophilus Rowe used the contents of

[34] Backscheider, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe: Lifestyle as Legacy". 57-58.
[35] Isaac Watts, preface to *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), x.
[36] Northumberland, Alnwick Castle Archives, MS 110, Letter 86, fol. 213.
[37] Melanie Bigold, "Elizabeth Rowe's Fictional and Familiar Letters: Exemplarity, Enthusiasm, and the Production of Posthumous Meaning," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (2006): 3-4.

Thynne's "Green Book" as the foundation for Rowe's published correspondence in his *Miscellaneous Works*, reprinting and adapting her letters to give the public an intimate look into Rowe's private life and relationships*:*

> I return your Ladyship's green Book with a thousand sincere Acknowledgments for your Goodness in lending it to me. I have not sent the Transcripts I made out of it, because I have not been honour'd with your Commands about it. But I live in hopes your Ladyship will condescend to answer my last, & favour me with your Orders about this, & my humble Request that your Ladyship would permit me to dedicate my Collection to You.[38]

Here, Theophilus Rowe details the role that the "Green Book" played in the creation of his collection, providing a large proportion of the correspondence that would see publication in his *Miscellaneous Works*. Frances Thynne's role in the publication of his collection would prove to be significant; She acted as a co-editor and contributor, playing a large part in committing Rowe's work to print as well as becoming the collection's dedicatee. In a later letter to Thynne, Theophilus defended his position as editor of his relative's intellectual property, writing that, in a few instances, he "corrected a Word or two, & joined two Letters together when they were very short."[39]

Another challenge to the study of Rowe's work is the overtly pious reputation that persisted after her death, largely expressed through exaggerated descriptions of her religious devotion and virtuous character. Despite its editors' alterations and modifications to the structure of some original letters, *Miscellaneous Works* became the publication that defined Rowe's legacy. *Miscellaneous Works* not only committed large amounts of Rowe's correspondence to print, it also featured twelve poetic tributes and included a prolix biography full of anecdotes concerning the nature of her personal relationships, lengthy character descriptions of both her father and husband, and details

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[38] Helen Sard Hughes, "Elizabeth Rowe and the Countess of Hertford," *PMLA* 59, no. 3 (September 1944): 733; Northumberland, Alnwick Castle Archives, Percy Family Letters and Papers, xxvI, fols. 123-124.
[39] Ibid.; *Percy Family Letters and Papers*, xxvi, fols.125-126

concerning her private religious practice. *Miscellaneous Works* became a nostalgic look at the span of Rowe's career and personal life, split into two volumes and teeming with never-before-published content that could only serve to tease her reading public.[40]

Beyond thirty-one pages of elegiac verse and a curated selection of her own poetry, *Miscellaneous Works* also featured a biography of Rowe that would influence readers for decades following her death, emphasising Rowe's piety to the point of hyperbole. In describing her death, Theophilus paints Rowe as a saintly figure, considering the quickness and ease of her death to be a "reward of her singular piety, and a mark of the divine favour[.]"[41] Rowe is presented as a literary object of worship, her life story constructed in overly religious terminology and her private letters offered up as a means to prove her exemplary character.[42] The public reacted to Theophilus' biography with great enthusiasm, and the collection became a commercial success.[43] Alongside *Miscellaneous Works*, *Friendship in Death, or Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728), *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (1729–32), and *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737) saw continuous circulation and publication until 1820, boasting exceptional popularity and longevity.[44]

During her lifetime, Rowe had always lived within a solemn religious environment, earnestly following the Dissenting beliefs of her family and friends. Later in her life, this would evolve into devotional writing that earned her the respect and friendship of Isaac Watts. In turn, Rowe garnered a reputation as the 'Heavenly Singer'.[45] Rowe's constant attention to religion and virtue is something distinctively repeated in many other accounts of her life and work. In a 1737 publication of the *General Evening Post*, news of Rowe's death reached the public, with the focus concentrated on her "private character" and overtly pious Christian practice:

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[40] Clarke, "Soft Passions and Darling Themes", 357-8.
[41] Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe," *MW*, 1:xxxix.
[42] Bigold, "Elizabeth Rowe's Fictional and Familiar Letters". 2-3.
[43] Clarke, "Soft Passions and Darling Themes", 354.
[44] Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century.* 62.
[45] Wright, "Matthew Prior and Elizabeth Singer", 72.

> [Rowe's] fine Genius and inimitable Wit were made truly estimable, by being constantly employed in the Service of Religion and Virtue: and her private Character, distinguish'd by the most exemplary Piety, Charity, and all that is amiable in Human Life, made her no less the Delight of her Acquaintance, than her Writings the Admiration of the Publick [sic].[46]

Soon after her death, Rowe's works were eclipsed by her reputation as a model of Christian piety, showered with tributes by men such as George Ballard in his *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752) and John Duncombe in his *Feminiad* (1754), and later by Anna Laetitia Barbauld in her poem "Verses on Mrs Rowe" (1773). Theophilus Cibber's *Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* (1753) described Rowe in a tone similar to that of *Miscellaneous Works,* emphasising her virtuousness and "exalted piety":

> The conduct and behaviour of Mrs. Rowe might put some of the present race of females to the blush, who rake the town for infamous adventures to amuse the public. Their works will soon be forgotten, and their memories when dead, will not be deemed exceeding precious; but the works of Mrs. Rowe can never perish, while exalted piety and genuine goodness have any existence in the world. Her memory will be ever honoured, and her name dear to latest posterity.[47]

In these cases, Rowe is continually lauded as the very picture of feminine piety and virtue. Rowe's reputation as a virtuous religious recluse persisted into the nineteenth century, considered to be the primary legacy of her writing career.[48] However, this reputation has become a hindrance to the study of Rowe's religious work, casting an overly sentimental shadow over the rigorous theology and political acumen expressed throughout her writing.[49]

While Rowe's contribution to religious poetry has been noted by several scholars, modern critics seem to overlook or ignore Rowe's faith as an important factor

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[46] *General Evening Post*, February 26, 1737 - March 1, 1737, Issue 534.
[47] Cibber, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland*, 340.
[48] Bigold, "Elizabeth Rowe's Fictional and Familiar Letters", 1.
[49] Clarke, "Soft Passions and Darling Themes", 354.

and impetus for her writing. Dissent, as a defining feature in Rowe's creative writing, is underrepresented or omitted. Henry Stecher's biography largely discusses Rowe's piety and Dissenting connections but fails to associate Rowe's poetry with the Calvinistic theology that dominated her environment and relationships. Although his account of Rowe's life and community provides important information on her Dissenting beliefs, Stecher largely focuses his attention on Rowe's enthusiasm, overlooking doctrines and philosophies that persistently reoccur throughout her body of work. Stecher pays particular attention to Rowe's commonly used tropes, such as death and the life thereafter, but does not ground his observations within the religious and political landscape that Rowe firmly occupies.

In a section entitled "Piety and Benevolence", Stecher considers Rowe's portrayal of heaven and particular aspects of her religious poetry as a by-product of her "Christian piety and romantic inclinations", rather than a theologically informed and nuanced interpretation of key doctrines.[50] Like many other researchers and critics, Stecher engages in a discussion of her piety and personal belief systems without considering the extent to which the connection with Dissent affects Rowe's writing. He attempts to look at the "fictionalisation" of metaphysical truths within her more pious pieces, paying particular attention to her concepts of "perfect bliss" and manifestations of "idealised nature".[51] However, Stecher erroneously considers her poetry and fictions to be mere "artistic devices", vehicles through which Rowe could flex creative muscles. He goes so far as to state that Rowe's inclusion of religious themes is the logical conclusion of a simple "attraction" to spirituality and piety, rather than a potent force that gave meaning to her life and work.[52]

Many modern commentators and academics seem to gloss over the content of Rowe's religious poetry, instead choosing to emphasize her political connections,

[50] Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome, 177*.
[51] Ibid., 193.
[52] Ibid, 177.

posthumous legacy or contribution to the genre of the epistolary novel. Furthermore, little effort is made to explore the way that Rowe mediates her specific theological beliefs with contemporary philosophical thought. Stecher's biography briefly delves into discussing Rowe's religion and dissenting background, but does not connect aspects of Rowe's community and personal belief systems to the larger corpus of her work. Rowe's belief systems and involvement within her Calvinistic environment often go unexpressed. When Stecher does acknowledge Rowe's Dissenting beliefs and particular doctrinal beliefs, they are considered rhetorical ornaments rather than a foundational force.

Stecher erroneously considers a "significant insight into her literary works" to be the result of linking Rowe's beliefs to the "spirit of Pietism".[53] Despite making it clear that Rowe did not share the "narrow intolerance" and "mystically-oriented religious tendencies" of the Pietists, Stecher somehow equates Rowe's "fervent devotion" and "enthusiasm" with a religious group to which Rowe did not claim membership or overall familiarity.[54] Stecher implies that Rowe can be classified within the Pietist spectrum of belief but fails to ground her poetry and personal beliefs within this grouping, lacking sufficient evidence to provide appropriate placement. Stecher's conceptualisation of Rowe's religious belief and the misunderstanding of her connection to Dissent is something that many scholars seem to echo. Similarly, Bigold notes the confusion that arises when attempting to place Rowe within a particular theological grouping or assessing her devotional enthusiasm. Bigold highlights contemporary labels of evangelical, mystic, and enthusiast. Indeed, Rowe appears as a bit of a theological conundrum, for whom the documentary evidence appears contradictory and inconclusive.[55] However, Bigold marks Rowe with the label "enthusiast", citing R. A.

[53] Ibid., 196.
[54] Ibid., 200.
[55] Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century,* 20.

Knox's definition of enthusiasm as pertaining to a life "attuned to the holy spirit".[56] As my thesis will show throughout, Rowe does exhibit enthusiastic tendencies throughout her writing but her Christian identity is far more complex, politically rooted, and nuanced than portrayed by Stecher or Bigold. Rowe is, firmly and irrevocably, tied to her Presbyterian roots and Calvinistic theology. It is important to establish that in her poetry Rowe not only expresses her faith but also reconfigures the conventions of religious writing. My thesis addresses the intersection of Rowe's work with dissenting religion and Christian theology. Alongside these factors, Rowe's faith is of course central to her writing, but we need to look beyond her piety and consider it in the context of larger cultural and theological factors.

Methodology and Structure

Despite the challenges of accessing Rowe's larger body of work and grappling with her posthumous reputation, this thesis balances Rowe's writing with contemporary theological discourse, looking at how she incorporated aspects of her own particular faith with Dissenting culture. Additionally, my thesis gives appropriate context for Rowe's piety, moving her beliefs from an overly sentimental biographical footnote to a strong foundation that permeates the majority of her poetry. This thesis works to firmly establish Rowe within both her political and theological contexts. Accordingly, I establish a critical backdrop for discussing Rowe's religious poetry and theological beliefs, drawing on historical, religious, and political scholarship to examine the historical moment and context in which Rowe operates. Despite the limited access available to manuscript and correspondence, my thesis expands its critical scope, considering Rowe's sphere of influence and the types of theological and political changes that she encountered throughout her life. My methodology is informed by a large number of Rowe's published writings and those of her contemporaries. Since Rowe has

[56] Ibid., 21.

left readers a limited view of her work, it is tempting to feel constrained to what she committed to the public eye. Despite this, my thesis attempts to reconstruct the context in which Rowe became politically active and theologically aware. Here, I balance Rowe's writing, her personal correspondence, historical documentation, and theological texts. A broader scope has been required to give a clearer picture of Rowe's context and community, which I develop throughout all of my chapters. In particular, the history of Dissent is important, not only for the study of Rowe's work, but also for producing an appropriate frame of reference. Looking to writers in Rowe's immediate past for theological context gives a sense of continuity and community throughout her writing and a clearer picture of the theological climate in which she operates.

Throughout my thesis, I explore the importance of a lived community and the significance of a Dissenting heritage in the works and relationships of Rowe. The influence of fellow Dissenters, past and present, and the sense of a continuation in respect to the theological traditions and community is an ever-present facet of Rowe's interactions and influences. The social duty of a Christian is a thread that I also develop throughout, looking at the shifting tide of Dissenting activity in the political sphere and the role of Calvinism. Along these lines, the intersection between "identity" and Dissent is something that is particularly distinctive within Rowe's work. Accordingly, my thesis discusses poignant Biblical and Classical models in Rowe's work and in the writings of her contemporaries, paying particular focus to larger themes and characters.

Chapter One provides a context to Rowe's poetry and prose works. Here, I outline major acts of Parliament, such as the enactment and enforcement of the Clarendon Code alongside subsequent acts of toleration, which had a considerable impact on Rowe's immediate family and wider community. Considering Rowe's religious and political environment is significant because it provides a crucial insight into the adaptation of Dissenting narratives into creative writing. Building off of this analysis, this chapter also delves into Rowe's adaptation of biblical subject matter and use of the

epic genre, framing her work within the wider context of Dissenting and contemporary writers. In addition, I specifically explore Rowe's use of the Virgilian Progression alongside that of Alexander Pope, further establishing her as a Christian Augustan writer.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the influence of the Cambridge Platonist and Calvinist theology on some of Rowe's religious poems. Herself a Presbyterian, Rowe's acquaintance with the work of the Cambridge Platonists adds complexity and tension to her articulation of devotion. Accordingly, this chapter specifically delves into Rowe's use of Calvin's Doctrine of Human Depravity and the Platonist belief in the inherent goodness of mankind. In an attempt to find a balance between Christian piety and the importance of rational thought, poems such as "A Paraphrase on the Canticles", "The Rapture", and "Hymn V" emerge as unconventional compositions on the intricacy of belief and the role of theology in shaping conceptions of identity. In this chapter, I specifically look at three facets and major themes that arise from Rowe's religious poems: the role of the rational mind, imagery of darkness and light, and the separation between the soul and the body.

Chapter Three considers the role of suffering in Rowe's poetry, looking to her own community's experience and that of larger themes within scripture. From the influence of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678 to her own father's imprisonment under the Act of Uniformity (1662), Rowe's sphere of influence underwent profound and dramatic alterations during her formative years and early career, which included the Glorious Revolution and eventual Act of Toleration in 1689. This had pronounced implications on Rowe's perceptions of difficulty and trial. This chapter explores her depictions of biblical characters Job and Joseph, considering their portrayal as subjects under unjust trial and suffering. Here, a Dissenting perspective regarding persecution becomes apparent, particularly in Rowe's poetic representation of imprisonment and suffering.

This leads to my discussion in Chapter Four where I examine the role of Providence in Rowe's final publication, *The History of Joseph* (1736) and in her posthumous devotional writing, *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1738). Building on from my analysis of Rowe's *History* in the previous chapter, Chapter Three considers providence as a major shaping factor in Rowe's conception of her epic and in her devotional meditations. Providence, as a significant theme throughout Rowe's *History*, also appears in many contemporary accounts of Joseph's story. This is particularly explored in relation to Rowe's adoption of characters and thematic elements from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and a translation of Girolamo Fracastoro's *The Maidens Blush*. Additionally, providence plays a large role in Rowe's personal understanding of her own faith. Her use of providence throughout posthumous publication *Devout Exercises of the Heart* considers its impact to her physical preservation, as well as the outworking of salvation. I also explore writings by contemporaries Sarah Savage, Jane Turell, and Elizabeth Burnet, looking at their conceptions of providence and its influence throughout their diary entries, verse, and meditations.

Chapter One: The World of Dissent and Locating Rowe

Dissent played a vital part of political and private life both before and during Rowe's lifetime, representing a wide range of theological groupings in opposition to the Church of England, also referred to in this thesis as the Established Church. Michael Watts simply considers a Dissenter to be someone who asked "chiefly to be left alone to worship God in their own way", free from the restrictions and dictates of the state religion.[1] This is a definition that I widely adopt throughout this thesis, however it is important to note that Dissent took on many forms during the early modern period and early decades of the eighteenth century, including groups such as the Quakers, Presbyterians, Puritans, Baptists, Catholics, and Congregationalists. Although there are a large number of diverse sects within Dissent, those who did not conform to the Established Church represented a considerable minority throughout England and Wales with less than six per cent of the population.[2] In this thesis, I adopt the use of the term "Dissent" to reference this wider group and to discuss the restrictive legislation passed against them, making particular theological distinctions when appropriate. It is also important to recognise Dissent's role in the English Civil War (1642-1651), as Puritans seized power, effectively abolished the Church of England, and committed regicide.[3] As a result, any dissenting involvement with national affairs was met with suspicion and restriction in the years following the Restoration. Although Rowe identifies as a Presbyterian, her inclusion within the larger category of Dissent had profound implications for her immediate family and local community.

This chapter discusses the political and religious culture that surrounded Rowe's upbringing, informing many of the contexts that appear throughout her later poetry and

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[1] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 2.
[2] Ibid., 3.
[3] For more on the role of Dissent in the Civil War, see N. H. Keeble, *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); D. E. Kennedy, *The English Revolution, 1642-1649* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Graham Seel, *The English Civil Wars and Republic, 1637-1660* (London: Routledge, 1999).

prose. I begin by examining the changing currents to the Church of England and Dissent, identifying key acts of Parliament that had a direct impact upon the nature of these religious institutions. Specifically, the Clarendon Code and the subsequent turmoil caused to the Dissenting community became a focal point for many of Rowe's contemporaries, giving rise to numerous publications that decried the restrictions and persecution imposed upon this minority group. Additionally, this chapter explores the literary culture into which Rowe emerged as a young writer, giving particular consideration to contemporary adaptations of Biblical accounts, epic form, and wider conceptualisations of Augustan poetry. Here, I discuss Rowe's adaptation of the Virgilian Progression, setting the trajectory of her career alongside that of Alexander Pope. The introduction of the religious, political, and literary culture of Rowe's early childhood and career provides a valuable insight into her construction of major genres, inclusion of biblical characters throughout her poetry, and ways in which she represents the struggles and particular theological beliefs of her Dissenting community.

Accordingly, the majority of Rowe's lifetime saw major and volatile changes within the areas of politics, religion, and literature. From her early childhood, Rowe witnessed dramatic shifts within monarchy and Parliamentary legislation, beginning at the age of eleven with the ascension of Catholic James II following the death of Charles II in 1685. At the time of the Glorious Revolution in 1688, Rowe had just turned fourteen and shared the joy of many Dissenters at the coronation of William and Mary, as evidenced through her first publications.[4] These two major political events had dramatic implications for the content and context of her poetry. Rowe's community ties and links to Dissent played a large role in her creative process, forming a theological and political framework through which she constructed the majority of her works.

[4] Paula Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 12.

The Clarendon Code and Family Connections

Rowe was born into a family, religious community, and Dissenting culture marked by strong opposition to the Established Church and greatly influenced by what is referred to as the Clarendon Code, a series of restrictions placed upon a Dissenting community from 1661 to 1665. The Clarendon Code was named for Charles II's chief minister Edward Hyde (1609-1674), the first Earl of Clarendon. Hyde, a lawyer and member of Lord Falkland's Great Tew circle, became a member of the Short Parliament, rising to become an advisor to Charles I by 1642.[5] With the Interregnum from 1649 to 1660 and subsequent Restoration, Hyde became a central figure in English political life from 1640 to 1667.[6] The restoration of the Established Church in 1661 brought about the Clarendon Code's chain of legislation from the Cavalier Parliament, consisting of the Corporation Act (1661), the Act of Uniformity (1662), Conventicle Act (1664), and Five-Mile Act (1665).[7] An incredibly severe ecclesiastical code, these acts excluded Dissenters from holding public office, refused entrance to Oxford and Cambridge universities, required Anglican communion and usage of the *Book of Common Prayer* in religious services, and placed heavy restrictions on unauthorised worship and the activities of ministers. With 1662's Act of Uniformity, a lasting divide became apparent between Anglican royalism and a persecuted Dissenting minority.[8] James Heath considered the Act of Uniformity to be something "blessed and renowned", formulated by the monarchy as something to reflect "Gods Glory and the Churches Peace and happinesse".[9]

Following years of Civil War, Interregnum, and religious turmoil, leaders such as Charles II and Hyde believed the Established Church to be the *via media*, a middle way to

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[5] Michael Finlayson, "Clarendon, Providence and the Historical Revolution," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 610.
[6] Ibid., 622.
[7] Clyde Grose, "The Religion of Restoration England," *Church History* 6, no. 3 (September 1937): 226.
[8] Philip Connell, *Secular Chains: Poetry and the Politics of Religion from Milton to Pope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 67.
[9] James Heath, *The Glories and Magnificent Triumphs of the Blessed Restitution of His Sacred Majesty K. Charles II from His Arrival in Holland 1659/60 till This Present* (London: Printed and to be Sold by N.G, R.H, and O.T., 1662), 270.

ensure political stability and a broad church with widely tolerant lines.[10] In the 1679 publication of *The Moderation of the Church of England*, Timothy Puller praised the Church of England for its temperance, writing that this form of restraint gave them a "singular advantage to convince Dissenters upon right and proper Principles[.]"[11] Even though they made up a small percentage of the population, Dissenters and their conceptions of religious freedom were framed as a serious threat to the social order and were subsequently considered to be dangerous people in need of strict legislation. [12] The choice to dissent from the Church of England had profound consequences for their political and educational life and the terms of these legislations effectively made Dissenters second-class citizens.[13] Dissenters were subject to various civil disabilities, intended to humiliate them into adhering to the terms of the Clarendon Code and Test Acts. Quakers, Catholics, Presbyterians, and other factions of Dissent were prohibited from holding any sort of political office or becoming members of Parliament.[14] Alongside these restrictions, punishments for those who disobeyed the legislation of the Clarendon code included transportation, fines, imprisonment, and physical violence. [15] The ramifications of this violence and its influence on the writings of Dissenters, particularly those of John Bunyan, Richard Baxter, and John Milton, will be particularly considered in the third chapter of this thesis.

The legislation set forth by the Clarendon Code had a direct impact on Rowe's family and childhood, facilitating the meeting of her parents and constructing the political framework that would influence her earliest publications. Rowe's father, Walter Singer (d. 1719), a Presbyterian minister imprisoned in Ilchester for non-conformity to

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[10] Grose, "The Religion of Restoration England,", 226.
[11] Timothy Puller, *The Moderation of the Church of England Considered as Useful for Allaying the Present Distempers Which the Indisposition of the Time Hath Contracted* (London: Printed by J. M. for Richard Chiswell, 1679), 386.
[12] Albert Cassell Dudley, "Nonconformity under the 'Clarendon Code,'" *The American Historical Review* 18, no. 1 (October 1912): 77.
[13] Tessa Whitehouse, *The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent, 1720-1800 (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10.
[14] Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500 - 1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 86-87.
[15] Susan Dwyer Amussen, "Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 1995): 19.

Charles II, met her mother, Elizabeth Portnell, during one of her charitable visits to the gaol. Theophilus Rowe's biography describes Portnell's visitation as stemming from an obligation to "visit those that suffer'd for the sake of a good conscience", considering their subsequent marriage to be a union between "virtuous and well-pair'd minds".[16] Rowe further describes Singer's conduct and temperament as one belonging to a "chearful Christian", concerned with the welfare of "the widows and orphans".[17] After his release from prison, Singer would go on to successfully enter the clothing trade, earning enough money to purchase considerable tracts of land.[18] Although Singer would not re-enter the ministry following his imprisonment, his connections with his Presbyterian community and personal religious convictions did not disappear.

In the early 1670s, England became a nation deeply troubled by unresolved religious tension, plagued by the continued persecution of Dissenters alongside constant fears of schism and popery threatening the Established Church.[19] Despite a declaration of indulgence in 1672, Charles II took a personal interest in acting against Dissenters, issuing orders to prosecute those who would not conform.[20] Parliament also passed the 1673 Test Act, requiring further oaths and allegiances in an attempt to weed out "popish recusants".[21] It was in the midst of this great religious turmoil that Elizabeth [née Singer] Rowe was born in Ilchester, Somerset in 1674, the same year that Milton published the twelve-book *Paradise Lost*.[22] By the late 1670s, it became clear that the Clarendon Code had failed to turn Dissenters back to the Established Church, with neither the Test nor Corporation Acts significantly reducing the numbers of Dissenters in public office or weakening the commitments of Dissenting clergy to their respective

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[16] Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe", *MW,* 1: iv.
[17] Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe", *MW*, 1: vi-ii.
[18] Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome*, 24-25.
[19] David Loewenstein, *Treacherous Faith: The Specter of Heresy in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 292.
[20] William Gibson, "The Limits of the Confessional State: Electoral Religion in the Reign of Charles II," The Historical Journal 51, no. 1 (March 2008): 30.
[21] Theodore Plunknett, *Studies in English Legal History* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), 323.
[22] Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel*, 13.

ministries.[23] Despite this, the Clarendon Code continued to be rigorously enforced for ten years, continuing with varying degrees of severity until the third decade of the nineteenth century.[24]

Consequently, much of Rowe's early childhood and local community saw direct and violent repercussions of the Clarendon Code. In 1677, roughly 20 miles from Rowe's childhood home, Anglican Bishop Peter Mews attempted to suppress a large Dissenting meeting in Taunton, drafting in deputy lieutenants and county militia. Even though his efforts were met with violence, Mews was regarded as having committed a great service for King and country.[25] The persecution would continue, with the opposition against Dissenters becoming more and more violent in the early 1680s. In 1681, many Somerset meetinghouses saw vandalism, with the forcible removal and destruction of seats and pulpits of those in Bristol. When it became almost impossible for Dissenters to meet in Bristol, many fled to the surrounding countryside.[26] The ascension of Catholic James II in 1685 brought about some small steps towards toleration. With a Declaration of Indulgence in May 1687, James attempted to garner support from Protestant Dissenters and their sympathisers despite their reticence to support a Catholic monarch.[27] The Declaration of Indulgence marked the beginning of a reversal of fortunes for many Dissenters, particularly considering that from 1681 to 1686, many Dissenters were viciously persecuted. With James' Declaration, some of those who had been driven from office could now find a more favourable and tolerant court.[28] In 1687, Dissenters from a Somerset borough of Chard publicly thanked James for his indulgence, comparing their struggles to the Israelites under persecution by "cruel taskmasters" in Old Testament Egypt.[29] Although James showed favour to Dissenters, formal toleration did not

[23] Gibson, "The Limits of the Confessional State: Electoral Religion in the Reign of Charles II", 29.
[24] Grose, "The Religion of Restoration England", 228.
[25] Gibson, "The Limits of the Confessional State", 32.
[26] Amussen, "Punishment, Discipline, and Power", 21.
[27] J. R. Jones, "James II's Whig Collaborators," *The Historical Journal* 3, no. 1 (1960): 65.
[28] Mark Goldie, "John Locke's Circle and James II," *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (September 1992): 558.
[29] Emanuel Green, *The March of William of Orange Through Somerset: With a Notice of Other Local Events in the Time of King* (London: n.p., 1892), 23.

materialise for all Protestant groups, sparking wide-ranging debates amongst Anglicans, Presbyterians, Socinians, and Independents.[30]

Poetry, Toleration, and the Glorious Revolution

William III's ascension to the throne in 1689, following the overthrow of James II during the Glorious Revolution, marked a dramatic change for the Dissenting community. Religious conflict played a central role in political life in the years after William's ascension, as the Established Church no longer held the traditional monopoly on public worship and found itself splintered by political loyalties and heterodox challenges.[31] William III welcomed toleration and worked to pass the 1689 Toleration Act, restoring crucial freedoms to a large majority of Dissenters. Despite relaxing restrictions on Dissenting meetings and reducing the criminal nature of nonconformity, the Act of Toleration did not repeal the Clarendon Code or Test Act. Instead, the Act of Toleration required oaths, tithes, declarations, and still demanded that Dissenters register their places of worship. [32] Although the Act decriminalised Trinitarian Protestant groups such as Baptists and Presbyterians, the Quakers, Unitarians, and Catholics were still bound by the older, restrictive legislation.[33] It quickly became clear that William's Act was not a concession of full religious liberty.

The political impact of the Act of Toleration, alongside a growing trend towards broader ecclesiastical toleration, marked a period of religious controversy for the Established Church.[34] Despite this, the Act of Toleration was seen by many as a reward for the loyalty of Dissenters and their support in 1688's revolution.[35] Reactions to William's Act were varied, with many sceptical of the Dissenters' ability to cooperate

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[30] Charles Mullett, "Some Essays on Toleration in Late Eighteenth Century England," *Church History* 7, no. 1 (March 1938): 25.
[31] Connell, *Secular Chains*, 3-4.
[32] Charles Mullett, "The Legal Position of English Protestant Dissenters, 1689-1767," *Virginia Law Review* 23, no. 4 (February 1937): 389.
[33] Dewey Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 25.
[34] John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England 1660–1750* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), 155–71.
[35] Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, 25.

with the new legislation. A 1689 publication, *Several Arguments for Concessions and Alterations in the Common Prayer,* warned that this fragile toleration was conditional and worried that many Dissenters would "shew themselves unworthy of that favour".[36] However, some voices published in favour of the Act, seeing broader Protestant toleration as beneficial for the nation. Humphrey Prideaux wrote that legislations against Dissenters forced them to "take shelter from us in the Camp of our common Enemy, and join with the Papists against us to the endangering both of Church and State to utter ruin".[37] Prideaux, concerned with the Protestant fight against "Papistry" considered Dissenters to be on "equal terms with us" and that their newly-found toleration carried a "promise and benefit to the Church of Christ among us[.]"[38] For Dissenters and wider Protestant factions, the Glorious Revolution represented a deliverance from popery, but also suggested a reformation of irreligion and licentiousness.[39] In the years after the Glorious Revolution, community and personal narrative began to be incorporated into national identity. November fifth became a day with special significance, reflecting William of Orange's arrival in 1688 and the thwarting of a plot to burn Parliament down in 1605 by a group of Roman Catholics. Many Dissenters marked these events with a fast day and commemorative sermons emphasising God's hand of blessing for a Protestant England.[40]

Lois Schwoerer notes that women writers from a variety of political and religious backgrounds began to interact with issues associated with the Glorious Revolution, ignoring the "customary restrictions" of their gender to step from the private sphere into the public world of print.[41] Rowe's submissions of political poetry to

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[36] Minister of the Church of England, *Several Arguments for Concessions and Alterations in the Common Prayer, and in the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England in Order to a Comprehension* (London: Printed for John Salsbury at the Rising Sun, 1689), 32.
[37] Humphrey Prideaux, *A Letter to a Friend Relating to the Present Convocation at Westminster* (London: Printed for Brabazon Aylmer at the Three Pigeons, 1690), 3.
[38] Ibid., 4.
[39] Brent S. Sirota, *The Christian Monitors: The Church of England and the Age of Benevolence, 1680–1730* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 69–109.
[40] Whitehouse, *The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent,* 11.
[41] Lois Schwoerer, "Women and the Glorious Revolution," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 196.

The Athenian Mercury drew upon her Dissenting background, enabling an exploration of identity as both a woman and a writer.[42] Michael Genovese rightly identifies a tension between the public and private lives of women poets, particularly those who engaged with religious writing, during the early eighteenth century as having a significant impact upon their engagement with print. Genovese indicates that many modern scholars solely "privilege the public sphere" and insist upon the "interpenetration of the public and the private", leading to a missed opportunity to address personal aspects of women's poetry.[43]

Backscheider considers Rowe's publication of political poetry to be "historically significant", an ideological and public foray into the ideals of the Glorious Revolution and Dissenting political identity.[44] When looking at Rowe's earliest published works, allusions to the Dissenting theological and political cause are unmistakable. In an 1691 poem, "Upon King William's Passing the Boyn," she praised the "War-like Prince" of the Glorious Revolution and his "brave exploits," comparing his military prowess to the "Martial God" of apocalyptic revelation.[45] In a later poem "A Poetical Question Concerning the Jacobites, sent to the Athenians," Rowe even considered William III to be a "name my Lines grow proud to bear," a conflation of the physical act of writing verse with the familial nature and community of Dissent.[46] For Dissenters, key aspects of the Glorious Revolution were the inclusion of religion within a political society, moving towards broader toleration and freedoms.[47] Backscheider also maintains that Rowe's political verse is "rich", leading to a "repositioning" of the poet within her own political and religious context.[48] Accordingly, Dissenters considered the recent history of

[42] Backscheider, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe: Lifestyle as Legacy", 46.
[43] Michael Genovese, "'Profess as Much as I': Dignity as Authority in the Poetry of Sarah Fyge Egerton," *The Eighteenth Century* 51, no. 1, Summer (2010): 45.
[44] Ibid., 45.
[45] Elizabeth Rowe, "Upon King William's Passing the Boyn," in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed for John Dunton at the Raven, 1696), 30.
[46] Elizabeth Rowe, "A Poetical Question Concerning the Jacobites, sent to the Athenians," in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed for John Dunton at the Raven, 1696), 27.
[47] Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?: England 1689-1727* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30.
[48] Backscheider, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe: Lifestyle as Legacy", 44.

nonconformity as imperative to their community and identity, looking to their predecessors from the restoration of Charles II in 1660 up until the ascension of William III as having direct and close ties.[49]

Writing Religion

For Rowe, the Bible provided a wealth of inspiration, symbology, and religious authority that naturally lent itself to poetry and epic. Despite Rowe's critical recognition for her religious verses, paraphrases, and hymns, the importance of biblical imagery and Christian allegory to her creative writing has not been fully explored. According to David Morris, the seventeenth century produced a range of writers that were interested in replicating the high style of the Bible in religious poetry.[50] Rowe, like many of her contemporaries, drew her vocabulary of inspiration and ecstasy from biblical sources. Some, like Milton's *Paradise Lost,* attempted paraphrases of the Bible and took its subject and larger style from scriptural influences while others, like Cowley's unfinished *Davideis* (1656), appropriated David's psalms and hymns.[51] For many religious writers, biblical poetry became a straightforward and direct way to convey aspects of theology. As they considered biblical history to be tacit canon, biblical poetry became an expression of explicit doctrine.[52]

In *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), John Dennis explored the convergence between verse and the Bible, considering poetry to be the "Natural Language of Religion" and religion the natural inspiration for poetic sentiment.[53] Throughout Dennis' text appear strands of religious, poetic, and philosophical anti-rationalist tradition, reflecting the power of religious ideas and their representation in

[49] Whitehouse, *The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent,* 10-11.
[50] David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1972), 14–22.
[51] Abigail Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 182-3.
[52] U. Milo Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (London: Yale University Press, 1966), 49.
[53] John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, Contain'd in Some New Discoveries Never Made Before, Requisite for the Writing and Judging of Poems Surely* (London: Printed for George Strahan, 1704), 97.

nature.[54] Dennis' connection to Rowe appeared publicly for the first time in her compilation *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (1704) with his contribution of the poem, "Te Deum Paraphrased". Here, Dennis conflated the "mortal lays" of poetry with the "boundless praise" of divinity, rhapsodising on the nature of God within the bounds of earthly creation.[55] Like Rowe, Dennis considered scripture and Christian theology to be a vital component in the creation of poetry, writing that religion was "Necessary to give the last force and Elevation to Poetry".[56] In *Grounds of Criticism*, Dennis emphasised the connection between the art of poetry and divinity itself, drawing attention to its proclivity for spreading religious ideals:

> For since Poetry has been thought not only by Heathens, but by the Writers of the Old Testament, and consequently by God himself who inspir'd them, to be the fittest method for the inforcing [sic] Religion upon the Minds of Men, and since Religion is the only solid Foundation of all Civil Society, it follows that whoever Endeavours to Re-establish Poetry, makes a generous attempt to restore an Art, that may be highly Advantageous to the Publick, and Beneficial to Mankind.[57]

Although Rowe chose not to describe her poetry along such direct lines, the inclusion of religious themes throughout the majority of her creative work raises questions regarding Protestant ideology, artistic expression, and larger Dissenting identity. Dennis' critical works became shaped by the ideals of religious renewal and moral reform, reflecting and stimulating a burgeoning interest in Christian poetry in writers such as Richard Blackmore, Isaac Watts, and Rowe herself.[58] For Dennis, poetic enthusiasm became an instrument of godly reform, embodied by a Williamite and low church agenda and taking shape alongside the high church polemic of the 1690s.[59]

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[54] Jeffrey Barnouw, "The Morality of the Sublime: To John Dennis," *Comparative Literature* 35, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 29.
[55] John Dennis, "Te Deum Paraphrased" in *Divine Hymns and Poems* (London: Printed by R. Janeway, 1704), 22, Lines 1-4.
[56] Dennis*, The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, 116-7.
[57] Ibid., 126-7.
[58] Morris, *The Religious Sublime*, 47.
[59] Connell, *Secular Chains,* 143.

Dennis' literary theory appeared in critical dialogue with Blackmore's work, marking the religious emphasis of his heroic poetry.[60] Rowe wrote in many different genres, casting religion as a central theme or symbolic component in the majority of her works. As a result, the intersection of her own private faith with wider Dissenting and Protestant culture is vital to my thesis. Felicity Nussbaum identifies discussion regarding religion, and in Rowe's case the writing of identity and religious culture, as a way to position subjects between "conflicting ideologies of self-denial and self-knowledge", which necessitates a further exploration regarding the writer's self-expression and wider political and religious connections.[61]

Earlier in the Seventeenth Century, George Wyther wrote in *A Preparation to the Psalter* (1619) that he believed in the Bible's ability to "melt the heart, and worke strange operations in the soule."[62] An important component of England's Protestant tradition was the versification of scripture for the entertainment and edification of a lay audience. Throughout the seventeenth century, many poets considered the Bible to be a vital source of poetic materials.[63] Defenders of Biblical paraphrase argued that verse served as the optimal medium for retention and that scripture expressed through poetry spread the message of God to an uneducated audience. Writers like Wyatt, Sidney, Milton, and Waller gave legitimacy to the versification of scripture, enabling it as a normal poetic activity. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, and at the height of Rowe's career, the versification of scripture became an established literary mode.[64] Accordingly, many of Rowe's contemporaries considered the emotional reactions of a reader or listener, who might defy rational analysis with a deep and profound

[60] Ibid., 146.
[61] Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 62.
[62] George Wyther, *A Preparation to the Psalter* (London: Printed by Nicholas Okes, 1619), 75.
[63] Morris, *The Religious Sublime*, 19.
[64] Ibid., 104-105.

connection to moving passages, as having profound ties to the effects of rhetorical devices found in the Bible.[65]

In the case of Dissent, poetry not only enabled the dissemination of theology, but also served as a powerful form of self-identity. John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (1666), although not a poem, set an important precedent for following generations of writers through the creation of an idealised Dissenting voice, providing a model for the individual's identity as a child of God perpetually striving towards heaven.[66] For the many Puritans before Bunyan and Rowe's time, the union of exegesis and homily produced approaches to scripture that were largely practical and rational, with the Bible consulted for authoritative instruction. In these cases, the imagination seemed irrelevant to correct doctrine. However, Bunyan enabled an imaginative realist approach to scripture, providing a Dissenting reader with more than a mere allegorical reading.[67] This mode of writing allowed him to construct a narrative that would have been familiar and applicable to a suffering and persecuted audience, told through vivid and imaginative works of fiction such as *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). Throughout Bunyan's text in *Grace Abounding*, he includes constant reference to scripture itself and cites verses throughout as a means to support his theological position. From the understanding of his own sinful situation to the promise of an eternal heaven, Bunyan's emotional connection to scripture gave him a framework through which he could interpret his imprisonment and pastoral ministry. He ackowledged the "guilt" of sin that "attendeth the soul" alongside the "gracious deliverance" of salvation and the "strong consolation" that heaven provided.[68] In this case, the words of scripture served as a proof text to the narrator's emotional experience of faith, working to proclaim divine authority and provide textual support for the reader's benefit. Rather than biblical authority providing the mandate for an acceptable interpretation of scripture and religious sentiment, it is

[65] Ibid., 20-21.
[66] Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, 64.
[67] Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation*, 23.
[68] John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, Or, A Brief and Faithful Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ, to His Poor Servant John Bunyan* (London: Printed by George Larkin, 1666), 11, 38.

the author who claims the "power" of correct thinking, using the Bible to serve in the interest of his or her argument.[69] In *Grace Abounding*, the Bible became a way to validate Bunyan's emotional experience, providing him with rhetorical markers alongside his journey through salvation, prison, and ministry.

Many Dissenting engagements with print came about due to a lack of security with the legal, political, and educational establishments. As a result, many of these marginalised groups sought alternative means to sustain their traditions and community ties. Rowe's depiction of her own interior life and the influence of Dissent became increasingly prevalent subjects throughout her writing, specifically in the early decades of the eighteenth century.[70] Tessa Whitehouse notes that these types of publications by Dissenters were not a product of isolation, but instead represented an assortment of ecumenical engagements filled with "overlapping endeavours, friendship, and rivalry involving a great variety of individuals".[71]

For Rowe, both her poetry and devotional writing provided a means to fuse Dissenting beliefs with the medium of self-expression, giving public voice to private religious sentiment and expressions of faith. A primary advantage of personal religious poetry is that the conviction and passion of the poet provided a source of pleasure and profit for the reader, irrespective of theological doctrine.[72] This gives us an insight into Rowe's popularity both during her lifetime and after, especially given that her religious meditations and poetry became a crucial part of her legacy and defined her public image. Rowe's versification of scripture became a lyrical form employed to express an intimate religious condition. In particular, she was drawn to scripture that depicted the relationship between the individual and divine.[73] This interaction became a repeated topic for many of her religious poems, often finding expression through symbol, allegory, and scriptural reference. After the success and influence of Milton's *Paradise*

[69] Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, 66.
[70] Backscheider, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe: Lifestyle as Legacy", 57.
[71] Whitehouse, *The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent*, 3.
[72] Morris, *The Religious Sublime*, 214.
[73] Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome,* 45.

Lost, the best poetry innovated form, resisted conventional tropes and illustrated a spontaneous relation with divinity.

A form of iconoclasm, the poetry of Dissent became a search for pleasure and devotion outside the realms of formal constraint.[74] For Rowe, the influences of her Dissenting community and the larger concepts of poetic identity evolved into powerful modes of self-expression. Although this topic is considered throughout my thesis, I give fuller discussion to Rowe's influences and their effects on her concept of personal identity in Chapter Two, looking particularly at Calvinist and Cambridge Platonist perspectives on topics such as depravity and the mind's ability to reason. However, a cursory understanding of scriptural engagement in the works of Rowe and contemporaries, such as Isaac Watts, gives crucial context and places Rowe's work in a spectrum of theologically influenced verse.

Watts' own religious poetry, while not as deeply emotive, provides an ideal foil to Rowe's use of scripture throughout her poetry. Watts and Rowe enjoyed a friendship that lasted for decades, likely beginning after the publication of Watts' *Horae Lyricae* in 1706. It is also possible that they were familiar with each other's writings before this or had possibly met through the Singer or Rowe families, but there is no record of an early encounter between them.[75] According to Samuel Johnson, Watts was "one of the first who taught the Dissenters to write and speak like other men, by shewing them that elegance might consist with piety".[76] Watts' *Horae Lyricae* (1706) emphasises that the "Songs Sacred to Devotion" are intended to "assist the Meditations and Worship of Vulgar Christians", providing an alternative to the "usual Methods".[77] His hymn "The Universal Hallelujah, or, Psalm 148 Paraphrased" also uses scripture and biblically inspired poetry to support religious experience. Here, he describes religious verse as

[74] Achinstein, "Romance of the Spirit", 425.
[75] Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome*, 88-99.
[76] James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal*, ed. G.B. Hill (Oxford, n.p., 1887), 312.
[77] Isaac Watts, Preface to *Horae Lyricae*, (London: Printed by S. and D. Bridge, 1706), 2.

something used to "tell the blind World" and show the beauties of the divine.[78] Watts appropriates the text of Psalm 148, closely following the original verses as they mimic the order of creation in their praise of the divine, starting from the sun's light and concluding with mankind. Having described the way that creation praises God, from the "surging seas" to the "lofty pines", Watts concludes that mortals are to "take the sound" and "eecho [sic] [these] glories of your King".[79] In this way, versification of faith becomes the primary mode through which the individual can praise the divine, imitating the rest of nature and creation.

In *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), Watts derives over a third of his verse from scripture alone, specifically referencing the Psalms as "expressive of the Temper of our own Hearts and the Circumstances of [our] lives".[80] In "Our Own Weakness, and Christ Our Strength", for example, Watts closely ties his verse to 2 Corinthians 12: 7, 9-10, meditating on the phrase "My grace is sufficient for thee".[81] Watts describes rejoicing in "deep Distress" as he leans on "All-sufficient Grace" and learns to "Glory in Infirmity."[82] Watts' emotive response to faith becomes diffused through divine mercy as he reflects on his sinful condition and various forms of trial, citing God's strong "Left-hand".[83] Like Rowe, Watts closely tracks the relationship between the divine and the individual, often making the comparison between sinner and saviour, God and man. In a poem inspired by Psalm 73:25, Rowe juxtaposes an empty earthly life with divinity and heaven, yearning for the celestial "charms of harmony" amid the "dull insipid things" that make up her reality.[84] Rowe differs significantly from Watts in respect to her earthly condition, often putting her desire for heavenly transport and divine communion in verse. Here,

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[78] Isaac Watts, "The Universal Hallelujah, Or, Psalm 148 Paraphrased" in *Horae Lyricae* (London: Printed by S. and D. Bridge, 1706), 22, line 19.
[79] Ibid., 23-24, lines 29, 41, 50-51.
[80] Isaac Watts, Preface to *Hymns and Spiritual Songs in Three Books* (London: Printed by J. Humfreys, 1707), 3.
[81] 2 Corinthians 12: 9 (King James Version)
[82] Isaac Watts, "Our Own Weakness, and Christ Our Strength" in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs in Three Books* (London: Printed by J. Humfreys, 1707), 17, lines 3-6.
[83] Ibid., line 12; There is often a biblical distinction between the right and left hands as having a correlation with blessing and wrath. Here, Watts is referencing the left hand of God as an act of discipline.
[84] Elizabeth Rowe, "Hymn. Who have I in Heaven but Thee, &c. Psalm lxxiii. 25" in *MW*, 1:65, lines 2-3.

she writes that without the love of God, she "nothing can enjoy" and "nothing crave[s]". Rowe's vision is decidedly heavenward, longing for the "Celestial bow'rs, seraphic songs/And fields of endless light".[85] While Watts largely grapples with the earthly side of human life, Rowe constantly looks towards death as a form of ultimate release and peace. In this way, Rowe shows a preference for an individually inspired vision, building upon many of the social conventions that dictate religious discussion and, in particular, the versification of faith.

Although Rowe's career was largely spent in the creation of verse, her final posthumous publication relied on scripture for its content and influence. Rowe's *Devout Exercises* is a spiritual autobiography in prose, which served as a model for other Christians to adopt and emulate. This aspect of her work is discussed more fully in the concluding chapter of this thesis, but deserves to be introduced here and emphasised as an important component of Rowe's religious writing. For many of Rowe's contemporaries, the majority of the spiritual autobiographies and meditations written by women did not have explicit plans for publication but found their way to public circulation through well-meaning family members or friends in the decades following their death. What is unusual about Rowe is that the publication of *Devout Exercises* was specifically designed to coincide with her death, the manuscript and eventual publication having been previously relinquished to the editorial care of her friend Isaac Watts. However, the spiritual autobiographies and meditations of women also have an ideology of self-scrutiny, something Rowe keenly adopts throughout her text.[86]

In the preface to *Devout Exercises*, Watts included a personal letter from Rowe, committing her private thoughts to public consumption through his editorial oversight. In this letter, Rowe explained her motivation for making these personal moments of religious clarity or sentiment available to a wider audience. She intended her

[85] Ibid., lines 5-6, 17-18.
[86] Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, xix.

"soliloquies" to be an inspiration to others, following the example of earlier spiritual autobiographies that she had found particularly edifying:

> The Reflections were occasionally written, and only for my own Improvement; but I am not without Hopes that they may have the same Effect on some pious Minds, as the reading of Experiences of others have had on my own soul. The experimental Part of Religion has generally a greater Influence than its Theory; and if, when I am sleeping in the Dust, these soliloquies should kindle a Flame of divine Love in the Heart of the lowest and most despised Christian, be the Glory given to the great Spring of all Grace and Benignity.[87]

Rowe's personal meditations become a form of spiritual autobiography, allowing the reader to follow her example and to benefit from previous trials and victories. It is also worth noting that in the case of spiritual autobiography, the public and private conceptions of gendered identity become intertwined. For women, this form of personal narrative is a claim to public space for speaking and writing.[88] As seen throughout Rowe's text, she gave public utterance to a collection of private religious experiences, using a genderless voice described by Watts as "spirit dwelling in Flesh" and an "Example of a Soul".[89]

Rowe's *Devout Exercises* presents an identity separate from the constraints of gender, emphasising the purity of the divine and the individual's continual progress towards sanctification. In *Devout Exercises*, Rowe emphasises the "experimental" experience of the Christian faith and the emotive "flame of love" that arises from genuine faith, distinguishing these from the "theory" of dogmatic theological concepts. She pictures a narrator freed from the limitations of class, gender, or particular religious groupings, stressing the role of emotions as the index of genuine piety. Rowe's language throughout *Devout Exercises* is ornate and, at times, hyperbolic. For example, in

[87] Elizabeth Rowe to Isaac Watts, n.d., n.p., in *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise,* ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), xxxvii-iii.
[88] Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, 155.
[89] Isaac Watts, Preface to *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise,* ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), xii.

meditation "Supreme Love to God", Rowe attempts to describe the effects of sin, considering herself as the "worm of the earth" and decrying the genderless "mortal frame" which prevented her from experiencing a closer relationship with the divine "splendour on my soul".[90] In her meditation "A Thank-offering for saving Grace", Rowe incorporates scriptural references to support her own description of saving faith, quoting Psalm 103:1-4, Psalm 18:25, Deuteronomy 7:9, and Romans 11:33 to lend authority to her own emotional reaction to divine love.[91] Here, Rowe uses the masculine voices of David and Saint Paul to support her reaction, weaving their experiences of the divine into her own.

Because of her rich descriptions and impassioned language, Isaac Watts felt some sort of editorial censure or explanation was appropriate in the preface to the meditations, writing that Rowe's accounts of sin, divinity, and the human condition had been the "fashion" among some "Divines of Eminence in former Years".[92] Although Rowe engaged in hyperbolic, deeply pious, and emotive language throughout her *Devout Exercises,* she also reconfigured the language of fellow male Dissenters to express her own experiences. Women's spiritual autobiographies were shaped by the patterns and jargon of their male counterparts, but also resisted the restrictions of gender through the self-reflexivity of the text.[93] They were influenced by the example of the religious meditations of John Owen and Isaac Watts, which both employ scripture as a means to lend textual authority to their personal experiences. A compilation of Watts' religious meditations and sermons previously inaccessible to the public, entitled *Devout Meditations: From Dr. Watts,* first appeared in 1791, arranged and published by Quaker publishers William Darton and Joseph Harvey. Organised by topics such as the 'inward witness of Christianity' and souls 'prepared for heaven', Watts' meditations deeply rely

[90] Elizabeth Rowe, "Supreme Love to God" in *Devout Exercises of the Heart"* Ed. Isaac Watts (London: printed for R. Hett, 1738), 4-5.
[91] Elizabeth Rowe, "A Thank-offering for Saving Grace" in *Devout Exercises of the Heart"* Ed. Isaac Watts (London: printed for R. Hett, 1738), 28-32.
[92] Isaac Watts, Preface to *Devout Exercises*, xiii.
[93] Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject,* xix.

on scripture as a means to legitimise his own personal experiences while also lending biblical authority.[94] It is unclear when these particular meditations were composed, as they seem to span various points in his lifetime and ministry. Unlike Rowe's *Devout Exercises*, Watts' meditations rely on scripture without hyperbole or overly emotional content, instead focusing on verses that serve as primary inspiration for each entry. The language Watts employs throughout appears measured, restrained, and tightly adherent to the biblical text.

In meditation inspired by the "Inward Witness to Christianity", Watts begins with the assurance of 1 John 15:10, that he who "believeth in the Son of God hath the witness in himself".[95] Throughout his meditation, Watts connects the idea of a "witness" to the individual's conscience, reason, and soul, emphasising the importance of "understanding many arguments and evidences of the truth of the gospel".[96] Paula Backscheider considers Rowe's community and Dissenting identity as crucial components of her self-disclosure as a writer and poet; she theorises that the strong responsibility to "witness" plays a major role in Rowe's writing.[97] Whereas Rowe emphasises the sensations of faith that occur primarily through one's own perception and emotional connection to the divine, Watts claims to have an intellectual "interest in the love of God, and lively sensations of that love", manifested through "zeal for his glory and [an] active diligence[.]"[98] In "Meditation on Divine Love", Watts questions the role of emotions in the experience of faith itself:

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[94] Isaac Watts, *Devout Meditations: From Dr. Watts* (London: Printed by Darton and Harvey, 1791), I.
[95] 1 John 15:10 (King James Version)
[96] Watts, *Devout Meditations*, 17.
[97] Paula Backscheider, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe: Lifestyle as Legacy," *in New Contexts for Eighteenth-Century British Fiction: "Hearts Resolved and Hands Prepared": Essays in Honor of Jerry C. Beasley*, ed. Christopher Johnson (Newark, NJ: University Of Delaware Press, 2011), 43.
[98] Ibid., 17-18.

> Though I have learned so much of religion as to know it does not consist in vehement commotions of animal nature, in sublime raptures and ecstasies, yet since the various affections of fear and hope, love and sorrow, belong to my nature, I am sure they ought to be engaged in some measure in the service of God and religion. - What shall I do, O my God, to love thee more? How shall I kindle this divine flame?[99]

Throughout the rest of the meditation, Watts attempts to balance the emotions that occur throughout everyday human life with the devotion and fervour that salvation inspires. Using scripture as a guide throughout his meditation, Watts considers David as an ideal model for the poetic expression of passion. He writes that the individual should "borrow those blessed patterns of warm and living devotion" found throughout the Psalms, tuning the "songs of Zion to the name of Jesus" and aiming for the "same spirit that gave the soul and the harp of David these sacred and immortal elevations[.]"[100] Like Rowe, Watts does emphasise the role of emotions in religious poetry, but expresses those emotions through the lens of scripture.

John Owen's meditations are similar to Watts' in that they all are inspired by one scriptural verse or theme. A Dissenting minister and brief contemporary to both Watts and Rowe, Owen is best known for his publications *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656) and *Schism* (1657), with both texts performing as a way to address Calvinist theology in contemporary conceptualisations of individual salvation and its wider impact on political structures within the Church of England. Additionally, Owen wrote a series of religious meditations focused on scriptural analysis and their adaptation to a Christian's spiritual life. Unlike Rowe, who cited a diverse range of scripture throughout her meditations without any obvious organising principle, Owen's approach is more systematic and employs a tighter focus on one particular scripture or concept. In the preface to a collection of his meditations, Owen emphasises the importance of the Bible itself, writing that the "glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" comes

[99] Ibid., 229.
[100] Ibid., 235.

through what is "revealed in Scripture".[101] Owen's entire book of meditations focuses on John 17:24, discussing the nuances of the faith and God's glory throughout: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me".[102] Similar to Watts, Owen takes up the language of David and the Psalms, using the emotion found throughout the book to give emphasis to his own points:

> But in [the perfect state of heaven] they are able to behold and delight in this Glory constantly, with eternal satisfaction. *But as for me* (saith David) *I will behold thy face in Righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness*, Psalm 17:15. It is Christ alone, who is the Likeness and Image of God. When we awake in the other World, with our Minds purified and rectified, the beholding of him shall be always satisfying unto us. There will be then no Satiety, no Weariness, no Indispositions; but the Mind being made perfect in all its faculties, powers and operations, with respect unto its utmost end, which is the enjoyment of God, is satisfied in the beholding of him for evermore.[103]

Owen considers the "utmost" end of all aspects of the mind to be the "enjoyment of God", a symptom of the perfected minds of "the other world". Here, Owen links scripture and the sentimental components of David's own experience as recorded in the Psalms. Whereas Rowe displayed strong religious sentiments without this direct and explicit connection to scripture, both Watts and Owen carefully mediate their written emotions through scripture, balancing the authority of the text with their own personal experience. Rowe adopts the language of scripture and Psalms but moves further into her own emotional experience, making the powers of her own personal faith the basis of her work. Like Rowe, Owen and Watts emphasise the role of feeling in faith, but articulate it in divergent ways. Owen and Watts use the authority of scripture as a frame

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[101] John Owen, Preface to *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ, in His Person, Office, and Graces with The Differences between Faith and Sight Applied to the Use of Them That Believe* (London: Printed by A.M. and R.R. for Benjamin Alsop, 1684), A3.
[102] John 17:24 (King James Version)
[103] Owen, *Meditations and Discourses*, 15.

for mediating emotions, carefully considering the words of the Bible as a model for correct responses to faith and salvation. Rowe, on the other hand, sees scripture through the lens of emotional reaction, using it as a means to describe and authenticate her personal experience of faith throughout her poetry.

The Bible and the Epic

For many Protestant writers both before and during Rowe's lifetime, the epic provided a way for the textual authority of the Bible to intersect with creative storytelling. Many contemporaries of Rowe cherished a determination to show the Bible as the ideal source for epic poetic narrative, offering a substitute for secular poetry and superseding translations of the likes of Homer, Ovid, and Virgil.[104] Phillip Connell identifies a "prophetic, Biblicist idiom" as a fundamental part of Dissenting writing in the late seventeenth century, providing a "counterpoint" to neoclassical tastes.[105] While the intellectual evolutions associated with the early Enlightenment enacted lasting changes to English literary sensibilities, Connell explains that "devotional and apologetic uses of poetic art endured", thriving in the early decades of the eighteenth century.[106] In particular, John Dennis addressed the composition of epic poetry, making the distinction between "vulgar" and "enthusiastick" genres. The notion of the vulgar, Dennis states, is best relegated to dramatic poetry, as it appeals to base human desires and sensibilities. As a result, the epic becomes a genre intended to elevate the senses and makes use of the subtlety found within enthusiasm to improve the tone and subject matter.[107] Rowe's foray into Biblical epic came at the end of her career, with *A History of Joseph. A Poem* (1738) published in the year before her death. Although I give a larger discussion to *A History of Joseph* in chapters three and four of this thesis, it is important to have some understanding at this stage of the way that larger Protestant discussion helped to frame

[104] Lily Campbell, *Divine Poetry and Drama in Sixteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 74-75.
[105] Connell, *Secular Chains*, 7.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, 18-19.

the epic, and influence the wider genre both before Rowe's lifetime and during her career. In particular, Lucy Hutchinson's paraphrase of Genesis, *Order and Disorder* (1679), offers a distinctive version of current debates surrounding biblical exegesis, extending her own interpretation of the scriptural text while also guiding her readers.[108] As *Order and Disorder* provides a retelling of the book of Genesis, it casts the Bible as the crucial source of content and tone that inspires Hutchinson's creative interpretation. In particular, Elizabeth Scott-Baumann offers a critical insight into Hutchinson's use of Biblical text, distinguishing *Order and Disorder* from earlier biblical epics such as Guillaume Du Bartas's *Devine Weekes*, Abraham Cowley's *Davideis*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost.*[109] Scott-Baumann presents *Order and Disorder* as another way of reading, positioning Hutchinson against contemporary trends in biblical exegesis. She argues that Hutchinson held similar views to those of John Owen, Calvinist minister and theologian, whose works she translated from Latin.[110] Owen viewed the Bible as a spiritual guide to sacred history and social conduct, defining the scripture as "the Divine Originall, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light".[111] A 1667 commonplace book shows evidence of Hutchinson's familiarity with Calvin's *Institutes*, as she affirms that Scripture claimed authority from "God alone who is the author of it and that the Scripture is the best interpreter and reconciler of itselfe."[112]

Like Rowe, Hutchinson claimed an awareness of Reformed doctrine, with tenets of Calvinist theology influencing aspects of her writing. With this perspective of scriptural authority in mind, Hutchinson's biblical references dramatically alter the tone and implications of the poem. In particular, Hutchinson's conceptualisation of prison as both a marker of the human condition tainted with sin and a physical location is a major

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[108] Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry and Culture 1640-1680* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 172.
[109] Ibid., 173.
[110] Ibid.
[111] John Owen, *Of the Divine Originall, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures* (Oxford: Printed for Thomas Robinson, 1659), 1.
[112] Nottingham, Nottinghamshire Archives, Religious Commonplace Book, DD/Hu3, 54.

theme of her text.[113] In *Order and Disorder*, Hutchinson establishes the frailty of human life as an indicator of sin and a limitation akin to imprisonment: "The utmost power that death or woe can have/Is but to shut us prisoners in the grave".[114] Given the biblical connotations of the text and larger Calvinistic themes permeating her discussion, the reading of the poem moves from figurative images of imprisonment to use the language of tyrants and oppressors.[115] Hutchinson's epic rises to the challenge of writing a biblical poem while also facilitating the interpretation and understanding of divine machinations, providing the reader with a set of rhetorical tools with which they can achieve a deeper comprehension of sacred writing. In a similar mode, Rowe's *History of Joseph* offered readers a sympathetic perspective on the biblical text, balancing scriptural authority with personal interpretation. Rowe's epic drew heavily from the fiction of her time and provided one of the most creative narrative and scriptural tales at the time of publication.[116]

The inclusion of Reformed doctrine within the epic enabled Rowe to reimagine Dissent as a sort of moral heroism. Because of this, Dissent became able to supersede the political marginalisation experienced throughout her lifetime. Milton's *Paradise Lost* served as a major focal point for the Dissenting epic, providing a wealth of inspiration and innovation regarding the use of scripture and its intersection with creative reinterpretation. Milton's influence on Rowe's own concept of the epic is discussed in chapter three of this thesis, where I consider her use of Miltonic characterisation throughout her epic. However, the effect of Milton's text on the subgenre of the religious epic is crucial to understanding the intersection of biblical paraphrase and wider Dissenting culture. *Paradise Lost* saw publication throughout years of conflict over religious liberty, toleration, and heresy, offering a cultural, political, and religious framework that addressed anxieties regarding Protestant unity and conformity

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[113] Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement,* 192.
[114] Lucy Hutchinson, *Order and Disorder*, ed. David Norbrook (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), Book 5, 249–50.
[115] Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement,* 192.
[116] Backscheider, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe: Lifestyle as Legacy", 57.

following the Civil War and years of Interregnum.[117] Milton's text provides an imaginative transformation of religious conflicts and tension through a mythic depiction of religious schism and political revolt, giving universal and cosmic significance to contemporary events.[118] *Paradise Lost* boldly redefined the nature and function of poetic art, establishing the epic as a response to religious change. Aware of the traditional and classical association of poetry with civic order and general piety, Milton challenged the notion that poets were the "first priests, the first prophets, the first Legislators and polititians [sic] in the world".[119] With the collapse and subsequent reconstruction of political and ecclesiastical institutions during his lifetime, Milton's work became charged and potentially divisive. In the 1670s, the language of poetry continued to have a profound engagement with both sacred and secular power, providing powerful rhetorical tools with which to call attention to large political and religious transitions.[120]

Milton also had a strong influence on Rowe's writing and conception of the epic. In an undated letter to Frances Thynne, Rowe describes a "solitary walk" through the meadows around her home and how the pastoral scenes reminded her of a particular passage from Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "I have been pulling a thousand flowers in pieces, to view their elegance and variety, and have a thousand times with rapture repeated Milton's lines."[121] Going on to quote a lengthy passage from Book Five describing the relationship between Adam and Eve, Rowe states that the "beauties of nature" provide a conduit for devotion, alluding to the landscape's ability to induce a state of religious fervour.[122] Rowe's connection to the works of Milton spread throughout her writing career, from public tributes and imitative poems to allusions and direct quotation of his works included in her correspondence. Rowe even read Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Italian, favouring a translation by Paolo Rolli (1687-1765), an Italian poet who lived in London

[117] David Loewenstein, *Treacherous Faith: The Specter of Heresy in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 298-9.
[118] Ibid., 304.
[119] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: n.p., 1589), 3.
[120] Connell, *Secular Chains*, 3.
[121] Elizabeth Rowe to Frances Thynne, n.d., "Letter VIX", *MW,* 2:198.
[122] Ibid., 199.

from 1715 to 1744.[123] Rolli's translations of the first six books were published in 1729, with the full translation completed in 1735.[124] In another letter to Thynne, Rowe gives a review of Rolli's translation, calling it a "charming amusement". Not wishing to be seen as possessing the "vanity of a critic", Rowe remarks that Rolli's work contains "all Milton's beauty and spirit, with the most exact translation of the world".[125]

Beyond her leisure reading, Milton's impact upon Rowe's own writing was direct and profound. Many of Rowe's works mimic Milton's "beauty and spirit", with some of her poems in direct imitation. In "A Description of Hell, in Imitation of Milton", Rowe recreates his vision of hell:

> A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
> As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames
> No light, but rather darkness visible
> Serv'd onely [sic] to discover sights of woe[.][126]

Rowe borrows Milton's imagery and creative twist on the idea of a fiery eternity, depicting the flame that produces nothing but darkness. Rowe's poetic interpretation also uses an inversion of the trope that light not only improves literal vision, but also provides intellect and rational thought:

> Uninterrupted night, which sees no dawn,
> Prodigious darkness! Which receives no light,
> But from the sickly blaze of sulphurous flames,
> That cast a pale and dead reflection round,
> Disclosing all the desolate abyss[.][127]

Both Milton and Rowe portray hell as a place where both the mind and body are plunged into utter despair. But beyond Rowe's own reverence for and familiarity with Milton's

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[123] George Dorris, "Paolo Rolli and the First Italian Translation of Paradise Lost," Italica 42, no. 2 (June 1965): 214.
[124] Ibid., 215.
[125] Elizabeth Rowe to Frances Thynne, n.d., "Letter LX", *MW*, 2:111.
[126] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, Lines 61-64.
[127] Elizabeth Rowe, "A Description of Hell, in Imitation of Milton", *MW* 1: 49-50, lines 6-10.

works in individual poems, her *History* appears as the largest imitation, an ambitious work on a larger scale. Rowe's *History of Joseph* is discussed at length in the second and third chapter of this thesis. However, it is important to emphasise that Rowe structured her epic of Joseph in a similar fashion to *Paradise Lost*, with individual chapters separated into books with plot summaries written at the beginning of each. She goes so far as to borrow his own characters and, in a sense, continues where he left off by beginning her epic by invoking a muse, the same "celestial Muse" who inspired the "spheres" to begin their courses and set universe into motion.[128] Milton's own muse adopts a similar role, inspiring Moses to record "how the Heav'ns and the Earth/Rose out of Chaos", putting creation's story into the mouth of the patriarch.[129] Making a direct reference to Milton's epic and use of a poetic muse, Rowe illustrates her own muse as the "courtly swain of old", a guiding presence in the remembrance and retelling of creation's story. Going on to describe the way she was privy to the "boundless chaos and primæval night/The springs of motion, and the feeds of light", Rowe establishes that her muse is, indeed, one and the same with Milton.[130] Phillip Connell identifies Milton's relationship to poetry and religion as offering a "unifying perspective" and providing a "revealing explanatory framework" that traces the changes to cultural contexts throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries[131]. Likewise, Rowe's own adaptation of the epic reflects this same "unifying perspective", particularly in its adoption of Milton's characterisations and major plot elements.[132]

Rowe and Augustan Poetry

Ann Messenger considers Rowe to be within the genre of the "Christian Augustan", consciously aligning her works with those of Richard Blackmore, Isaac Watts,

[128] Elizabeth Rowe, *The History of Joseph. A Poem*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for T. Worrall, 1737). Book I, 5, line 1.
[129] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* Book I, Lines 6-10.
[130] Rowe, *The History of Joseph*, Book I, 1, lines 9-12
[131] Connell, *Secular Chains*, 7.
[132] John Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance 1640-1740* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 175.

and John Dennis.[133] There is a sense that Rowe's connection with the larger Augustan genre has been overshadowed by her legacy, even considered as something to be forgotten or concealed. In posthumous collection *Miscellaneous Works*, Rowe's foray into the Augustan genre and some of her contributions to the *Athenian Mercury* were purposefully omitted, something Norma Clarke considers to be a deliberate editorial choice to distance Rowe from the Augustan-inspired poetry of her youth.[134] With the conceptualisation of a 'Christian Augustan', Rowe manipulates religious symbolism and imagery as a 'sociable sign', appealing to broad swathes of cultural and religious sensibility. In particular, the Augustan form regarded critical thought as a means to imitate immutable truth, art, nature, and innovation, from the highest to lowest levels of sophistication.[135] According to Donald Wesling, a defining feature of the Augustan genre is the interchange between literary and ordinary language alongside poetry and prose, marked by a "certain repertoire" of these sociable signs.[136] Specifically, Augustan poetry enables inherited poetic features to sit alongside philosophical and religious assumptions, connecting the presence of the divine with the individual's observation. In the years following 1688, the connection of patriotism with property, plenty, and peace became a common feature of Augustan poetic practice, often appearing as a descriptive poem.[137] Emphasising a key connection between the poetic imagination and the divine, the Augustan mode makes the assumption that there is nothing that the poet can devise which God has not already created. Accordingly, literal terms become metaphors and metaphors can be taken literally, reflecting God's creation and omniscience. The Augustan poet becomes one who seeks within the limitations of his writing, hinting at

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[133] Ann Messenger, *Pastoral Tradition and the Female Talent: Studies in Augustan Poetry* (New York, NY: AMS Press, 2001), 115.
[134] Norma Clarke, "Soft Passions and Darling Themes: From Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674–1737) to Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806)," *Women's Writing* 7, no. 3 (October 2000): 355.
[135] Donald Wesling, "Augustan Form: Justification and Breakup of a Period Style," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 408.
[136] Ibid., 403.
[137] Ralph Cohen, "The Augustan Mode in English Poetry," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1967): 9.

the boundaries of knowledge, literal and metaphor, ideal and real.[138] Within this framework, Rowe's poetry carves out a space for Dissent within the context and confines of the Augustan genre through her manipulations of pastoral poetry and the Pindaric ode.

Rowe's pastoral poetry challenged hegemonic conventions of genre and gender, offering a powerful revision of female desire and a masculine tradition. According to Heidi Laudien, Rowe's use of the pastoral enabled her to challenge the ideology of Puritan self-denial, presenting an alternative to masculine desire and feminine modes of chastity and retirement. As the pastoral had been considered to be a "suitable testing ground' for the poet's abilities since the Renaissance, Rowe's early adoption (and mastery) of the form signalled her ambition to experiment with more complex and elevated poetical genres, such as the epic.[139] Laudien presents Rowe as a poet "preoccupied" with the form in her early foray into public circulation, citing the large number of pastoral poems created at the beginning of her career.[140] Within the Augustan, the pastoral provided an ideal setting for displays of nature and reason, religion and the sublime. In this way, descriptions of flora and fauna became a way to convey an "ultimate and inclusive order", mimicking the hierarchy of modern civilisation.[141] Laudien has also identified the pastoral as an ideal genre for women to critique the political, social, and poetic conventions of the day, as a result of its flexibility. Rowe, she suggests, used the pastoral to showcase and problematize "conventional" gender relations while rewriting constructions of gender and sexuality.[142]

The pastoral provided Rowe with an ideal platform for her early forays into political and religious writing. Her conception of the pastoral binds together the

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[138] Ibid., 25.
[139] Heidi Laudien, "Reading Desire in the Pastorals of Elizabeth Singer Rowe," *Women's Writing* 19, no. 4 (2012): 603.
[140] Ibid., 605.
[141] W. K. Wimsatt, "The Augustan Mode in English Poetry," *ELH* 20, no. 1 (March 1953): 2.
[142] Laudien, "Reading Desire in the Pastorals of Elizabeth Singer Rowe", 90; Laudien has identified the pastoral as a genre fully "brought into history" and the wider concept of the Augustan through the likes of Denham, Pope, and Thomson, transforming into something emblematic of national pride and able to convey Whiggish sensibilities by the 1720s.

celebration of the natural order with philosophical debates regarding divine love, ignorance, and life after death. In "A Pastoral", first published in *Poems on Several Occasions*, Rowe imagines a dialogue between herself (via the pseudonym "Philomela") and Greek naiad Daphne, questioning the juxtaposition of love and sorrow. Rowe positions herself as a nymph, embodying aspects of the natural world as she reforms her emotional state:

> Why sigh you so, What Grievance can annoy
> A Nymph like you? Alas, why sighs my Joy?
> My *Philomela*, why dost bend thy Head;
> Hast lost thy Pipe, or is thy Garland dead?
> Thy flocks are fruitful, flowery all thy Plain;[143]

Liz Oakley-Brown considers Rowe's assumption of Philomela's identity, an Ovidian figure and a play on her maiden name of 'Singer', as a means to contest "cultural urge[s] to suppress female authorship and agency".[144] Throughout "A Pastoral", Rowe emphasises the subject of unrequited love and female desire. "A Pastoral" makes up the first of three successive poems printed in *Poems on Several Occasions* in which Rowe assumes the identity of Philomela, using the pastoral genre as a means to explore sexuality, political affiliation, and divine justice. While Rowe first introduces the nymph Philomela as a coy and innocent ingénue in "A Pastoral", the "Victim to the smiling Swain" and keeper of "delightsome Pastures", she quickly builds upon this common trope in later poems to reconfigure the genre.[145]

The closing pastoral poem, "A Pastoral on the Queen", sees Rowe's Philomela evolve to become an aware and politically-motivated Dissenter, this time in dialogue with Phillis, consort to King Demophoon of Athens and the subject of Ovid's *Heroides.* Phillis begins the poem by establishing Philomela as a stereotypically feminine pastoral

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[143] Elizabeth Rowe, "A Pastoral" in *Poems on Several Occasions. Written by Philomela* (London: Printed for John Dunton, 1969), 24, lines 1-6.
[144] Liz Oakley-Brown, *Ovid and the Cultural Politics of Translation in Early Modern England* (New York, NY: Ashgate, 2006), 137.
[145] Rowe, "A Pastoral", 26, lines 28, 31.

figure, emphasising her "chearful strains" that call the attention of every "murmuring stream and pretty spring".[146] However, Philomela quickly dispels this type of reading, transitioning the pastoral into an elegy for the recently-departed Queen Mary, who had died on December 28, 1694, two years before the publication of *Poems on Several Occasions.* Philomela laments the "black scene" left in the wake of death of an "illustrious Saint" and "Publick Loss".[147] Mary II ruled the nation as joint sovereign for six years alongside William III, following the overthrow of James II in 1688.[148] For Dissenters like Rowe, this was a monarchy committed to Protestant values reclaimed from Roman Catholic control. While Dutch William had Calvinistic origins, Mary was a direct heir to the throne with "unimpeachable" Anglican credentials.[149] Mary is depicted in this pastoral as a "Dear Hero", the darling of a "poor lamenting Nation" and a "Trophy fall[en] to death".[150]

In *Madam Britannia* (2012), Emma Major frames a discussion of national identity around the figure of Britannia, connecting aspects of the British Empire to William and Mary's Protestant rule and condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church.[151] At the time of William and Mary's succession, the Protestant majority considered Catholicism (associated with the religious preferences and rule of James II) to be a hallmark of erratic and unpredictable government, and looked to the Church of England as "compatible with freedom".[152] Major identifies Britannia as a multi-faceted figure, the embodiment of a nation "saved" from Catholic despotism whose character also reflects Mary's piety and involvement with the ecclesiastical affairs of the Church of England.[153] What is significant for me about Major's discussion is that she shows nation and religion

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[146] Elizabeth Rowe, "A Pastoral on the Queen" in *Poems on Several Occasions. Written by Philomela* (London: Printed for John Dunton, 1969), 62, lines 1-4.
[147] Ibid., 63, lines 19-25.
[148] Richard Price, "An Incomparable Lady: Queen Mary II's Share in the Government of England, 1689–94," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 307.
[149] Ibid., 324.
[150] Rowe, "A Pastoral on the Queen", 64, lines 40-3.
[151] Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.
[152] Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?,* 20.
[153] Major, *Madam Britannia,* 25.

to be so closely intertwined, something reflected in Rowe's pastoral series. Rowe laments Mary's death as a supernatural calamity, mourning the "Royal Shepherdess" of moderate religion and the loss of her "Whole Sex's Glory".[154] The loss of a Protestant queen and monarch is a personal and national tragedy, which the conventions of pastoral enable her to frame as a major religious and political event. Oakley-Brown sees Rowe's assumption of Philomela's grief as a way to fashion a unique literary persona, informed by an awareness of gender politics and textuality in the early eighteenth century.[155]

Additionally, Rowe's apprenticeship in Augustan poetics evolved with her use of the Pindaric ode, widely utilised in her earlier publications and providing an important framework for political and theological discussions. For early Whig poets like Rowe, the Pindaric ode was an ideal form for imaginative flights of eloquence, providing a classical model that accommodated contemporary notions of the sublime. Though it was a common poetic form in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Pindaric did not always enjoy a positive reception. Samuel Johnson, in his *Life of Cowley,* considered the form as "lax and lawless versification", which flattered the "laziness of the idle".[156] But at the time that Rowe first experimented with the form, it had reached a new level of popularity through the early works of Isaac Watts and William Congreve.[157] Many, like John Dennis, used the Pindaric as a way to communicate "extraordinary events" of modern life, juxtaposing visions of heroic valour with those of terrifying darkness.[158] Dryden recognised Dennis' proclivity for the genre, calling him one of the "Greatest masters" of the form, setting English poetry "almost upon an equal foot with the

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[154] Elizabeth Singer Rowe, "A Pastoral on the Queen" in *Poems on Several Occasions. Written by Philomela* (London: Printed for John Dunton, 1969), 64, lines 36-7.
[155] Oakley-Brown, *Ovid and the Cultural Politics of Translation*, 138.
[156] Samuel Johnson, "Life of Cowley" in *The Lives of the English Poets; and a Criticism on Their Works*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Dublin: Printed for Whitestone, Williams and Colles, 1779), 56.
[157] Penelope Wilson, "Pindar and English Eighteenth-Century Poetry," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 55, no. S112 (June 2012): 160-1.
[158] Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture*, 179-80.

Ancients".[159] The theological verse of the early eighteenth century often featured political commentary, using elevated verse to commemorate or celebrate events in public life. Poets like Blackmore, Dennis, Hughes, and Rowe modified the Pindaric to further connect current events and religious poetry.[160] Following these examples, Rowe also used the ode to link scriptural reference to political commentary.

Rowe's "A Pindarick Poem on Habbakuk", printed alongside her pastoral verses in *Poems on Several Occasions*, portrays William III as the agent of divine justice and a partner to biblical wrath. Here, Rowe reimagines Habakkuk chapter three as having direct connections to the Glorious Revolution and William III's landing at Torbay on November 5, 1688. Describing a deliverance from Catholic rule and a national return to a Protestant monarchy, "A Pindarick Poem on Habbakuk" sees Old Testament prophecy as having a direct correlation to national events.[161] God is depicted as full of vengeful and holy wrath, "drest in th' unsufferable Flame" and filling the Earth with "Terror and Amaze".[162] This mirrors the biblical text itself, describing a God committed to "thresh the heathen in anger" and zealous for the "salvation of thy people[.]"[163] Rowe's poem grows in intensity to the very last lines, where she makes it clear that the full extent of God's wrath applies to William III's enemies:

> […] Arm'd with Fury thou the Vict'ry didst pursue.
> So now, Great God, wrapt in avenging Thunder,
> Meet thine and William's Foes, and tread them groveling [sic] under.[164]

Here, Rowe conflates William's victory and supremacy with the destruction of enemies to the Israelite people, transforming divine promises of deliverance into a message of hope for Protestant and Dissenting readers. In doing so, she directly parallels the biblical

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[159] John Dryden to John Dennis, March 1694, in *The Letters of John Dryden*, ed. Charles E. Ward (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1942), 72.
[160] Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture*, 189.
[161] Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?,* 15.
[162] Elizabeth Singer Rowe, "A Pindarick Poem on Habbakuk" in *Poems on Several Occasions. Written by Philomela* (London: Printed for John Dunton, 1969), 18, lines 3, 6.
[163] Habakkuk 3:12-3. (King James Version)
[164] Rowe, "A Pindarick Poem on Habbakuk", 21, lines 45-47.

text itself: "[…] when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops".[165] Interestingly, Rowe uses the fluctuating meter of the Pindaric form to emphasise aspects of the paraphrase, configuring rhyme as a way to "decode" or mediate divine wrath. Employing a variable rhyme scheme and blank verse, Rowe is able to highlight important characteristics of both the original scripture and its translation into poetry. Similar to the irregular verse of Abraham Cowley's pindaric odes, Rowe's use of blank verse frames important aspects of the biblical text, emphasising moments of chaos or uncertainty from those in opposition to divine rule:

> The frightened Nations scattered,
> And at his sight the bashful Mountains fled
> […]
> The distant Ethiops all Confusion are,
> And Midian's trembling Curtains cannot hide their Fear:[166]

Conversely, Rowe's use of rhyme appears throughout the rest of the poem as either a couplet or alternative pattern, closely associated with order and stability:

> All Natures Frame did quake beneath his Feet,
> And with his Hand he the vast Globe did mete;
> […]
> And very terrible thou didst appear
> To them, but these thy darling People cheer.[167]

According to Donald Wesling, a period of revolution, chaos, and religious diversity generated after 1660 gave birth to a strong desire for peace and parliamentary rule by 1689, something alluded to by many Augustan poets and proponents of neoclassical criticism.[168] Ian Watt has remarked that in this time of political instability, many looked

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[165] Habakkuk 3: 16 (King James Version)
[166] Rowe, "A Pindarick Poem on Habbakuk", 19, lines 15-6, 19-21.
[167] Ibid., 19-20, lines 13-4, 27-8.
[168] Donald Wesling, "Augustan Form: Justification and Breakup of a Period Style," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 397.

to the political and cultural life of Augustan Rome as a model for renewed systems of order that might quell religious and civil dissension.[169]

Rowe, Pope, and Virgilian Progression

Rowe's career consciously follows the Virgilian model associated most prominently with the career of Alexander Pope, adopting similar writing styles and gradually growing her body of knowledge as a writer. From their first ventures into print and the types of materials produced throughout their writing careers, the styles and literary output of Rowe and Pope deserve to be looked at alongside each other as two distinctive examples of professional poetic development. This juxtaposition between Rowe and Pope is not intended to be a simple comparison, but rather an insight into their own conceptualisations of popular poetic forms, innovations within genre, and an acute awareness of public literary consumption.

Helen Deutsch has identified the "Virgilian progression" as a major shaping factor in Pope's early career, inspired by Virgil's movement from eclogue to epic in developing his career.[170] This can be seen most clearly in Pope's *Works* (1713), as he moved from the mastery of the *Pastorals* to an English and Christian version of Ovid's *Heroides* and *Eloisa to Abelard*.[171] The model of Virgil's progress through the genres of pastoral, georgic and epic provided a pattern for the training of the poet, ensuring familiarity with the classics as the basis for sound writing practice.[172] While Pope is typically associated with this type of "learning curve", Rowe's career also follows a similar trajectory, beginning with the Pindaric and Pastoral genres and evolving to include more challenging verse forms. Rowe's career path, and the methods by which

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[169] Ian Watt, "Two Historical Aspects of the Augustan Tradition," in R. F. Brissenden, ed., *Studies in the Eighteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 85.
[170] Helen Deutsch, "Pope, Self, and World," in *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15.
[171] Ibid.
[172] John Coolidge, "Great Things and Small: The Virgilian Progression," *Comparative Literature* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1965): 1.

she gradually expanded her writing repertoire, suggest a surprising degree of poetic ambition.

Accordingly, there is a strong correlation between Pope and Rowe's early careers. Rowe cut her teeth as a writer in 1693 by publishing paraphrase and translations in the *Athenian Mercury* under the editorial eyes of John Dunton. In a similar career arc to Rowe, Pope participated in a minor classical revival like her predecessors Walsh, Congreve, and Garth.[173] Both Rowe and Pope entered the arena of public circulation around the same moment in history, beginning their publishing careers in the early decades of the eighteenth century with formal odes, imitations, and translations. Rowe and Pope also cultivated literary coteries that crossed boundaries of age, religious and political affiliation, and rank.[174] Pope developed his poetic skills through imitating the verse of his English predecessors, seeking the advice of more senior literary figures. Rowe's earliest poems were seen and critiqued by public figures such as Bishop Thomas Ken and members of the Thynne family, adherents of the Established Church who were sympathetic to Dissenters, and friends with the Singer family. Pope also sought mentors and readers outside of his own immediate community, establishing friendships and correspondence with authors such as Sir William Trumbull, George Granville, and Samuel Garth.[175]

Pope's works emerged into a broad arena through the outlets of journals, newspapers, and coffeehouses, whereas Rowe's poetry primarily found voice through Philomela, the anonymous female poet featured in the *Athenian Mercury*. Despite their initial differences in accessing public print and the means by which they built their individual reputations, Pope and Rowe found a similar audience for their poetry though Tonson's *Poetical Miscellanies,* with Rowe contributing verse to 1704's Fifth Part and Pope publishing his *Pastorals* in 1709's sixth edition. As we have previously seen,

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[173] Wesling, "Augustan Form: Justification and Breakup of a Period Style,", 405.
[174] Shef Rogers, "Alexander Pope: Perceived Patron, Misunderstood Mentor," in *Mentoring in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*, ed. Anthony Lee (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 52.
[175] Ibid., 53.

Rowe's first publications, from the *Athenian Mercury* to *Poems on Several Occasions* included the pastoral genre and other classical forms of imitation. Despite Pope's popularity, the religious and political allegiances of women did not always align with the content of Pope's poetry, evoking sharp critiques with the diversion of his ideology. Rowe, for example, admired and frequently quoted Pope's early poetry but strongly disapproved of his later satirical writings.[176]

It was during Rowe and Pope's lifetimes that it became possible for women to enter the literary marketplace without excessive damage to their reputations. Women such as Rowe and Carter, known for unimpeachable character, published volumes and became distinguished for their poetic contributions.[177] In particular, Pope's images influenced Rowe's own descriptions of heaven in landmark publications *Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728) and *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (1728-32), which attempted to sway readers to accept their own mortality by describing a heaven replete with sensual delights and requited love.[178] Initially, Rowe found a connection to Alexander Pope through his edited miscellany for Bernard Lintot's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1717), as well as contributing poetry in the second edition of *Eloisa to Abelard* (1720).[179] There are also several evidences of her familiarity with Pope in references to him throughout her correspondence. In a letter to Frances Thynne, Rowe claims an awareness of his poetry collections, citing an excerpt from Pope's "Ode: The Dying Christian to his Soul" and writing that she found herself "charm'd" with his verse and descriptions of death.[180] Additionally, a letter to the Reverend Thomas Amory reveals a familiarity with Pope's correspondence.[181]

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[176] Claudia N. Thomas, *Alexander Pope and His Eighteenth-Century Women Readers* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 71.
[177] Ibid., 85.
[178] Ibid., 74.
[179] Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century,* 19.
[180] Elizabeth Rowe to Frances Thynne, n.d., *MW,* 2: 178.
[181] Elizabeth Rowe to Thomas Amory, n.d., *MW,* 2: 232.

Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* was originally anonymously published in 1711 and used as an opportunity to refine his own positions as a critic and poet.[182] Both Rowe and Pope took advantage of the changing literary culture of the early eighteenth century as it encouraged a new publicity for literature and an awareness of public judgment.[183] The publication of the *Works of Mr Alexander Pope* (1713) elevated Pope to the status of an established author, following in the footsteps of authors such as Ben Jonson, who published *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (1616) at the age of 44. Presenting his *Works* at the age of 29, Pope exhibited an impressive amount of self-definition and authorial control over his early foray into publication.[184] It is important to note that just six weeks after Pope's *Works* were published, he also released a compilation of poems, *Poems on Several Occasions*. Containing thirty-seven unacknowledged poems, Pope's *Poems* offered readers a glimpse into the poetry of his youth. James McLaverty argues that we can look at *Works* and *Poems* much like "twins", showing both sophistication and amateur aspects of his literary career.[185] McLaverty also considers Pope's *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations* (1712) to be a significant stage in Pope's professional development as a writer, its publication providing a marker of his ambition to become a "major poet".[186]

Moving away from publishing poetry following the death of her husband in 1715, Rowe saw the greatest success with her mid-career publication *Friendship in Death, in Twenty Letters From the Dead to the Living* (1728), a series of fictitious letters sent back and forth between dead heroes and virtuous loved ones. *Friendship in Death* would go one to be one of her most popular works, going through seventy-nine editions by 1825.[187] After an early flirtation with the epic, Pope abandoned the genre and settled

[182] Pat Rogers, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17–39.
[183] James McLaverty, *Pope, Print, and Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 55.
[184] Ibid., 46-47.
[185] Ibid., 69.
[186] Ibid., 16-17.
[187] Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel,* 2.

into writing ethical pieces and social satire.[188] Pope's *Rape of the Lock* marked a crucial stage in his progress towards being a professional writer.[189] Unlike Pope, Rowe found success with the epic and published *A History of Joseph* in 1736, the final publication of her popular career. Rowe's adoption of the Virgilian progression and similar career arc to that of Pope is significant, signalling an ambitious writer intent on increasing her mastery of different poetic forms. With the Virgilian progression, Rowe's poetry evolves and innovates, reconfiguring genres such as the pastoral and epic throughout her lifetime. In this context, Rowe's creation of verse appears as more than an artistic sentiment or creative expression, functioning as a powerful tool for cultivating her career alongside notable and popular figures such as Pope.

This chapter has considered a wide range of influences to Rowe's writing, beginning with the effects of the Clarendon Code and subsequent toleration. Here, I have explored the nature of Rowe's early political poetry, paying close attention to her representation of William III and the Dissenting political cause. Through this analysis, I have demonstrated the pervasive nature of the political and religious instability that impacted the Dissenting community, also giving rise to publications by John Owen, John Bunyan, Isaac Watts and other contemporaries of Rowe. In addition, Rowe's adaptation of biblical meditations and reconfiguring of the epic play a crucial role in establishing her as a religious writer sensitive to changing literary currents, as evidenced by her familiarity with the work of John Milton and Anne Hutchinson. Finally, this chapter has showed Rowe's use of the Christian Augustan and familiarity with the Virgilian Progression. Here, Rowe's publications become more than reactionary political pieces. Rather, her mastery of the Virgilian Progression, presented alongside of contemporary Alexander Pope, signals an impressive amount of authorial ambition, knowledge of

[188] David Morris, "A Poetry of Absence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry,* ed. John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 229.
[189] McLaverty, *Pope, Print, and Meaning*, 14.

classical models related to author formation, and showcases Rowe's ability to innovate within these prescribed frameworks.

Chapter Two:

Depravity, Cambridge Platonism, and the Calvinist Influence

To visit Elizabeth Singer Rowe's house in Frome is to be made acutely aware of the vibrant religious context in which she lived. A small rural town located in the British county of Somerset, Frome is home to a diverse array of Protestant sects and the place where Rowe lived for the majority of her life. Walking through the streets, even as a modern observer, the influence of multiple factions is evident. Rowe's house is, quite literally, adjacent to the Dissenting chapel Rook Lane, founded in 1707 and now converted into Frome's performing arts centre. Rook Lane House became her residence following the death of her husband in 1715 and it was there that Rowe lived for the rest of her life. It has even been suggested that Rowe and the minister of Rook Lane, John Bowden, shared Rook Lane House for a period of time.[1] Additionally, Rowe financially supported this chapel with significant portions of her yearly income and worshipped there weekly.[2] Across the road sits St. John the Baptist, Frome's local parish church and the final resting place of Bishop Thomas Ken, a friend of Rowe's father and one of her tutors. Frome is also home to many other different congregations, with the addition of a Quaker Chapel in 1675, and a strong Baptist presence since 1669. In a small town such as this, the community generated would be one of theological diversity. Indeed, it has become commonplace to argue that Rowe was herself a proponent of this irenic environment, eschewing theological boundaries in her service to various

[1] Henry Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome: A Study in Eighteenth-Century English Pietism* (Frankfurt: Herbert Lang, 1973), 147-8.
[2] Theophilus Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe", *MW,* 1:lxxvii.

Christian charities across the Protestant spectrum.[3] For a study of Rowe's religious poetry, the town of Frome provides a curious window into the theological diversity of her work, illustrating profound ways in which her exposure to a wide range of Protestant sects influenced her poetic art.

Rowe's interest in looking outside of her own theological beliefs was particularly noted in Theophilus Rowe's biography, as she was well known for having friends and contacts beyond the sphere of Dissent including the likes of Frances Thynne, Matthew Prior, and Sir Richard Blackmore. Theophilus takes particular care to explain to the reader that these types of relationships sprung from her own "love of piety":

> [Rowe's] love of piety was not confined to those of her own party in religion; and it ought to be related as an exemplary instance of Christian moderation, that she continued all the latter part of her life in constant communion with those who differed from her in articles which she thought of great importance[.][4]

Theophilus' tone regarding Rowe's "love of piety" is unclear, particularly when we consider the type of posthumous legacy that he attempted to create for her. Although framing her relationships with those not "of her own party" as an example of Christian moderation and charitable engagement, he nevertheless retains a somewhat defensive tone. He is, however, willing to highlight Rowe's ability to move beyond the boundaries of Reformed theology in both her personal and professional life.

In Rowe's case, components of her religious expression are largely informed by her Dissenting background, but also take inspiration from her familiarity with the work of the Cambridge Platonists, a group of philosophers and theologians who attempted to reconcile the ethics of Christianity with the

[3] Ibid., lxxxi.
[4] Ibid., xcv-i.

humanism of the Renaissance, making sense of the connection between faith, rational thought, and new developments in science.[5] Counted among them were the philosophers Henry More (1614–1687), Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), and Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683). Younger followers included John Norris (1657–1711).[6] The Cambridge Platonists emerged as some of the first in the English Protestant tradition to develop a system of natural philosophy and were committed to clear-cut illustrations on God's providence, goodness, and existence. Many of their most substantial works, such as Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) and More's *Immortality of the Soul* (1659) demonstrated the inclusiveness of rational thought and religious faith.[7]

Because she hailed from the Calvinist orthodoxy of the Presbyterians, remained within the sect throughout her life, but was simultaneously exposed to a vast array of theological and philosophical texts, it does not surprise that Rowe was interested in the ideas posited by the Cambridge Platonists.[8] Susan Staves briefly discusses Rowe's interaction with the work of the Cambridge Platonists, acknowledging that this contact forced her to confront the "logical contradictions" between a Calvinistic belief system that emphasised the fall and the Platonic understanding that humans had an essentially good nature, strengthened by the capacity for rational thought.[9] Like so many of her fellow Protestants, Rowe considered human reason to be the handiwork of divinity. Her work ought to be set alongside the Cambridge Platonists, not only because it shows a departure from her deeply embedded confessional standpoint, but also because it allows us to see Rowe as an innovator within the sphere of religious verse. In this chapter, I discuss Rowe's use of her key intellectual sources,

[5] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996), 135.
[6] Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 167.
[7] Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason*, 135.
[8] Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 218.
[9] Ibid., 105.

particularly the Reformed theology of Dissenters and the philosophical tenets of Cambridge Platonism.

Calling attention to Rowe's interaction with Dissent and Cambridge Platonism in this way exposes Rowe as a complex, intellectual writer, because of rather than in spite of her religious belief. For Rowe, the choice of poetry as a medium for rigorous theological discussion provided her with the flexibility to issue challenges to, and identify inconsistencies within, the Calvinist creed. Her poems demonstrate that Reformed belief stretched beyond the dogma of Calvin and exhibit her willingness to engage with multiple philosophies and theological beliefs. This chapter also considers Rowe's relationship to Dissent, paying particular attention to the way that she deals with the Calvinist doctrine of depravity and questions the extent to which mankind's sinful nature limits the ability to reason. With Rowe's exposure to the Cambridge Platonists, her work continues to explore the concept of depravity and its integration into an enlightenment narrative of human progress. In particular, it demonstrates the influence of the discussions by Benjamin Whichcote and John Norris of man's innate abilities and the extent to which the individual can perceive the divine.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century and into the early eighteenth century, Dissenters wrestled with the theologies of sin, depravity, and the relationship between God and man. For many believers like Rowe, concepts such as self-knowledge, sin, and life after death would have initially been filtered through the lens of Calvinist theology. Susan Staves argues that for women writers during the time of the Restoration and into the eighteenth century, Protestant Christian thought had an incalculable weight on their thoughts and experiences, emphasising an "individual responsibility for the state of their souls and the moral conduct of their lives".[10] Poetry allowed Rowe to

[10] Ibid., 105, 31-32.

reconfigure belief as a creative medium, providing a strategy for thinking through complex theology in a way that allowed for introspection and experimentation, while simultaneously permitting her to avoid or defer definitive theological statements. Such ambiguities and complexities do not only occur in the movement between speculative theology and its application to her own life, but also derive from the eclectic mixture of theological sources and traditions that she encountered.

According to Timothy Clark, the intersection of inspiration with personal creativity created a conundrum for religious authors, especially in regards to Platonist and Christian traditions. Although Clark primarily discusses Romantic and Post-Romantic texts in his *Theory of Inspiration* (2000), his formulation is helpful in the respect that it explores the relationship between individuals and their religious beliefs, specifically focusing on the impact on creative practice. Generally, Clark contends that the notion of a supernatural truth "negate[s] individual creativity" and reduces the authority of the poet to that of passive vessel:

> In both the Platonic and the biblical traditions, inspiration described the supposed possession of an individual voice by some transcendent authority. The muse speaks, and the poet is only her mouthpiece and servant; or in the medieval Christian tradition the human *scriptor* has authority only as a scribe of divine truth. Both notions actually negate individual creativity. Inspiration there concerns matters of authority, the right to speak and the claim to speak in the name of truth.[11]

Clark identifies a "logocentric conception" of theological belief, defying contradiction on the part of a passive scribe.[12] This is certainly one model for

[11] Timothy Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 2.
[12] Ibid., 4.

understanding the role of religious poetry in the eighteenth century, but it is not borne out by Rowe's writing. Within Rowe's religious poems, she is able to simultaneously become a mouthpiece for the divine while retaining creative freedom. Poetry allows Rowe a deliberate strategy for publishing heterodox opinions and offers an experimental space through which she can adapt and explore conventionally held beliefs.

Many Dissenters sought to transfigure the languages of poetry and prose, considering the traditional genres and tropes to be inadequate ways to express the connection between God and man. Furthermore, there was a Dissenting belief that the origin of poetry had divine inspiration.[13] For Rowe, the medium of poetry went beyond the mere expression of sentiment or a reflection of her piety. Following on from a Dissenting tradition, many of her poems refashioned the theology of her contemporaries in an attempt to represent the divine. In her poem, "The Vision", Rowe describes a poet frustrated with the inability to portray "Heav'nly Subjects" with the magnificence and eloquence that she desires. In this particular passage, Rowe makes evident the distinct shift from the ease and amusement of creating secular poetry to the "faint and unskilled voice" as it seeks to reveal truths about divinity":

> 'Twas here, within this happy Place retir'd,
> Harmonious Pleasures all my Soul inspir'd;
> I take my Lyre, and try each tuneful String,
> Now war, now love, and beauty's Force would sing;
> To Heav'nly Subjects now, in serious Lays,
> I strive my faint, unskilful Voice to raise:
> But as I unresolv'd and doubtful lay,

[13] Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 209.

My Cares in easy Slumbers glide away;[14]

Comparing the "serious Lays" of religious subject matters to the "Harmonious Pleasures" of topics such as war, love, or the force of beauty, Rowe's poet adopts a sombre and uneasy tone. As the poet moves from the discouraging process of producing these "Lays" to the physical act of lying down and drifting into an "easy slumber", the reader becomes an observer of Rowe's creative process, bearing witness to the complexities and paradoxes inherently attached to sacred writing. Here, the language of retreat signals a change in the verse's purpose, beckoning to a larger tradition of devotional and Protestant retirement poetry.[15]

The poet in "The Vision" transitions from the "Soul inspir'd" assurance and confidence of secular poetry to meekness and irresolution at the elaborate task ahead, making it clear that the portrayal of divinity brings a unique set of challenges to both the reader and the writer. Rowe leans heavily on the language of uncertainty as she begins to explore theological writing, adapting the verse form as an innovative means to express paradoxes and contradictory points of view. And indeed, throughout many of Rowe's religious poems, this language of uncertainty becomes a distinguishing feature. For Rowe, writing theology into verse appears as no easy or straightforward task. The anxiety surrounding the representation of religious belief is nothing new; legions of poets and writers have attested to the struggle to put their particular beliefs into words. What is significant about Rowe's religious poems, and what is explored throughout this chapter, is how she continues to be "unresolv'd and doubtful" as she moves through a variety of sacred subjects during her writing career, identifying theological conflicts and exploring alternative philosophies, most notably those

[14] Elizabeth Rowe, "The Vision", *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe.* Vol 1. Ed. Theophilus Rowe (London: Printed for R. Hett at the Bible and Crown, 1939), 2, lines 11-18.

[15] For further reading about retirement poetry, see Michael Edson's, "'A Closet or a Secret Field': Horace, Protestant Devotion and British Retirement Poetry," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 1 (2012): 17–41.

of the Cambridge Platonists. In terms of her religious poetry, this ambiguity calls into question her works' historical and social context. What can we discern from her writing in terms of the reconstruction of contemporary Dissenting and literary cultures and their intersection?

In order to come to this conclusion, I begin by discussing the theological traditions and poetical particulars of both the Cambridge Platonists and some of Rowe's Calvinist contemporaries. At odds in terms of their theology of human depravity and man's ability to perceive the divine, both the Cambridge Platonist and Calvinist schools of thought have distinctive ideas on the relationship between God and humanity. Many of the writings of the Cambridge Platonists, specifically those of Benjamin Whichcote and John Norris, state that the mind is capable of independently discerning the divine, and that reason is a faculty given to man in order to lead a properly Christian life.[16] Additionally, the poetry of Henry More discusses the rational mind in detail, considering the limits of man's comprehension of God and their own sinful state. In contrast, many of Calvin's writings emphasise the idea of self-knowledge and man's innate tendency to sin. Looking at the doctrine of depravity, Calvinism teaches that the mind is a tainted reflection of sin, untrustworthy and unable to perceive God without divine revelation.[17] It is here that Rowe can be seen most actively to question and wrestle with her Dissenting beliefs and Platonist ideas of human reason. Here, I place Rowe's poetry within and between the spectrum of Calvinism and evolving enlightenment thought, looking at facets in her poems that reflect her familiarity with these two groups. Additionally, I consider the way Rowe seeks a balance

[16] Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason*, 155.
[17] Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, vol. 1, 2 vols., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 9.

that would honour her inherited Dissenting beliefs and accommodate modern reason.[18]

The second section of this chapter explores the delineation between the body and soul, as it performs a major role in Rowe's religious poetry. Accordingly, she takes great care to define the difference between these two major components, discussing the interactions between them. In doing so, Rowe ascribes personal identity to the eternal and heavenly soul while the body is cast as base and earth-bound, a captive and corrupted vessel. In a similar fashion, many Dissenting poets considered the body and soul to be irrevocably tainted, but the soul was always seen as an immortal and higher component of an individual. Looking at the poetry and hymns of Rowe's friend and fellow Dissenter Isaac Watts, specifically his poem, "Happy Frailty", found in the third edition of *Horae Lyricae* (1715), we see that the soul becomes fully enlightened and perceives that its true sinless state is only to be found in heaven. Rowe perceives the flight of the soul in a similar fashion, and in poems such as "The Rapture" and "Hymn V", we can clearly see the way that Rowe imagines life after death. In the case of the Cambridge Platonists, the soul and body perform different functions. The soul acts as a force to govern and control the body, while the body is seen as an entity in need of restraint. For the purposes of this chapter, it is the separation of the soul and the body that draws our attention. The transformation of the soul in death becomes represented and imagined in various ways. Specifically, the poetry of John Norris attempts to configure the soul's relationship with the divine after death. In his poems, "The Meditation" and "The Elevation", the soul reflects on its liberation from the body.

Third, the rational mind functions as a pivotal component in making sense of human depravity. The mind's ability to perceive divinity is an issue that

[18] Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel*, 62.

divides the Cambridge Platonists and traditional Calvinist thought. This section considers Rowe's poem "A Paraphrase on the Canticles" and shorter lyric works, particularly the pervasive imagery of darkness and light through which she continues to interrogate the terms and implications of a larger theological debate regarding innate sinfulness. In many of Rowe's poems, but most notably "A Paraphrase on the Canticles", published in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1696), there is a clear sense of struggle as Rowe attempts to reconcile a Reformed understanding of depravity with many of the philosophies posited by the Platonists. This tension is seen most clearly in the imagery and language of darkness and light, symbols which appear throughout the writings of Calvin and the Platonists. Representative of deity, purity, understanding, and reason, the concepts of darkness and light are apparent in Rowe's protagonist, the Bride, as she spends considerable time discussing the process by which the individual perceives self, the impact of knowledge associated with self-awareness, and the implications for her relationship with the Divine and her Bridegroom.

Rowe and Reformed Theology

Crucial to the understanding of Rowe as a religious writer is just how powerful and pervasive Reformed doctrine became in her life and in the lives of her contemporaries. But even more than that, Rowe had critical exposure to a large range of philosophies and ideas due to her wide reading and education. This section aims to discuss both the Dissenting and Cambridge Platonist traditions of writing, how they viewed man's ability to reason, and the way that Rowe interacted with both of these traditions. Importantly, the legacy of the Dissenters featured heavily in Rowe's writings. For a Dissenter such as Rowe, reformed doctrines such as total depravity and the understanding of divine grace would not only have been taught from an early age, but also understood in

the context of everyday life. Her introduction to Calvinist theology began at the cradle. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Rowe's father was a Dissenting minister imprisoned for his beliefs under the Act of Uniformity and became one of the most important influences on his daughter.[19] From an early age he impressed upon her the importance of Christian principles, the practice of religious devotion, and provided her with a model for piety.[20] They had a close and affectionate relationship and it was from him that Rowe learnt the devout faith that would characterise her personal life and subsequent work.

Many Dissenters, both before Rowe's time and after, held to Calvin's doctrines as a foundation for their theological beliefs.[21] Beliefs such as predestination, justification, and salvation of the elect manifested most clearly through *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), which began as an effort to establish a Calvinist system in England just before the Interregnum.[22] Many of the English Presbyterians, Baptists, and Congregationalists (with the addition of others) would come to be known as Dissenters, as they did not adhere to the Act of Uniformity (1662), which established the Church of England as the only approved church and mandated that all ministers, schoolmasters and university incumbents swear an oath attesting to their faith and acceptance of everything posited in *The Book of Common Prayer*.[23] But with the Act of Toleration in 1689, enacted when Rowe was 15 years old, some Dissenters had freedom to practice the religion of their choice, provided they took oaths of allegiance. Michael Watts writes, "In drawing up deeds or applying for license under the Toleration Act, congregations often described their meeting-houses as for the use of 'Protestant Dissenters' or people 'of the Presbyterian or Independent persuasion' rather

[19] Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England*, 247.
[20] Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome*, 25.
[21] Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment,* 9.
[22] John McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 322-323.
[23] Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.

than for the exclusive use of either denomination", indicating that the terms "Presbyterian" and "Independent" were interchangeable.[24] Throughout the years of the Act of Uniformity and the persecution that inevitably followed, various sects of Dissent became united through their common confessions, with the *Westminster Confession* as a foundation. *The Confession of Faith*, alongside the *Shorter Catechism*, became a Calvinist classic, bringing the theology up to date with the formulation of the doctrine of the Covenants of Works and of Grace.[25] Even continuing up to the present day, many Reformed congregations still hold to the *Westminster Confession* as the basis for their theological beliefs. As a Presbyterian, Rowe certainly would have learned the doctrines posited in the *Westminster Confession*, adopting what is known as a "Reformed" view of scripture. Concerning Reformed theology, Isabel Rivers writes:

> The evangelical tendency emphasises the traditional Reformation doctrines of grace, atonement, justification by faith (often covered by the label 'orthodoxy'), the importance of experimental knowledge, meaning both the believer's own experience in religion, and the acquaintance with the variety of the experience of others, and the central function of the heart and affections in religion in relation to the will and understanding. In emphasising these things eighteenth-century dissenters were following in the footsteps of their puritan and nonconformist forebears, but with certain important modifications.[26]

The doctrine and teachings of Calvinism are expressed most succinctly in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* first published in Latin in 1536 and later translated into English in 1561. Many of the doctrines outlined in

[24] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution*, Vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 297.
[25] McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, 325-326.
[26] Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 167.

Calvin's *Institutes* became guidelines for the English Calvinists.[27] For Calvin, the Bible was not only an illustration of God's work in creation or first-hand accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, but also a source of true revelation that illuminated God's purposes and plans for mankind throughout the ages.[28] The *Institutes* describe a God who acts not only as the author and creator of the universe, but also a God deeply concerned with human affairs. Calvin believed that the knowledge given by God and the revelation of sin far exceeded theological intellect, emphasising elements for true repentance and humility.[29] In the writings of many English Puritan writers, Calvinistic doctrines such as God's sovereignty, man's innate depravity, and the power of original sin dominated sacred and secular texts.[30] According to the doctrines of Calvinism and the *Westminster Confession*, scripture's authority is of supreme importance, but the illumination of the Spirit is necessary for a proper interpretation. Only divine grace can renew human faculties, making possible man's attempts to do good. Following along these lines, powers of the soul (reason, understanding, conscience) are divine implantations.[31]

Calvin believed that the knowledge given by God through Scripture far exceeded human or theological apprehension. Accordingly, his *Institutes* emphasised the revelation of sin alongside true repentance and humility.[32] Calvinist doctrines such as God's sovereignty, man's innate depravity, and the power of original sin became popular subjects for both sacred and secular texts in the Puritan tradition.[33] The doctrine of total depravity stressed man's inherently sinful nature, emphasising that the physical body and mind are

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[27] James Boulger, *The Calvinist Temper in English Poetry* (New York, NY: Mouton Publishers, 1980), 9.
[28] Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel*, 54.
[29] Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 6.
[30] Boulger, *The Calvinist Temper,* 12.
[31] Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 6.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Boulger, *The Calvinist Temper in English Poetry*, 12.

irrevocably tainted before birth. The *Institutes* makes it very clear that to be human is to be saturated with sin: "All of us, therefore, descending from an impure seed [Adam], come into the world tainted with the contagion of sin. Nay, before we behold the light of the sun we are in God's sight defiled and polluted."[34] According to the doctrines of Calvinism, the authority of scripture is supremely important, but the illumination of the Spirit is necessary for a proper interpretation. Only divine grace can renew human faculties, making it possible for individuals to commit acts that please God. Following along these lines, the powers of the soul (reason, understanding, conscience) are divine implantations.[35]

Despite this strong association with Calvinism and commitment to her Presbyterian faith, Rowe's poetry takes on a theological life of its own.[36] Indeed, the public expression of her religious faith and the articulation of theological particulars falls outside the conventional spectrum of Reformed thought, especially in the respect that it considers alternative perspectives to mankind's innate depravity and seeks to reconcile the human condition with divine wisdom. In the preface to *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (1704), Rowe begins by questioning the interaction between the rational mind, a "pure intellect", and the physical body, the "Beings such as we are":

[34] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 214.
[35] Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 6.
[36] Beyond her political persuasions, Rowe was a devout and committed Presbyterian throughout her life, spending half of her yearly income in support of various charities and of the local chapel.

> Tis true, were we nothing but pure Intellect, were we stripped of Flesh and Blood, and arriv'd at that perfect State the Saints above enjoy, then a bare abstraction of Tho't, and orderly ranging of Idea's, might serve the Turn. But while we continue such Beings as we are, while Blood, and Spirits, Imagination and Passion, make up a Part of our Nature, these must have their proper Objects and Incentives, or we shall scarcely engage in the Quest of Glory.[37]

Here, Rowe entertains the idea that the physical body has an intrinsic part to play in the human experience, calling it a "Part of our Nature". Unlike some of her Reformed contemporaries, she sees the body as something that positively contributes to life before death, connecting the corporeal state to "imagination and passion". This is a far cry from the Calvinist belief that every facet of the human experience is completely depraved without divine intervention. Moreover Rowe insinuates that human existence relies upon a sense of purpose, indicating that one's "proper Objects and Incentives" are a primary means by which an individual can achieve true fulfilment: apprehension of God's Glory.

Following on into Rowe's lifetime, many Dissenters believed that the Established Church's doctrine was not sufficient to instruct properly about the Christian life. Paula Backscheider explains that as "most Presbyterians believed and […] as Rowe's fictions imply, reading the Scriptures, human experience, and reason could teach the nature of God better than the doctrine of the Church of England." [38] Backscheider's statement is half true, in the sense that the Presbyterian reliance on reason as a faculty able to perceive the divine was limited. Despite the separation because of the Act of Uniformity, there remained strong Calvinist ties within the Church of England. Many Presbyterians and Anglicans maintained strong friendships and connections, with Dissenters

[37] Elizabeth Rowe, Preface to *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed by R. Janeway for Richard Burrough, 1704), 4.
[38] Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel*, 62..

occasionally worshipping in the parishes of the Church of England. In more local and rural settings, the line between conformist and nonconformist blurred.[39] Although many Dissenters did believe that the Church of England's doctrine was inadequate to educate the faithful about God's nature, true Calvinists looked to the doctrine of total depravity as one of the major reasons why human experience and reason was not to be trusted. Instead, the Bible was central, the ultimate source of truth and the text around which people oriented their lives.

Calvinism's doctrine of total depravity stresses man's inherently sinful nature, on the basis that the physical body and mind are irrevocably tainted from the very beginning. The *Institutes* makes it very clear that to be human is to be saturated with sin. Calvin writes, "All of us, therefore, descending from an impure seed [Adam], come into the world tainted with the contagion of sin. Nay, before we behold the light of the sun we are in God's sight defiled and polluted."[40] Here, humans are corrupted from birth, and are also incapable of any good, "wholly inclined" to sinfulness. According to the *Westminster Confession*, the proclivity to depravity remains even after conversion, and is the hallmark of an innately sinful nature: "This corruption of nature during this life, doth remaine [sic] in those that are regenerated: and, although it be, through Christ, pardoned, and mortified [...] all the motions thereof are truly and properly sin."[41] Here we see that, according to both Calvin and the *Westminster Confession*, the tendency of man towards sin is innate, irreversible, and pervasive, affecting every aspect of life. The only way to acquire true knowledge about the depraved self and the nature of the human condition is through divine revelation. The essence of reformed thought was the adherence to the Bible

[39] Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, *1660-1714, 23*,
[40] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 214.
[41] *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms, Agreed Upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (London: Printed for Robert Boslock, at the Sign of the King's Head in Paul's Church Yard, 1649), 16.

alone as a means to interpret and mediate both an individual's understanding of the self and the world. Calvin explains,

> Philosophers generally maintain that reason dwells in the mind like a lamp, throwing light on all its counsels, and, like a queen, governing the will – that is so pervaded with divine light as to be able to consult for the best, and so endued with vigour as to be able perfectly to command that, on the contrary, sense is dull and short-sighted, always creeping on the ground, grovelling among inferior objects, and never rising to true vision… but that when enslaved by sense, it is corrupted and depraved, so as to generate into lust.[42]

Here, Calvin addresses the notion that human reasoning is able to discern good and truth. In doing so, he indicates that the mind is intended to help humanity understand the world and "consult for the best". But for Calvin, the doctrine of total depravity extends to the function of the mind, rendering reason as tainted, sense as "short-sighted" and "always creeping on the ground." According to the Calvinist tradition, the mind needed to be "born again" before it could properly perceive the divine. Salvation and a proper understanding of the Bible are the only ways that minds can be "totally renewed" and Calvin alludes to Romans 12:2, where Christians are told to "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."[43] Calvin emphasises the importance of the new birth: "The statement of our Lord is, that a man must be born again, because he is flesh… a mind is not born again merely by having some portion of it reformed. It must be totally renewed."[44] For Calvinists, the light of true knowledge was only to be found in scripture.

In her poem "Soliloquy IV", Rowe looks past the dogma of her theological beliefs in an attempt to balance her mortal life with the constraints of piety.

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[42] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 224.
[43] Romans 12:2 (King James Version)
[44] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 249.

Here, the uneasy shift between total depravity and redemption of the elect creates tension as Rowe considers all that has been given up in the name of salvation. Beginning by asking God to judge her "inmost soul" and boasting that no other "rival form" takes his place in her heart, Rowe puts the authenticity of her devotion on trial.[45] In doing so, she actively weighs the truth of scripture, considering all that she has forsaken in the name of devotion:

> […] If this is not a truth,
> I know not where, I know not what I am,
> But wander in uncertainty and doubt.
> If this is not a truth, why have I shut
> My eyes on all the beauty of the world?
> Why have I stopp'd my ears to ev'ry call
> Of glory and delight? why do I shun
> The paths of pleasure? why despise the joys,
> The entertainments of society?
> And lost to all in solitary shades
> Give up my hours, and ev'ry thought to thee?[46]

Rowe's use of verse allows her not only to question the beliefs that she holds dear, but to also consider what would happen should she forsake these truths. Within the confines of poetry, she retains the ability to articulate uncertainty and unease, while still making her faith the foundation upon which she constructs her identity. Interestingly, Rowe sees the truth of her religious belief as a major anchoring point in her self-identity. She explains that without this constant, there would be nothing for her but to "wander in uncertainty", lacking a way to gauge her personhood and the ability to engage with the world that she sees. In the poem, however, Rowe phrases her doubts and misgivings in a series of rhetorical questions, each more introspective than the last. Unlike Calvin's call that every thing should be done with a "view to [God's] glory", she reflects on the

[45] Elizabeth Rowe, "Soliloquy IV", *MW,* 1:195, lines 3-4.
[46] Ibid., lines 11-22.

natural beauty, earthly enjoyments, and pleasure found in society. In terms of depravity, Rowe appears to question the boundaries of sinfulness within the realm of human and earthly pleasure.

Lamenting missed opportunities of "glory and delight", Rowe seems to regret the dedication that a pious life requires, the hours and countless thoughts that she is expected to give to God. Yet as the poem concludes, Rowe reaffirms her commitment to piety and describes the Divine as the "solace of [her] life", clinging to her hope in final salvation despite the sinful inclinations and doubts that remain.[47] Rowe also uses the poem to facilitate personal contemplation, creating a voice aware of its own sinful nature, weakness, and limitations. Her use of rhetorical questions appears to be a way to disclose uncertainty, indicating an unspoken but plainly understood answer to her audience. In her choice to present theological debate through a collection of poetic soliloquies, Rowe extricates herself from the need to reach a final conclusion or theologically definitive statement of faith; her readers expect no such thing. However, this does not diminish her theological and intellectual engagement. The soliloquy's speaker demonstrates a principled, rigorous and honest display of the personal application of Christian teaching. In this, Rowe's poetry contradicts the notion that religious writing equates to simple exercises of piety, emerging not only as tokens of private devotion, but as complex expressions on the nature of belief and the role of a true worshipper.

Rowe and the Cambridge Platonists

Convinced of the compatibility of reason and faith, the Cambridge Platonists regarded philosophy as the legitimate concern of theologians and were distinguished by the high value they gave to human reason. The philosophy

[47] Ibid., 1:196, lines 29-35.

of the Cambridge Platonists opposed itself to the Reformed view that God bestowed reason to mankind upon conversion, rather positing that reason was an innate but divinely implanted quality in man. Convinced of the compatibility of reason and faith, the Cambridge Platonists sought to combine aspects of Christian theology with philosophical discourse and were distinguished by the high value they afforded to human reason. Reason was the highest human faculty, an inherent ability that enabled the perception of divine truths. Most notably, they agreed with St. Augustine that divine knowledge of God was innate in mankind.[48] For Benjamin Whichcote, one of the founding fathers of Cambridge Platonism, man's rational interpretation of his own religious experience provided him with knowledge of the divine.[49] Whichcote argued that man's ability to reason lead him naturally to God:

> There is a natural and indelible sense of Deity, and consequently of religion, in the mind of man. [...] It fairly lies before every man, when he useth his reason and understanding to contemplate the various effects in the world, to find out an agent that is intelligent, and superior to mind and understanding in man.[50]

Similarly, John Norris took care to discuss the role of reason in relation to the Calvinist interpretation of sin and depravity. A philosopher and poet as well as an Anglican clergyman, he published *An Account of Reason and Faith* in 1697 and his principal metaphysical work, *An Essay Towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World*, in 1701 and 1704 and his poetry, for which he is particularly known, was rooted in the metaphysical tradition.[51]

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[48] Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism,* 31.
[49] William De Pauley, *The Candle of the Lord: Studies in the Cambridge Platonists* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1937), 9.
[50] Benjamin Whichcote, *The Works of the Learned Benjamin Whichcote D.D, Rector of St. Lawrence Jewry, London*, Vol. 3, (Aberdeen: Printed by J. Chalmers, 1751), 187.
[51] W. J. Mander, *The Philosophy of John Norris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

It is probable that Rowe made her acquaintance with the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists through the writings of John Norris, who worked closely with Rowe's friend and editor John Dunton and served as a contributor and sometime editor to the *Athenian Mercury.*[52] Additionally, Norris' work appears in many of Rowe's later collections of poetry, most notably *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (1704). Rowe also read a great deal of John Norris' work.[53] Many years later, Edward Dwight Walker would go on to classify Rowe as one of the "Platonic Poets" alongside Henry More in his book *Reincarnation: A Study of Forgotten Truth* (1888).[54]

Unlike their Calvinist counterparts, many of the Cambridge Platonists eschewed doctrines such as the doctrine of election and the doctrine of total depravity. Henry More, one of the more prolific writers of the group, placed great emphasis on the moral and practical components of the Christian faith. For him, religion was something to be embodied in life, rather than steeped in dogma; that is not to say that he abandoned true doctrine or right opinion. Rather, he sought to realign men from disputes of theology to true Christian duty.[55] More spent his formative years at Cambridge in the late 1630s and early 1640s, where his philosophical ideas began to reflect various tendencies that would go on to forge the Enlightenment.[56] More had been raised in a Calvinist household, which played a crucial role in the way that he would go on to view doctrines such as election and total depravity. In Richard Ward's edition of More's memoirs, *The Life of the Learned and Pious Dr. More* (1710), More recalled his childhood and the pervasive influence of Calvinistic thinking,

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[52] John Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance 1640-1740* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 94.
[53] Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 218.
[54] Edward Dwight Walker, *Reincarnation: A Study of Forgotten Truth* (New York, NY: John W Lovell Company, 1888), 190.
[55] Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy*, 361.
[56] Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance*, 12-13.

outlining how this type of theology directly affected his perspective on man's ability to reason:

> […] every Humane Soul is no abrasa tabula, or mere Blank Sheet; but hath innate sensations and Notions in it, both of good and evil, just and unjust, true and false; and those very strong and vivid. Concerning which Matter, I am the more assur'd, in that the Sensations of my own Mind are so far from being owing to Education, that they are directly contrary to it: I being bred up, to the almost 14th Year of my Age, under Parents and a Master that were great Calvinists (but withal, very pious and good ones): At which time, by the Order of my Parents, persuaded to it by my Uncle, I immediate went to Æton School; not to learn any new Precepts or Institutes of Religion; but for the perfecting of the Greek and Latin Tongue. But neither there, nor yet any where else, could I ever swallow down that hard Doctrine concerning fate.[57]

What More would go on to achieve through his career was the notion that a connection between "strong divinity" and a moral life was to be preferred above Christian division into sects. As a result of his exposure to Calvinism during his childhood years, many of More's writings emphasize pietism rather than Calvinist morality.[58]

For Benjamin Whichcote, another of the founding fathers of Cambridge Platonism, man's rational interpretation of his own religious experience provided him with knowledge of the divine.[59] Whichcote argued that man's ability to reason naturally lead him to God and claimed that the mind was the hallmark of a creator:

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[57] Henry More, *The Life of the Learned and Pious Dr. More,* ed. Richard Ward. (London: J. Downing, 1710), 5-6.
[58] Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance,* 30.
[59] De Pauley, *The Candle of the Lord,* 9.

> There is a natural and indelible sense of Deity, and consequently of religion, in the mind of man. [...] It fairly lies before every man, when he useth his reason and understand, to contemplate the various effects in the world, to find out an agent that is intelligent, and superior to mind and understanding in man.[60]

Whichcote explains that the mind has a "natural and indelible" inclination toward the divine. For Whichcote, the mind is meant to push the individual towards God, to "contemplate" nature in order to "find out an agent that is intelligent", even going so far as to insinuate that it's man's duty to "contemplate" and perceive divinity. For Whichcote, religion was an inherently rational institution from its very conception. He writes, "Religion is intelligible, rational, and accountable; It is not our Burden, but our Privilege; it is not for our Harm, but given us for our Good."[61] More dramatically, Whichcote even goes so far as to say that human reason is a shadow, a reflection of the rationality and order of God. He explains, "God applies to our Faculties; and deals with us by Reason and Argument. Let us learn of God, to deal with One another in Meekness, Calmness, and Reason; and so Represent God."[62] Many of the Cambridge Platonists believed in an exaltation of the natural powers of the human mind and the ability for rational thought to cleanse the mind.

The Cambridge Platonist's overriding confidence in human reason added a complicated facet to Reformed thinking about inherent sinfulness. Rowe mirrors this in many of her poems, exploring the limits of rational thought and the relationship with divine wisdom. In her poem, "On the Creation", appearing in an edited compilation entitled *Poetical Miscellanies* (1704), Rowe specifically discusses reason in relation to the creation of Adam and Eve:

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[60] Whichcote, *The Works of the Learned Benjamin Whichcote*, 187.
[61] Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms* ed. Samuel Salter (London: J. Payne at Pope's Head, 1753), 29.
[62] Ibid., 72.

> But last of all, two of a nobler Kind,
> After the brightest Model in his Mind,
> With Care the Great Artificer design'd:
> Beyond his other Works, compleat [sic] and fair,
> He form'd with ev'ry Grace the lovely Pair,
> Adorn'd with Beauty, crown'd with Dignity,
> Immortal, Godlike, Rational, and Free:
> Serene Impression of a Stamp Divine,
> Upon their matchless Faces clearly shine:[63]

Here the bodies of Adam and Eve are portrayed as a reflection of God and a "Model in his Mind". They are divinely "design'd" and "Beyond his other Works": the apex of His act of creation. Besides being "form'd with ev'ry Grace", "Adorn'd with Beauty", and other various qualities, the pair are truly made in the image of the divine: "Immortal, Godlike, Rational, and Free". It is here that Rowe considers the mind and rationality to not only be an innate trait of humankind before the Fall, but also – in the pattern of the Cambridge Platonists – a celestial implantation, a "serene impression of a Stamp Divine". Yet her invocation of reason as an innate human quality is complicated by the wider contexts of the poem. Rowe imagines this debate in a Prelapsarian setting, envisioning Adam and Eve without the corrupting influence of sin and depravity. Here, she visualises God's creation as he had originally intended: fully rational, enlightened and complete. For Rowe, man's ability to reason innately tied him to divinity and became a hallmark of perfected creation. Although the Cambridge Platonists and Calvinists disagreed on the extent to which man could perceive God in a sinful state, Rowe suggests that the "Stamp Divine" not only corresponds to Adam and Eve's physical form, but also extends to their capacity for rational thought.

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[63] Elizabeth Rowe, "On the Creation" *Poetical Miscellanies: The Fifth Part.* Ed. Jacob Tonson (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1704), 376, lines 88-96.

Like his contemporaries, John Norris took care to discuss the role of reason in relation to the Calvinist interpretation of sin and depravity. What is unique about Norris' position, however, is that he represents the heritage of the Cambridge Platonists towards the end of the movement, when many of their positions and arguments were thought to be anachronistic. As a result, many of Norris' works salvage and reconstitute many of their insights.[64] Norris published *An Account of Reason and Faith* in 1697 and his principal metaphysical work, *An Essay Towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World*, in 1701 and 1704. Norris is also known for his poetry, as it particularly marks the transition from the Renaissance to a more modern style of writing, with many of Norris' poems finding their roots in the metaphysical tradition.[65] Norris was a member of the Cambridge Platonists, but is distinct in the sense that he takes up much of their philosophy and beliefs at a later period. Additionally, Norris stands apart from the larger Platonist group when it came to the notion of "innate ideas", or man's sense of awareness. For the Cambridge Platonists, knowledge became predicated on experience, whereas Norris felt that knowledge could be something instinctive to the human condition.[66] Norris' work has been largely ignored in the study of the Cambridge Platonists, largely due to the fact that he appears late in time and disagrees with a few bits of their philosophy. A victim of compartmentalization, little attempt has been made to connect Norris' theology, philosophy, and poetry to their common pursuit.[67]

Norris acknowledged the complexity of the term "reason", writing that it was an "ambiguous word, and of various acceptation."[68] In his *Account of Reason*

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[64] Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance*, xvi.
[65] W. J. Mander, *The Philosophy of John Norris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.
[66] Mander, *The Philosophy of John Norris*, 8.
[67] Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance*, 75.
[68] John Norris, *An Account of Reason and Faith in Relation to the Mysteries of Christianity* (London: Printed for S. Danship, 1697), 19.

and Faith (1697), Norris defines reason as a form of truth and conformable to nature:

> Sometimes it is taken for Truth, and that both for Truth of the Thing [...] and for the Truth of the Proposition which is its conformity to those Ideal Relations [...] as when we say, *this is Sense and Reason;* meaning that the Proposition is true, and conformable to the Nature of things.[69]

Here, Norris contends that reason might just be "taken for Truth" and that truth conforms to a pre-existing ideal, functioning as the "Nature of things". For Norris, the ideas of sense and reason are interchangeable. The Platonists, both individually and as a larger group, devoted their considerable philosophical learning to this "sense and reason", to defending the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, and to formulating a practical ethics for Christian conduct. Above all, the Cambridge Platonists held the belief that the human mind is innately equipped with the principles of reason and morality.[70]

The relationship between Calvinist theology and the beliefs of the Cambridge Platonists, to modern eyes, would appear to be two sides of the same coin – both groups fully acknowledged man as a committing sinful acts, humanity needing a saviour, and Jesus' substitutionary atonement. However, to conflate the two groups in terms of similar theology is to grossly misconstrue the nuances of the doctrine of total depravity and notions of man's awareness of the divine. For Rowe, this knife-edge of difference provides ample subject matter and a platform for discussing the subtle distinction within a particular faction of Dissenting belief and philosophy.

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[69] Ibid., 20.
[70] Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment,* 35.

Delineating the Body and Soul

> Tis true, were we nothing but pure Intellect, were we stripped of Flesh and Blood, and arriv'd at that perfect State the Saints above enjoy, then a bare abstraction of Tho't, and orderly ranging of Idea's, might serve the Turn. But while we continue such Beings as we are, while Blood, and Spirits, Imagination and Passion, make up a Part of our Nature, these must have their proper Objects and Incentives, or we shall scarcely engage in the Quest of Glory.[71]

In the preface to her book of poems, *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (1704), Rowe begins by making a sharp distinction between the "pure intellect, stripped of Flesh and Blood" and the physical body, the "Beings such as we are". For a Dissenter like Rowe, the notion of "Blood and Spirits, Imagination and Passion" became an integral way to understand the relationship between body and soul. In the case of her religious poetry, Rowe makes it clear that she views the individual to be composed of these two parts: the physical body and the eternal soul. Seeing the soul as a higher and spiritual entity, Rowe deems her body to be an unwelcome barrier between heaven and earth. In this way, death becomes an anticipated release and the body can be merely discarded. Staves writes,

> In her religious poetry, though she does have some sense of divine presence in the natural world, Rowe generally understands herself to be separated from God as long as she lives; she thus longs more intensely for death as the necessary prelude to enjoying divine presence in heaven. Instead of a Platonic idea of the soul as simply immaterial, she returns again and again to a contrast between a worldly body that impedes the

[71] Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Preface to *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed by R. Janeway for Richard Burrough, 1704), A4.

> soul's contact with God and a transfigured, resurrected body that will finally enhance the soul's perception of God.[72]

This dialectic between a "transfigured" body and the "immortal" soul is what makes Rowe's religious poetry so complex. Moving in and out of the Calvinist perspective that the body is something to be merely discarded after death, on the one hand, and the Platonist notion that the body is something to be refined and controlled, many of Rowe's poems embrace this tension between the body and soul. With the physical body and immortal soul at odds, many of Rowe's religious poems see human life on earth as a perpetual state of conflict. The majority of the Cambridge Platonists and Calvinists agree that the soul and body are separate entities. For both of these parties, the body exists as a container for the soul, a base vessel for a higher consciousness.

Both Calvin and the Cambridge Platonists have a similar conception of the word "soul", seeing it as a distinctive and immortal "essence", the indefinable notion of individuality and self. Unlike the body, the soul is intended to communicate with the divine, to have a relationship with God, and to return to heaven after death. In Calvin's *Institutes,* he writes that "there can be no question that man consists of a body and a soul; meaning by soul, an immortal though created essence, which is his nobler part."[73] Emphasising the soul as the "nobler" counterpart to the physical body, Calvin considers the body to be depraved, and base. The Cambridge Platonists similarly define the soul as something that perceives God and that has a complicated relationship with the body. Whichcote explains, "The Soul does contemplate and worship God; when it is not disturbed by the Body, or disaffected through Vice."[74] However, despite the fact that Calvinism and Platonism both acknowledge that a human is composed of both a

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[72] Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain,* 221.
[73] Calvin. *Institutes*, 160.
[74] Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, 7.

body and a soul, they see the relationship between these two parts as functioning in dramatically different ways.

Calvinist theology sees the body as something that cannot be repaired or restored. The soul, as a consequence of being linked to such a body, is irrevocably tainted and not to be trusted. Calvin writes in his *Institutes*:

> For as a body, while it contains and fosters the cause and matter of disease cannot be called healthy, although pain is not actually felt; so a soul, while teeming with such seeds of vice, cannot be called sound […] In a body, however morbid, the functions of life are performed; but the soul, when plunged into that deadly abyss, not only labours under vice, but is altogether devoid of good.[75]

Here, the soul, "teeming" with the "seeds of vice", functions as a reflection of a corrupted body. It cannot be considered "sound" and worthy of trust. Even more dramatically, Calvin considers the body to be a "deadly abyss" where the soul is forced to reside and, as a result, becomes "devoid of good". Rowe however appears to reject the idea that the body and soul, terms Calvin often conflates with the physical body and rational mind, are merely "seeds of vice". Questioning the idea that the believer's reason or will are not under the control of the individual, she seeks a balance in her verse that would honour her inherited Dissenting beliefs while also accommodating modern reason.[76]

For many Cambridge Platonists, the proper use of the body was to ensure that the soul could practise virtue. Whichcote writes, "the Use of the Body is to be the Instrument of the Soul, in the practice of Virtue; and when it is not made such, it is Alienated from its proper Use."[77] Here, the misuse of the body or leaving it to an improper state obstructs the soul from rightfully knowing and

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[75] Calvin, *Institutes*, 251.
[76] Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel*, 62.
[77] Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, 32-33.

perceiving God. Here, the body and soul work together for their own mutual benefit. For the Platonists and Whichcote in particular, the goal of life on earth was to refine both the soul and body: "The work of this State is, to bring our bodies into Subjection to our Minds; and to bring our Bodies to Harmonize with God."[78] Here, the body is the possession of the soul, intended for harmony with God. Unlike many of the Calvinists, who considered both body and soul to be utterly corrupted, the Platonists felt that the body was something to be improved.

In her poem "The Expostulation", from *Poems on Several Occasions* (1696), Rowe reflects the tension between the body and the soul, repeatedly bemoaning the confines of her physical body and longing for her soul to be set free. She begins the poem by addressing the divine, presenting both body and soul as important components of her conscious experience.

> How long, great God, a *wretched captive* here,
> Must I these hated marks of bondage wear?
> How long shall these *uneasy chains* controul
> The willing flights of my impatient Soul?
> How long shall her *most pure intelligence*
> Be strain'd through an infectious screen of gross, corrupted sence?[79]

Seeing the physical body as tainted and imprisoning in relation to the holiness of the divine, Rowe continually makes the comparison between God's perfection and fallible humanity, moving from the heights of heaven to the depths of depravity. For Rowe, there is no middle ground, no space between perfection and perversion. Referring to herself as a "wretched captive", Rowe wears the "hated chains of bondage" in both body and soul. Echoing the style of Psalm 13

[78] Ibid., 119.
[79] Elizabeth Rowe, "The Expostulation" in *Poems on Several Occasions Written by Philomela* (London: Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in Jewen-Street, 1696), 12, lines 1-6. Original emphasis.

and David's pleas for deliverance, the first stanza of "The Expostulation" repeatedly calls God to action and begs for release.[80] Rowe sees her life on earth in finite measures and continuously asks "how long" she will be required to remain in her physical body. Referring to her own body as the "uneasy chains", Rowe considers physicality to be an impediment to spiritual freedom, longing for a "willing flight" of her "impatient soul". Referencing Romans 8:21 and the "bondage of corruption" that sin brings to the body, Rowe sees death as an inevitable release and uses the language of slavery to describe the conflict between the sinful body and "impatient soul".[81] For Rowe, the existence of a body means the inability to escape its weakness and the perversion of reason. The language of captivity weaves throughout the poem, suggesting that Rowe's soul and consciousness is held imprisoned within the confines of the physical body. This dichotomy continues into the second stanza of "The Expostulation", where Rowe continues to divide the body and soul:

> When shall I leave this *darksome house* of clay;
> And to a brighter mansion wing away?
> There's nothing here my thoughts to entertain,
> *But one Tyr'd revolution o're again.*[82]

Interestingly, Rowe embodies the consciousness of her soul and portrays it as something that inevitably flies upward upon separation from its physical restraints. In doing so, Rowe associates herself with this separate and unique entity, capable of mobility and agency. Rowe plays with the balance of the soul and body, inferring that the soul isn't necessarily completely depraved. Once freed of its earthly tethers, the soul is thought to immediately make its way to

[80] Psalm 13 (King James Version)
[81] Romans 8:21. (King James Version)
[82] Rowe, "The Expostulation", 12, lines 7-10.

the "brighter mansion" of heaven and the improved "house" of eternity, a reference to John 14:2.

A similar train of thought can also be seen in the poetry and prose of hymn writer Isaac Watts (1674–1748), one of Rowe's contemporaries and friends. An attendant of Thomas Rowe's academy in Newington Green, Watts became acquainted with Rowe at an early age and encouraged her writing. Madeleine Forell Marshall writes, "Among the many pleasures and rewards of reading the poetry of Watts is the introduction he provides – both tacitly and explicitly, in poems and his preface – to the poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe. She came from the same world of educated Dissent, and she was inspired by the same Adventurous Muse. Watts was one of Rowe's many good, lifelong friends".[83] Their friendship found public expression with his poem ''To Elizabeth Singer, On the Sight of Some of her Divine Poems Never Printed", published on the 19th of July 1706. Rowe returned the sentiment, writing "To Dr. Watts, on his Poems Sacred to Devotion" shortly afterward. Their friendship continued until her death in 1736 and even beyond, as Rowe left Watts with the manuscripts of *Devout Exercises of the Heart*.[84] In the preface, Watts not only commends his friend and discusses the merits of her work, but he also is quick to demarcate the separation between the soul and body, specifically Rowe's soul and body, after death. He writes, "The Reader will here find a Spirit dwelling in Flesh, elevated into divine Transports, congenial to those of Angels and unbodied Minds. Her intense Love to her God kindles at every Hint, and transcends the Limits of Morality. I scarce ever met with any devotional Writings which give us an

[83] Madeleine Forell Marshall, "Teaching the Uncanonized: The Examples of Watts and Rowe" in *Teaching Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, Ed. Christopher Fox (New York, NY: AMS Press, 1990), 14.
[84] Sharon Achinstein, "Romance of the Spirit: Female Sexuality and Religious Desire in Early Modern England," *ELH* 69, no. 2 (2002): 413-14.

Example of a Soul, at special seasons, so far raised above every time that is not immortal and divine".[85]

Watts is now primarily known as a hymn writer, with many of his hymns still used in congregational singing in various denominations. Many of his poetic, sermonic, and prose writings engage with elements of the doctrines of Calvinism, although his religious writings were meant for a wide spectrum of readership, ranging from his congregation at Bury Street, fellow dissenting churches, protestants in general, and unorthodox Christians.[86] Watts modified his position on many Calvinist doctrines during his forty-eight years of preaching. In many of his hymns and poems, there are traces of Calvinist theology, especially as he interacts with the doctrine of total depravity. In *Horae Lyricae* (1706), Watts lucidly illustrates the doctrines of Calvinism, discussing the ramifications of sin and the conversion experiences that would filter into his later sermons and prose. While Watts' hymns have been widely disseminated and now enjoy wide recirculation, his *Horae Lyricae* has been almost totally neglected, proving to be a challenge to literary historians.[87] In *Horae Lyricae*, the most heart-felt poems focus on the body and the soul as agents that aid in an individual's sanctification and glorification.[88] In his poem "Sickness Gives a Sign of Heaven", Watts also describes the body as a prison of sorts, a frightening and unstable separate entity:

> Oft have I sat in Secret Sighs
> To feel my Flesh decay,
> Then groan'd aloud with frightened Eyes

[85] Isaac Watts, preface to *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise, by Elizabeth Singer Rowe (*London: Printed for R. Hett at the Bible and Crown, 1738), xii.
[86] Boulger, *The Calvinist Temper*, 58.
[87] Madeleine Forell Marshall, "Teaching the Uncanonized", 6.
[88] Boulger, *The Calvinist Temper,* 273.

To view this tottering Clay.[89]

Here, the poet (ostensibly Watts himself) sits in quiet contemplation and looks objectively at his body. With the language of a crumbling building, unstable and alien, Watts notes that his flesh is, indeed, in the process of "decay". Becoming alarmed at the frailty and weakness to which he is tethered, Watts' view of the body becomes something resembling a nightmare. Seeing the full weakness of his "clay" as he groans "aloud" with "frightened eyes", the poet carefully takes account of his position. But despite the initial feeling that the body is a decaying and putrescent entity, the poet significantly shifts in his view:

But I forbid my Sorrows now,
Nor dares the Flesh complain,
Diseases bring their profit too;
The Joy o'recomes the Pain.[90]

In an interesting turn, Watts moves from a place of fear and disgust to quiet resignation. Forbidding the "sorrows" or complaint of the "flesh", the poet takes an alternative view of physical pain. In doing so, Watts considers "diseases" and maladies to "bring profit" in various forms. Watts indirectly references the Biblical idea that suffering works in positive ways, to bring "joy" that "o'recomes the pain". Romans 8:18 considers that the "sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us".[91] This sentiment continues throughout the rest of the poem, as the poet views his flawed body within the scope of heaven and divine reward:

My cheerful Soul now all the Day
Sits waiting here and Sings;
Looks thro' the Ruins of her Clay,

[89] Isaac Watts, "Sickness Gives a Sign of Heaven" in *Horae Lyrice: Poems Chiefly of the Lyric Kind* (London: Printed by S. and D. Bridge, for John Lawrence, 1706), 18, lines 1-4.
[90] Isaac Watts, "Sickness Gives a Sign of Heaven", 19, lines 5-8.
[91] Romans 8:18, King James Version.

And practices her Wings.

Faith almost changes into Sight,
While from afar she Spies
Her fair Inheritance in Light
Above created Skies.[92]

Watts maintains this defiant perspective, writing of the "cheerful soul" as something that "sings" and welcomes the death and destruction of the body. Peering through the "Ruins of her clay", the soul anticipates the flight heavenward and "practices" for the day when faith will become sight. In this preparation, "faith almost changes into sight" and the soul gets a glimpse of the eternal promises found in heaven, her "fair inheritance in light", free from physical entanglements.

In his poem, "Happy Frailty", first appearing in the third edition of *Horae Lyricae* (1715), Watts returns to the stark contrast between the soul and body. Similar to the Calvinist doctrine that states that the soul is irrevocably tainted because of its association with the body, Watts paints the immortal soul as the victim of the contagion of sin. Here, the soul remembers its true sinless state only when separated from the body and in the presence of glory:

Alas! How frail our state; said I,
And thus went mourning on,
Till sudden from the cleaving sky
A Gleam of Glory shone.

My soul all felt the glory come,
And breath'd her native Air;
Then she remember'd Heaven her Home,
And she a prisoner here.

[92] Isaac Watts, "Sickness Gives a Sign of Heaven", 18-19, lines 9-16.

> Strait she began to change her key,
> And joyful in her Pains,
> She sung the frailty of her clay
> In Pleasurable strains.[93]

Watts looks at the state of the soul after death as it makes the transition from sin to perfection, earth to heaven. Initially mourning the frailty of human life, the soul makes a dramatic change once it glimpses the "cleaving sky" and a "gleam of glory" shines upon it. The soul undergoes an awakening, feeling her "glory come" once she approaches heaven and breathes the "native Air". This is a very similar perspective to Rowe's train of thought in "The Expostulation", as the soul's "most pure intelligence" is considered to be "strain'd" through the corrupted body, an "infectious screen of gross, corrupted sence". But for Watts, the body is defined even more dramatically as a prison, with the soul treated as a convict. As the soul gains a clearer understanding of its origins, it has a very different response to the physical body. Watts notes that the soul begins to "change her key" and sings the "frailty of her clay".

Here, Watts notes that the soul is unable perceive the divine or properly understand its own origins when directly connected to the body. The body acts as the "glass darkly" of 1 Corinthians 13:12, preventing the soul from understanding its true origins. This theological position is, again, associated with Calvin and his *Institutes.* Calvin writes,

> Were not the soul some kind of essence separated from the body, Scripture would not teach that we dwell in houses of clay, and at death remove from a tabernacle of flesh; that we put off that which is corruptible, in order that, at the last day, we may finally receive according to the deeds done in the body.[94]

[93] Isaac Watts, "Happy Frailty", 92-95, lines 13-24.
[94] Calvin. *Institutes,* 161.

Here, Calvin explains that the soul and body are, indeed, intended to separate. Supporting the idea that the soul is not only distinct from the body, *Institutes* also sees the body as a dwelling place, of sorts. Referenced as a "house of clay" and a "tabernacle of flesh", the body is considered to be a temporary place for the soul to reside. Meditating a separation of body and soul, Rowe also refers to her body as a "darksome house of clay" in "The Expostulation", mimicking the style of Isaiah 64:8, alluding that the relationship between God and humanity as that of a potter and his clay.[95] In doing so, Rowe steps away from the body as a part of her identity, seeing it objectively as a tainted and depraved enclosure for the soul. This allusion to the body as a "house of clay" is neither the first nor the last time that Rowe will use the reference. In an undated letter to William Rowe, Rowe laments that she is still alive and well, forced to remain in her physical body:

> I am content you should know that I am still below the stars, confin'd to these dusty regions, breathing the gross element of air, and drinking tea instead of nectar, and encumber'd with a body of clay, instead of sparkling in a vehicle of light. I am still no better than a wretched mortal.[96]

Again, we see Rowe's belief that the body is intimately tied to the "dusty regions" of earth, "encumbr'd with a body of clay".

The image of the depraved and imprisoning body and the innately celestial and fleeing soul is also seen in the poetry of Norris. His poem "The Meditation", as well as a few others, appears alongside Rowe's own poems in her published book of poems, *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions By Philomela and Several Other Ingenious Persons* (1704). Norris, like Watts and Rowe, maintained that the soul and body were different entities, and that mind

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[95] Isaiah 64:8. (King James Version)
[96] Elizabeth Rowe to William Rowe, n. d., "Letter XXIV", *MW*, 2:211.

and matter were also distinct.[97] However, Norris breaks from Watts and the Calvinist perspective in the respect that, for him, the mind is synonymous with consciousness and reason. For Watts, the soul is the immortal and heavenly part of the individual. Although both poets describe a soul that desires to move heavenward and has origins in a different realm, Norris' portrayal of consciousness appears as a more nuanced and self-reflective. Unlike Watts, who is sure of his soul's purpose and destination, Norris is unclear about life after death. To be more specific, Norris is acutely aware of an afterlife but does not know the shape that it will form. In "The Meditation", we can see that Norris identifies with the soul but also expresses doubt as it considers an eternal state:

> It must be done, my Soul, but 'tis a strange,
> A dismal, and mysterious, Change!
> When thou shalt leave this Tenement of Clay,
> And to an unknown Somewhere wing away,
> When time shall be Eternity, and thou
> Shalt be thou know'st not what and live thou know'st not how.[98]

Like Watts and Rowe, Norris ascribes true identity and "selfhood" to the soul, considering the body as a "tenement of clay". At death, the soul and body separate, with the soul continuing to the vague "unknown somewhere" to be something "thou know'st not what". However, it is Norris' perspective on the "unveiled" perspective after death and its connection with the soul that draws our attention. In a similar fashion to Isaac Watts, the poetry of both Rowe and Norris exhibits a sense of the anticipatory revelation that occurs in death, as the soul travels to heaven.

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[97] Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance*, 100.
[98] John Norris, "The Meditation", in *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions By Philomela and Several Other Ingenious Persons* (London: Printed by R. Janeway for Richard Burrough, 1704), 137-139, lines 1-6.

Another one of Norris' poems, "The Elevation", gestures toward a clarity that can only be accessed through the soul's flight after death. Writing in a style that mimics a prophetic vision or transcendental scene, Norris explains:

> Take Wing, my soul, and upwards bend thy Flight,
> To thy originary Fields of Light.
> Here's nothing, nothing, here below
> That can deserve thy longer Stay;[99]

Norris considers the "Fields of Light" to be the soul's "originary" home, stating that nothing "here below" merits the soul's residence on earth. Again, this perspective is similar to that of Watts, but the soul goes through no radical transformation after death. Unlike Watts' version of the soul in his poem, "Happy Frailty", in Norris' conception, the soul merely experiences a change in perspective:

> How Vile, now Sordid, here those Trifles shew,
> That place the Tenants of that Ball below?
> But ha! I've lost the little Sight,
> The Scene's remov'd, and all I see
> Is one confused, dark, Mass of Night;
> What nothing was, now nothing seems to be.
> How calm this Region, how Serene, now Clear,
> Sure I some Strains of Heavenly Musick hear.[100]

Caught in the middle between heaven and earth, the soul undergoes a process of unveiling. Here, consciousness shifts and what once was meaningful, pales in comparison. Considering the earth, "that Ball below" and its "tenants", the soul experiences a dramatic change. But still, the soul has no clear vision of heaven, despite separating from the body. Citing the "confused, dark, Mass of Night", this

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[99] John Norris, "The Elevation" in, *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions By Philomela and Several Other Ingenious Persons* (London: Printed by R. Janeway for Richard Burrough, 1704), 143-146, lines 1-4.
[100] Ibid., 143-146, lines 17-24.

utopian vision is still obscured and Norris has "lost the little Sight" of all that it counted familiar.

In Rowe's poem, "Hymn V", printed alongside Norris' poem in *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions,* there is a distinct shift in the function of the soul as it rises out of the body.

> When, when, shall I behold thy Face
> All Radiant and Serene,
> Without these envious dusky Clouds
> That make a Vail between?
>
> When Shall that long expected Day
> Of Sacred Vision be,
> When my impatient Soul shall make
> A new Approach to thee.[101]

Beseeching God to descend from heaven and longing to "behold thy Face", "Hymn V" anticipates death as a means to true communion with the divine. Rowe makes an interesting reference to the "envious dusky clouds" of the human experience and body, frustrated with the limitation that it provides. Calling flesh a "vail" that falls between this life and the next, Rowe constructs an explicit allusion to Hebrews 10:20, where the writer describes Christ's physical body in similar terms: "By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh."[102] Rowe looks forward to this "long expected day", a time when she will have "sacred vision" and see God clearly. This is yet again another reference to 1 Corinthians 13:12, as we are told that Christians "see through a glass, darkly" but will have full revelation and perfected knowledge in heaven.[103]

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[101] Elizabeth Rowe, "Hymn V", *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed by R. Janeway for Richard Burroughm at the Sun and Moon, 1704), 11-13, lines 20-28.
[102] Hebrews 10:20 (King James Version)
[103] 1 Corinthians 13:12 (King James Version)

For Rowe, the body and the soul offer conflicting ways to interact with the doctrines of Calvinism and the philosophies posited by the Cambridge Platonists. From the innate depravity found in Calvin's *Institutes* to the imprisoned soul within a crumbling physical body, many of Rowe's poems waver back and forth between these two schools of thought, indicating tension and offering a complex insight into the nuances of Rowe's Dissent.

Darkness and Light, Reason and Understanding

The darkness of human depravity and the light of reason were major themes interspersed throughout many of Rowe's religious poems, reflected and discussed also in Calvinist and Cambridge Platonist literature. In many of Rowe's poems, we can see the manner in which she represents perception of the divine, knowledge of God, and the true understanding of the human condition. In this section, I discuss Rowe's conception of the rational mind in relation to divinity and human depravity, also exploring how her work traces the post-Reformation development of pietism into the more modern Evangelicalism.[104] Just as Calvinist theology and Cambridge Platonist philosophy differed in their perception of the physical body and eternal soul, there remains a split when it comes to the notion of the rational mind and man's ability to perceive God. For those holding to a Calvinistic perspective, perception of God is innately tied to divine revelation, or the act of God supernaturally opening the eyes of the sinful to the truth. But for Calvin, humanity has some sort of innate knowledge that a divine does exist and his *Institutes* explains that "there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God […] has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead."[105] However, this perception of the divine does not indicate salvation. It is up to God to enlighten

[104] Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance*, xv.
[105] Calvin, *Institutes,* Book I, 43.

the sinners, not for man to find on his own. The Cambridge Platonists felt completely the opposite, believing that for mankind, true understanding about the nature of God and his revealed plan could be achieved through rational thinking. During the seventeenth century, many Platonists successfully argued that the sovereignty of man's reason overshadowed arbitrary criteria of truth, such as the Bible.[106]

In their poems, sermons, and philosophical writings, the Cambridge Platonists used light as a metaphor for intellect, reason, and rational understanding of the human condition. One of the favourite Biblical texts was Proverbs 20:27: "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts."[107] The Cambridge Platonists interpreted the Hebrew "spirit" to mean "psyche" in the Greek sense, typically translated into English as the "mind" or "soul". However, "spirit" or "soul" was also to be taken to mean reason, a divine guiding light conferred on humanity.[108] In particular, Whichcote interpreted Proverbs 20:27 in such a way that he believed that the light of reason was something "lighted by God, and Lighting us to God. *Res illuminata, illuminans.*"[109] Res illuminata, illuminans, "thing illuminated, illuminating", particularly shows Whichcote's (and subsequently the Cambridge Platonist) understanding of the relationship between the divine and human reason. By receiving divine illumination concerning the nature of God and the human condition, the individual would be able to spread that same light and understanding to others and spur on their own comprehension of the divine. Whichcote further describes the relationship between light and the mind:

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[106] Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason*, 323.
[107] Proverbs 20:27 (King James Version)
[108] Daniel Walker Howe, "The Cambridge Platonists of Old England and the Cambridge Platonists of New England," *Church History* 57, no. 4 (December 1988): 471.
[109] Benjamin Whichcote, "Moral and Religious Aphorisms" in *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. E.T. Campagnac (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 70.

> A candle is a thing first lighted and then lighting; so that the mind and understanding is first made light, by divine influences; and then enlightens a man in the use thereof, to find out God, and to follow after him in creation and providence. Therefore, it is the depth of degeneracy, to be without God in the world, to have God far from our remembrance.[110]

Here, light has two functions: it represents divine revelation and it also comes to mean the ability of mankind to use their rational faculties to "follow Him [God] in creation and providence". Whichcote acknowledges that God bestows reason on mankind, and also emphasises that to "be without God" is the "depth of degeneracy". For the Cambridge Platonists, sin and negligence blunt the faculties of natural reason, casting shadows on the brightness shed from the "candle of the Lord."[111] To be in darkness was, quite simply, to lack perception. The ability to reason elevated humanity above the rest of creation, setting him apart and allowing him to be made in God's image.

For those who held to a Reformed doctrine, the concepts of light and dark took on a different set of connotations. For Calvin, the term "darkness" was always associated with a lack of understanding or sinful ignorance. Darkness or blackness typically refer to a lack of "knowledge of God, mere blindness. When the spirit describes men under the term *darkness*, he declares them void of all power of spiritual intelligence." [112] Rather than reflecting intellectual enlightenment, true light only came from the Divine. Calvin's light became a manifestation of God's truth, with darkness emerging as a metaphor for man's innate sinfulness. True light and truth about God is revelatory, something that can only be understood through the workings of the Holy Spirit: "It is true, indeed, that men cleaving too much to the earth are dull of apprehension, nay,

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[110] Whichcote, *The Works of the Learned Benjamin Whichcote,* 187.
[111] Sterling Lamprecht, "Innate Ideas in the Cambridge Platonists," *The Philosophical Review* 35, no. 6 (November 1926): 560.
[112] Calvin, *Institutes,* 238-9.

being alienated from the Father of Lights, are so immersed in darkness as to imagine that they will not survive the grave; still the light is not so completely quenched in darkness that all sense of immorality is lost" (referencing James 1:17, where God is considered to be the "Father of Lights").[113] This lies in contrast to depraved human experience, which is saturated with darkness: "For although there is still some residue of intelligence and judgment as well as will, we cannot call mind sound and entire which is both weak and immersed in darkness."[114]

By accepting Christ, the believer's affections were thought to undergo a transition to full comprehension of the nature of their sinfulness and accurate perception of God's nature. Calvin takes great care to emphasise that the light of truth is only bestowed through divine grace and favour: "Surely a very different sobriety becomes the children of God. As they feel that without the Spirit of God they are utterly devoid of the light of truth, so they are not ignorant that the word is the instrument by which the illumination of the Spirit is dispensed."[115] Here, Calvin emphasises the means by which divine understanding is measured or "dispensed" by the divine.

For Isaac Watts, intellectual and spiritual light or darkness remain outside of the individual's control. Accordingly, Watts believed that God held supreme power to enlighten the eyes of the individual. Although this view is hardly unique to Watts, the exchange between man's agency and God's supreme will also appears in many of Rowe's poems. Like Rowe, Watts also walks the line between Reformed doctrine and Enlightenment philosophy, questioning the role of the rational mind as it interacts with the divine and considers human

[113] Calvin, *Institutes,* 161; James 1:17 (King James Version)
[114] Calvin, *Institutes,* 233.
[115] Calvin, *Institutes,* 86.

depravity. In his poem, "The Divine Sovereignty", found in *Horae Lyricae* (1706), Watts firmly establishes the Divine as a God who is associated with light:

> Thy Sovereign Voice bids ancient Night
> Her Spacious Realms resign,
> And Lo! Ten Thousand Globes of Light
> In Fields of Azure shine.
>
> Thy Wisdom with Superior Sway
> Guides this vast moving Frame;
> Whilst all the Ranks of Being pay
> Deep Reverence to thy Name.[116]

Citing the "Sovereign Voice" that can force "ancient night" to quit her "spacious Realms", Watts envisions divine light, the "ten thousand globes", shining throughout the universe. However, Watts associates this divine light with heavenly wisdom, the "superior sway" that guides the "vast moving frame" of humanity. Here, Watts' God creates order from chaos in a way that is unattainable by human intellect. Unless the divine illuminates the understanding, true enlightenment remains impossible.

A similar association of light and dark, order and disorder, can be seen in Rowe's poem "On the Creation", where she describes the moments before the earth is created, taking particular notice of the void of light, an absence of revelation.

> Nor yet the crude materials of the earth,
> Were form'd; not time, nor motion yet had birth:
> Not yet one solitary spark of light
> Glar'd thro' the dusky shades of ancient night;
> Nor on the barren wastes of endless space,
> As yet were circumscrib'd the bounds of place:

[116] Isaac Watts, "The Divine Sovereignty" in *Horae Lyrice: Poems Chiefly of the Lyric Kind* (London: Printed by S. and D. Bridge, for John Lawrence, 1706), 2, lines 9-16.

When at th'Almighty's word, from nothing springs
The first confus'd original of things.[117]

Rowe describes the darkened "crude materials" of an unshaped world, surrounded by the "dusky shades" of endless night. Lacking a "solitary spark", it is only when God chooses to speak that the "original of things" appears. In a similar fashion to Watts, Rowe posits that only God is capable of creating something from nothing and bringing about order where there once was a void. In terms of intellectual engagement, Rowe's poem thus allows her to consider the complex nuances involved with describing order and chaos, but also the limitations of the physical world and man's relation to it. Here, we see moments before time and creation, when divine intellect first set everything into motion.[118]

A similar sentiment can also be seen in another of Watts' poems in *Horae Lyricae*, "God Incomprehensible". Here, the poet is faced with difficulty when God is not available to him, when the "light" of reason fades away:

Far in the Heav'ns my God retires,
My God, the point of my Desires,
And hides his Lovely Face;
When he descends within my View
He charms my Reason to pursue,
But leaves it tir'd and fainting in th'unequal Chase.[119]

Calling the relationship between himself and Divine an "unequal Chase", the poet feels nothing but frustration away from God. As the Divine "retires" and "hides his Lovely Face", Watts feels that his reason is left "tir'd and fainting" in pursuit.

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[117] Elizabeth Rowe, "On the Creation", *MW,* 1:7, lines 1-8.
[118] There is a strong link between John Milton and many of the Cambridge Platonists in regards to the imagery of dark and light. Milton also uses this type of discourse in *Paradise Lost* with the fall of Satan on Book One. See also Stephen Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).
[119] Isaac Watts, "God Incomprehensible" in *Horae Lyrice: Poems Chiefly of the Lyric Kind* (London: Printed by S. and D. Bridge, for John Lawrence, 1706), 16, lines 1-6

But what is most interesting in this stanza is the way that Watts eloquently describes the "reason" as something that God "charms" to "pursue", as if it's a heavenly construction or great cosmic game. It appears that Watts and God are caught in an odd cat and mouse exchange, with the poet and his reason attuned to things above yet unable to fully access divine reason. In the next stanza, the poet interacts with the light (and reason) of God with surprising results:

> Or if I reach unusual height,
> Till near his Presence brought;
> There Floods of Glory check my Flight,
> Cramp the bold Pinions of my Wit
> And all untune my Thought;
> Plunged in a Sea of Light I roll,
> Where Wisdom, Justice, Mercy Shines;
> Infinite Rays in Crossing Lines
> Beat thick Confusion on my Sight, and overwhelm my Soul.[120]

When the poet's reason reaches "unusual height" and begins to grasp things about the divine that are considered to be too great, he finds that the enlightened "floods of glory" inhibit, or "check", his flight. In a language that echoes the classical story of Icarus with his homemade wings, Watts attempts to get close to Godly reason but instead finds himself "plunged" into a "Sea of Light", one that overwhelms and brings confusion instead of clarification. This type of comparison illustrates the limitations of mankind when it comes to being able to correctly perceive divinity. For Watts, the bold ambition to have an equal understanding with God proves impossible. On the other hand, the plunge into divine light only exposes more bewilderment at the relationship between God and man. Despite exposure to justice, mercy, and wisdom, this type of engagement with light brings confusion.

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[120] Ibid., 16, lines 7-15.

Similarly, Rowe's poem "The Submission" describes a God who is absent and voluntarily removes the "light of reason" from his followers. Here, Rowe grapples with sorrow and anxiety while trying to follow God's laws. Despite her anguish, Rowe portrays God as a supremely benevolent figure, deeply caring for his creation:

> However hard, my God, thy terms appear,
> Howe'er to sense afflicting and severe,
> To any articles I can agree,
> Rather than bear the thoughts of losing thee:[121]

Looking past her pain and suffering, Rowe sees God as a truly benevolent figure, even though she continually struggles with unspecified trials. Trusting that the divine's terms, "afflicting and severe" are somehow for her benefit, Rowe sustains her belief that God's ways and plans surpass humanity's comprehension. Towards the end of the poem, Rowe fully submits to the will of God in spite of trial and suffering. It is here that Rowe describes a sense of emptiness when it comes to her relationship with God and narrates the extent of her emotional pain. But despite God's absence, Rowe continues to put the entirety of her trust in him:

> Ev'n I shall yet adore thy wonted grace,
> Tho' darkness now conceals thy lovely face.
> But, oh! how long shall I thy absence mourn?
> When, when wilt thou, my sun, my life, return?
> Thou only can'st my drooping soul sustain,
> Of nothing by thy distance I complain.[122]

Rowe describes the concept of salvation and faith as something to be endured and practised without direct contact with the divine. Stating that she will

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[121] Elizabeth Singer Rowe. "The Submission" in *The poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737).* Ed. Madeline Forell Marshall. (London: Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 1989), 34, lines 1-4.
[122] Ibid., 34, lines 17-22.

continue to "adore thy wonted grace" despite the fact that "darkness now conceals thy lovely face", Rowe no longer feels the presence of God but feels compelled to continue in the act of worship. Rowe's God in "The Submission" is inactive, absent, and silent. Comparing her spiritual life to the darkness of night, Rowe refers to God as "her sun" and "life", anticipating his inevitable return like the transition from midnight to morning. Here, Rowe is expectant that God will eventually speak in her sorrow and distress, relieving anxieties and troubles.

Additionally, many of the Cambridge Platonists question the relationship of sin and salvation. John Norris also considered the mechanics of divine illumination and looked specifically at the relationship between sin and salvation. Norris discussed the limits of human nature and original sin, coming to the eventual conclusion that mankind has both good and evil in its nature. In his *An Account of Reason and Faith in Relation to the Mysteries of Christianity* (1697), he writes,

> We have little more of that than the refracted Beams of the Sun a little before its rising, and after its setting, enough to make a Twilight, a Mixture of Light and Darkness, but such a Mixture as is very unequal, Darkness making the far greater part of this Composition… Let us consider that we have a darker side yet, and are subject to a Much lower Dispensation.[123]

According to Norris, people have a "lower Dispensation" and are predisposed to darkness. But what distinguishes his perspective from his Reformed counterparts is that he does not completely separate humanity from the dark despair of sin, instead stating that there is a "mixture of light and darkness". In doing so, he alludes to 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as

[123] Norris, *An Account of Reason and Faith*, 51.

also I am known."[124] Crucially, the darkness of ignorance is meant to be something that can be over come. His *Account of Reason and Faith* continues:

> This Excellent Person strikes Light out of Darkness, by improving even the Incomprehensibility of the Christian Mysteries into an argument for the Truth and Credibility of them [...] We are therefore to take the Words of Scripture according to their proper and most Natural Sense[.][125]

In this view the natural human state is that of limited understanding; he believes that the light of reason comes though the ability to perceive the divine. Using dynamic language, Norris posits that the individual is to take responsibility for his or her own improvement, striking the light out of darkness in a way that it not unlike God's act of divine creation. He contends that illumination becomes a way to dispel chaos and confusion, offering an answer to "Christian Mysteries". In a similar fashion, Rowe's poem "Soliloquy XXVIII" considers light to not only bring freedom from sin, but also relief from ignorance:

> Creating Spirit, speak the potent word,
> Let there be Light! and cloudless day will rise.
> Dispel the clouds of ignorance and sin,
> Banish whate'er opposes thy designs
> Of love and grace, and freely work thy will.[126]

Here, Rowe mimics the story of divine creation, giving the Divinely appointed "potent word" the ability to introduce light, eradicating confusion and sin. By setting the beginning of Genesis alongside the typically Reformed belief that true understanding comes through divine revelation, Rowe suggests that the nature of poetry and divine speech are somehow aligned. However, she also indicates that this light not only reveals the truth about God, but also illumines man's

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[124] 1 Corinthians 13:12 (King James Version)
[125] Norris, *An Account of Reason and Faith,* 299-302.
[126] Elizabeth Rowe, "Soliloquy XXVIII", *MW,* 1:224, lines 1-8.

innate ability to reason. Like Norris, Rowe's concept of light is one that works to banish chaos and confusion, ushering in a new way to perceive the world and understand man's own relationship to his sinful nature. Unlike those who posited that divine revelation was necessary for understanding truths about God, Norris subscribed to the belief that mankind has the innate ability to reason, proving sufficient for a proper interpretation of scripture.

For Norris, the natural human state is that of limited understanding and he believes that the light of reason, the product of an "Excellent Person" comes though the mind's ability to perceive the divine. Unlike Calvinists who posited that divine revelation was necessary for understanding truths about God, Norris subscribes to the belief that mankind has the innate ability to reason, proving sufficient for a proper interpretation of scripture.

Rowe's Canticles

Rowe's religious poems more widely consider both the Reformed and Cambridge Platonist views of human depravity, divine revelation, and reason. Throughout Rowe's poetry, metaphors of darkness and light are developed as a means to discuss the interaction between depravity and enlightenment, innate reason and divine revelation. In this section, I discuss "A Paraphrase on the Canticles" as a representative example of the way that she negotiates these conflicting views on human depravity. The darkness of human depravity and the light of reason were major themes interspersed throughout Rowe's religious poems. However in "Canticles", darkness and light take on a host of characteristics that are linked to the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists and Reformed theology in respect to the limits of depravity.

Consequentially, tension between Reformed theology and the beliefs of the Cambridge Platonists manifests as Rowe considers these differing

theological and philosophical traditions. Poems such as "A Paraphrase on the Canticles" transform from and materialise as fraught with contradiction and perpetually changing perspective. To this effect, Harriet Guest writes,

> The poets of religion in the eighteenth century […] become more concerned with clarity, with the perceived need to address a general and heterogeneous audience, at the same time as poets less directly concerned with religious issues acknowledge that their poetry has become 'vocal' only to a small and select group. In the poetry of the first half of the century we can trace the tensions – between silent adoration and sermonic exhortation, authority and pious humility – that inform [both of] these developments.[127]

Guest's perceptive observation certainly rings true when considering Rowe's religious poetry. Rowe emerges as a poet of her time in the respect that her work ricochets between public and private, religious and secular, Dissenting and philosophical. But rather than merely illustrating this type of tension for a contemporary audience, many of Rowe's works invite the reader to participate in the struggle, working out their own interpretations of philosophy and theology for themselves. As readers, we are able to "trace the tensions" in our own way, caught in the middle ground between a Calvinist interpretation of human depravity and the Cambridge Platonists construction of human reason. The act of self-analysis and the expression of piety was a reflection of an earlier Puritan idea of religious culture that encouraged 'experimental knowledge' as a way to connect philosophical knowledge and biblical theology.[128]

Appearing in her first book of published poems, *Poems on Several Occasions Written by Philomela* (1696), and separated into six chapters,

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[127] Harriet Guest, *A Form of Sound Words: The Religious Poetry of Christopher Smart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 6.
[128] Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 36.

"Canticles" is a dizzying and unsettling foray into the mysteries of romantic love and Christian piety.[129] Closely mimicking the structure and subject matter of the original book of the Bible, Rowe's paraphrase sought to adhere to its parent text as much as possible. "The Song of Solomon" appears in the Bible as a celebration of sexual and romantic love, featuring the distinctive voices of a Bride and her Bridegroom. Traditionally interpreted as an allegorical representation of the love between Christ and the Church, "The Song of Solomon" has seen many different treatments in both prose and poetry in the Christian tradition.[130] Rowe's "Canticles" partially adheres to this tradition, but departs from conventional interpretations. Her poem focuses on the relationship between Bride and Bridegroom, ultimately questioning the role of sinful humans in relation to the Divine. Here, I take specific interest in Rowe's conceptualisation of the Bride, a figure who comes to embody human depravity. Through this characterisation, and using the apostrophic structure of the scriptural original, Rowe is able to compare this figure to the Bridegroom, a perfected figure and a symbol of divinity, in order to enter the theological debate over man's sinful nature.[131] Rowe's "Canticles" traces the intricacies and extreme emotion that often accompany sexuality and relationship dynamics, while also challenging conventional notions of the Christian's experience. According to Madeleine Forell Marshall:

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[129] Rowe was not the only one to convert "The Song of Solomon" into poetic paraphrase. *A Paraphrase Upon the Divine* Poems (1676) by George Sandys and *The Book of the Song of Solomon in Meter* (1676) written by T.S. were also popular and well circulated.

[130] Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714*.

[131] Paula Backscheider also takes interest in Rowe's version of "Canticles" in her book *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry* (2008), focusing on the practice of paraphrasing scripture as an "educational advantage" in comparison to secular Augustan poetry. Backscheider discusses the way that Rowe drew from the metaphors and imagery of sacred text, while also adopting and maintaining conventional poetic tropes. Despite this analysis, Backscheider does not go into particular detail about Rowe's characterisations of the Bride and Bridegroom nor considers their theological implications.

> The role of the Bride allowed [Rowe] to write passionately on theological subjects, speaking with real authority, sanctioned by the divine love tradition, for all people in their relation to God. […] Rowe was neither a morbidly depressed religious fanatic nor a sexually repressed female who channelled her eroticism into religious verse. The exemplary requirements of biography and the venerable conventions of divine love explain the portrait and help us approach the poetry.[132]

"A Paraphrase on the Canticles" allowed Rowe to develop her own poetic voice in an unusual way. The Bride appears not as a figure bound by sexual restraint, or more importantly, by the rules that govern polite religious expression. Rowe is able to experiment with theological positions, allowing different elements to influence each other and create tensions. The conflict between Rowe's inherited Calvinism and the Platonist view of human reason can be seen most lucidly through the symbolism of light and dark.

The language of sin and perfection, and its representation in the imagery of darkness and light, becomes intensified through the interaction of Rowe's main characters, the Bride and Bridegroom. Rowe makes it very clear that the very language of sin and restoration, reason and doubt innately lie within human experience. Beginning the poem *in medias res*, Rowe's Bride calls out to her beloved: "Wilt thou deny the bounty of a kiss,/And see me languish for the melting bliss?"[133] Immediately we see that the relationship between the lovers is not straightforward, nor a perfect union. The Bride appears as a figure unbound by sexual restraint, nor by adhering the rules that govern polite religious expression. In setting these two figures in a position of conflict, Rowe is able to experiment with theological positions, allowing different elements to influence each other and to create tensions.

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[132] Marshall, "Teaching the Uncanonized", 16.
[133] Elizabeth Rowe, "A Paraphrase on the Canticles" in *Poems On Several Occasions Written by Philomela* (London: Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in Jewen-Street, 1696), 36, lines 1-2.

Departing from the typical representation of a Bride as a "Bride of Christ" or representation of purity, Rowe's character suffers from self-doubt deriving from innate sinfulness.[134] From the beginning of the poem, the Bride explicitly identifies herself with darkness, considering it to be her intrinsic quality. In one of the earliest passages of self-description, the Bride exclaims, "I am black, tis true, for scorching in the Sun."[135] Immediately, we see the juxtaposition of the light of purity, the power of illumination, and the detrimental effect that this exposure has on her. Unable to face the intense light that we allegorically associate with the sublime Godhead, Rowe's protagonist laments that she has been turned "black" by its exposure, both externally and emotionally. At the same time, it is only by subjecting herself to the light that she can have a truly accurate perception of her state. Yet when subsequent reference to the Bridegroom is made, he is given all of the positive attributes of this light and his presence illuminates the darkness in the protagonist. With the Beloved's presence comes not scorching but healing, purity and clarity. This is seen when the Bride exclaims a few lines later, "My Bright Love shall all this blackness chase."[136] The presence of the Bridegroom enables the Bride to reconfigure her identity from something "black" or negative, becoming a figure of cleansing and renewal. The rhetoric of cleansing light and the absolute contrast between light and darkness are commonplaces of Cambridge Platonist presentations of a rational God-given mind. Associating darkness with mystery and imperfection, Whichcote makes a direct comparison between knowledge and light: "The more Mysterious, the more Imperfect: That, As Darkness is, in compare with Light; so is Mystery, in comparison with Knowledge."[137] Whichcote emphasises the

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[134] Revelation 21:2; Ephesians 5:27 (King James Version)
[135] Rowe, "A Paraphrase on the Canticles", 37, line 13.
[136] Ibid., 37, Line 16.
[137] Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms. Collected from the Manuscript Papers of The Reverend and Learned Doctor Whichcote*, ed. Samuel Salter (London: Printed for J. Payne at Pope's Head, 1753), 124.

"imperfection" of darkness, the mystery of the unknown. For Whichcote, darkness does not necessarily indicate total depravity and sin, but rather a lack of understanding.

An alternative view of divine light and sinful darkness is clearly visible in Rowe's characterisation of the Bride as she charts her anxieties and shortcomings, intimately displaying her emotions for both the reader and her Beloved. Throughout the poem, she questions her ability adequately to relate to the Bridegroom, acknowledging both the limitations and frustrations associated with loving and being loved by a perfected character. Many of the terms that Rowe chooses to describe the Bride appear negative, whilst again and again the presence of the Bridegroom ushers in a transcendent or restorative experience, signalled by the introduction of light. Rowe writes,

> When loe, a Glimpse of my approaching Lord,
> A Heaven of Joy did to my soul afford:
> So the dark souls confin'd to endless Night,
> Would smile, and wellcome-in a beam of Light.[138]

Making the analogy of the confinement seen in "dark souls" with the Bride's own helpless state, Rowe makes it clear that the Beloved not only brings physical light, but also the promise of redemption and restoration. This is an explicit reference to the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. Here, the "dark souls" are not merely exposed to night, but "confin'd" to it indefinitely. The Bridegroom's presence offers "a heaven of joy", a source of salvation and relief in the face of "endless night".

Curiously, on Rowe's conception of divine light, it is not expected to linger and her vision of emotional turmoil and happiness is marked by its inescapable revolution. There is no notion of the darkness permanently lifting in

[138] Rowe, "Canticles", 42, Lines 9-12.

this scenario, but the mere pause of suffering and pain. Concurrently, sorrow, darkness, and emptiness are only seen as temporary. In one particular circumstance, Rowe likens a troubled past and human sorrow to winter season:

> But hark, methinks I hear him softly say;
> Arise my Fair, arise, and come away!
> For loe [sic] the Stormy Winter's past and gone;
> And summer, Drest in allure Pride, comes on:[139]

Here, the presence of the Beloved represents a paradigm shift, an emotional change of season and temperature. Moving the Bride, labelled "my Fair", from a state of single-mindedness and resolution to a place of rest and peace, the Bridegroom's presence becomes the alluring and much-needed impetus to change. By acknowledging the "stormy winter" and remembering the troubled past of the protagonist, Rowe cleverly constructs the vivid imagery of a tempestuous season, something that has "past and gone". Although the ceasing of pain and suffering is seen to be temporary, Rowe has no qualms about longing for eternal rest and peace. Moving back to chapter two, she exclaims,

> Not for the World would I exchange my Bliss,
> While my Beloved's Mine, and I am His.
> And till the break of that Eternal Day,
> Whose Rising Sun shall chase the Shades away;[140]

Here, the lovers find perpetual joy and happiness in the inevitable "eternal day", where no cycle of light and dark or seasonal change can affect their relationship. In drawing the comparison with heaven and the "Rising Sun" of eternity, Rowe deftly weaves in the language from the Song of Solomon, where the poet declares that her love will remain for her beloved "until the day break, and the shadows

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[139] Ibid., 41, Lines 26-29.
[140] Ibid., 41, Lines 38-4.

flee away".[141] Exclaiming that "my Beloved's mine, and I am his", the lovers are able to find equality and peace in intimacy and togetherness. Fashioning a clear allusion to the joys and permanence of heaven, Rowe sees that only this timeless state can truly "chase the shades" of sin away and provide everlasting relief.

For Rowe, "Canticles" offers a way to discuss depravity in relation to purity and salvation. Through her portrayal of the Bride, Rowe is able to experiment with concepts of innate sinfulness, darkness, and corruption. Alternatively, she explores the relationship of the Bride to the Bridegroom as he brings salvation and enlightened thought. In terms of referencing the views of the Cambridge Platonists, Rowe's Bride not only becomes an embodiment of mystery and a lack of understanding, but also a figure deeply affected by the light of reason. Simultaneously, "Canticles" gestures towards a Calvinist narrative, casting the Bride as a depraved figure in desperate need of salvation and divinity's revelation. Offering a strong heterodox reading, Rowe's "Canticles" allow her to explore these theologies in a creative and discursive way.

This chapter has considered the influences of Cambridge Platonism and Reformed theology on the religious poetry of Rowe in order to demonstrate the extent to which she uses the medium of poetry as a means to convey complex facets of these philosophies. Through her portrayal of depravity and man's ability to reason, she develops a discussion on the nature of the rational mind and its relationship to divinity. Throughout, Rowe questions whether man can actually perceive divinity in a depraved state, or if divine revelation is necessary for such comprehension. As a result, Rowe's poetry becomes multi-faceted, a space to explore the limits of theology. Just as in Frome, where the irenic and theologically diverse community lived and worked in close proximity, Rowe's religious work allows opposing ideologies and philosophies to intertwine.

[141] Song of Solomon 2:16-17 (King James Version)

Drawing upon her religious convictions as a Dissenter, Rowe's poetry becomes more than a mere reflection of piety, or even of Calvinistic devotion. Instead, many of Rowe's poems become places where she wrestles with different types of philosophies and theological particulars. A great number of her poems display the effects of depravity and sin, looking towards heaven as a means of escape from an endless cycle of struggle. Additionally, Rowe draws from the philosophies posited by the Cambridge Platonists to further flesh out her concept of the soul and body. Both the Platonists and Calvinist traditions see the individual as composed of two distinctive parts: the body and the soul. Looking specifically at some of Rowe's other religious poems, alongside that of Henry More, John Norris and Isaac Watts, we can identify the ways that the body and soul interact. What emerges from this type of analysis is a complexity and tension in Rowe's religious poems, framed by both the Cambridge Platonist and Calvinist particulars. It is by considering the imagery of darkness and light in "A Paraphrase on the Canticles", alongside some of her other works, that we can most clearly see the tension between the Calvinist and Platonist perspectives on knowledge, the rational mind, and the ability of man to perceive God.

Chapter Three:
Dissenting Suffering, Narrative, and Devotion

In "Soliloquy XI", Rowe makes a powerful challenge to the "pow'rs of darkness", daring the authors of the "black indictment" to come forward and reiterate their accusations against the followers of God. Originally recorded in a Commonplace Book of Rowe's and estimated to have been written towards the early eighteenth century, "Soliloquy XI" employs not only the language of legal condemnation and court proceedings, but also vivid imagery of divine benevolence versus the "malignant pow'r" of evil.[1]

> Ye pow'rs of darkness, where are all your threats?
> Speak out your charge, the black indictment read!
> I own the dreadful, amazing score;
> But who condemns, when God does justify?
> Who shall accuse, when freely he acquits;
> He calls me blest, and what malignant pow'r
> Shall call the blessing black?[2]

With the act of accusing the justified of God with an unspecified "charge", Rowe establishes a heavenly opposition between the children of God and malicious earthly forces. During Rowe's lifetime, the conflict between good and evil would have taken on new meanings when considering the antagonism between Dissenters and the Established Church. In this poem, we can see the way that Rowe establishes the tense and fraught relationship between the "dreadful, amazing score" of God's approval with the "black indictment" of those who would disagree and punish those whom the divine would consider to be "blest". Both directly before Rowe's lifetime and during her childhood, the impact of the

[1] "Soliloquy XI", along with others in this series, can also be found in manuscript collection RP2151, held in the British Library. This poem first saw public circulation in 1739 with Theophilus Rowe's posthumous collection of Rowe's writing, *Miscellaneous Works.*
[2] Elizabeth Rowe, "Soliloquy XI" *MW,* 1: 203, Lines 16-22.

Clarendon Code and subsequent toleration stimulated widespread debates on the merits of allegiance to the Church of England, appearing in published tracts, sermons, legislation, and violence towards the Dissenting community. In particular, the Act of Uniformity in 1662 became a moment that saw thousands of Dissenting ministers ejected from their posts with many who failed to conform imprisoned. Rowe's own father, Walter Singer, saw imprisonment in Ilchester for failing to comply with the Act and it was in the gaol that he met Elizabeth Portnell, his future wife and Rowe's mother.[3]

In the act of documenting both their external experiences of suffering and discrimination alongside the interior and personal expressions of faith, Dissenters were able to not only find comfort and encouragement through times of difficulty, but could also create a wider literary community outside the confines of their meeting houses or private gatherings. This chapter explores Dissenting models for persecution and devotion in both poetry and prose, providing a critical context for Rowe's religious verse and depictions of suffering. Throughout this chapter, I consider the genre of prison narrative and subsequent Biblical examples for persevering during unjust persecution or hardship. Here, I begin by exploring the works of Bunyan and his contributions through works such as *Grace Abounding* (1666) and *Seasonable Counsel: Or Advice to Sufferers* (1684) alongside Rowe's attempt to provide an allegorical model of an innocent prisoner in her epic *The History of Joseph* (1736). Both Bunyan and Rowe borrowed authority from the Word of God, producing a dialogic interaction with Biblical texts. This allowed for not only the validation of experience, but also the justification for their particular beliefs.[4] For contemporaries of Bunyan and Rowe, the propensity towards narratives of

[3] Theophilus Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe" *MW*, 1: iv.
[4] Rivkah Zim, "Writing Behind Bars: Literary Contexts and the Authority of Carceral Experience," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (June 2009): 308-9.

religious imprisonment and the appropriation of biblical models served to build upon the textual authority of scripture. Accordingly, the Bible became a stable authority and a basis for predictable reform.[5] Rowe's creative writing worked to raise Dissenting experience into public consciousness but also provided her with the ability to create private meditations and personal expressions of faith. In doing so, she not only encouraged her fellow believers, but also provided a model of exemplary conduct in the face of undue suffering and persecution at the hands of the state. The intersection of divine text and "holy suffering" provided Dissenters with an interesting and powerful mode of textual transaction. Throughout this chapter, I consider ways in which Rowe provides the reader with a clear and vivid picture of imprisonment due to moral conviction. This approach also contributes to larger discussions surrounding Dissent and presumed innocence.

The literature written by Dissenters while under the intense persecution of the Clarendon Code and subsequent toleration provides a vital insight into the way they were seen by many of their hostile contemporaries.[6] The last decades of the seventeenth century also saw a revival of major forms of prison writing, a genre that had, for the most part, been dormant since the early days of the Christian church.[7] Dissenters, such as John Bunyan and Richard Baxter, largely published and wrote for a broader persecuted audience but also expressed elements of their own devotion through a shared suffering with Biblical figures. For those Dissenters who were incarcerated for their faith, the impulse to record their experiences and motivations for resisting the Established Church stemmed from a desire to validate their conduct in both the eyes of God and also their

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[5] Peter Goldman, "Living Words: Iconoclasm and beyond in John Bunyan's 'Grace Abounding,'" *New Literary History* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 472.
[6] Melinda Zook, *Protestantism, Politics, and Women in Britain, 1660-1714*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 123.
[7] Thomas S. Freeman, "The Rise of Prison Literature," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (June 2009): 133.

community of readers.[8] As a result, the persecution of Dissenters has serious implications for the understanding of early eighteenth-century life and social discourse. The failure to consider the exclusion of the Dissenting community and their specific experiences as profound motivators to participate in print culture reduces our ability to participate in nuanced and contextually informed discussions regarding the public sphere.[9] In the literature of Dissent, shared memories and experiences proved to be powerful forces in bolstering faith, courage, and resolve. Given their removal from municipal government and educational restrictions, many Dissenters found print culture to be a different and more accessible form of public life. A large number of Dissenters felt that writing and dissemination of their persecution enabled them to come to terms with events which had, in the words of N. Keeble, "overthrown them".[10] Through publication, faithful Dissenters declared their unwavering commitment to their faith amidst the changes of an unstable political climate.

I begin the first half of this chapter by exploring at Rowe's portrayal of the biblical Job. Mirroring many of the struggles endured by Dissenters in the late seventeenth century, struggles of which Rowe was intimately aware through her personal beliefs and community ties, the figure of Job provided an example of perseverance and divine reward for faithfulness. The suffering Job, alongside a colourful cast of biblical characters, was seen as more than a heroic type or archetypal figure, acting as precedent to direct the reader into correct forms of action. Accordingly, the Old Testament was perceived as no mere history, but a

[8] Dosia Reichardt, "The Constitution of Narrative Identity in Seventeenth-Century Prison Writing," in *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices*, ed. Ronald Bedford, Lloyd Davis, and Philippa Kelly (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 120.
[9] Tessa Whitehouse, The *Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent, 1720-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19.
[10] N. H. Keeble, The *Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), 83.

compilation of characters with actions worth emulating.[11] In providing representation for these characters and reinterpreting their stories through her writing, Rowe's literary interaction with Job also served as an example for good Dissenting practice and Protestant faith.

The second half of this chapter considers Rowe's epic *The History of Joseph. A Poem* (1737), discussing Joseph's role as a persecuted figure. In this section, I discuss Rowe's *History* and also examine the writings of her contemporary John Bunyan, making particular mention of his publications *Prison Meditations* (1683) and *Counsel for Sufferers* (1683). Here, I explore ways in which Bunyan and Rowe portray the prisoner, paying particular attention to the notion of innocence. Here, we see the popular trope of justification before a divine judge. Ultimately, the character of Joseph endures unjust suffering and comes from a position of hardship to that of ease and position. The story of Joseph highlights the diaspora of the Jewish experience, reflecting the hopes and dreams of Jewish life in Egypt. In the biblical story, the Jews are seen as living as a minority amongst great religious and ethnic diversity.[12] Likewise, Dissenters represented a minority grouping, enduring suffering and wrong-doing at the hands of a majority government. With legislation put into place such as the Act of Uniformity, those who did not adhere to the terms of Charles II and the Cavalier Parliament saw jail sentences and hostile persecution. Many, including Baptist minister John Bunyan and Rowe's own father, Walter Singer, were unjustly imprisoned for their unwillingness to adhere to the terms of the Church of England. Accordingly, many saw parallels with the biblical Joseph, particularly in his unjust prison sentence for doing what he believed to be right. With the further *Royal Declaration of Indulgence* of 1672, a great deal of direct

[11] Bernhard Lang, *Joseph in Egypt: A Cultural Icon from Grotius to Goethe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 4.
[12] Ibid., 26-27.

persecution to Dissenters ceased, with many of the imprisoned being set free. Again, Joseph's experience provides a Biblical and encouraging parallel to the experiences of Dissenters during this time, giving an example of the way that persecution under trial and unjust suffering has an ultimate end and heavenly reward. Rowe's account of Joseph continues on from a popular tradition of using Joseph as a model for moral instruction.[13]

Dissent and Persecution

In *Protestantism, Politics, and Women in Britain, 1660-1714* (2013), Melinda Zook explains that the insecurity of the government led to the seemingly indiscriminate targeting of all of those outside of the Church of England, making "curious bedfellows of once mutually hostile groups. Presbyterians and Muggletonians, Independents and Quakers, Fifth Monarchy Men and Baptists [were now considered to be] enemies of the state."[14] The discrimination and injustice committed as the result of the Clarendon Code and Test Acts manifested into something powerful to Rowe's family and the wider Dissenting community at large. Richard Baxter's *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696) recounted the severity of the Act of Uniformity and some of its immediate fallout:

> When the Act of Uniformity was passed, it gave all the Ministers that could not Conform, no longer time than till Bartholomew-day, August 24. 1662. and then they must be all cast out: […] When Bartholomew-day came, about One thousand eight hundred, or Two thousand Ministers were Silenced and Cast out: And the Affections of most Men thereupon were such as made me fear it was a Prognostick [sic] of our further Sufferings […] And now came in the great Inundation of Calamities, which in many Streams overwhelmed Thousands of godly Christians, together with their Pastors. As for Example, Hundreds of able Ministers,

[13] Ibid., 131.
[14] Zook, *Protestantism, Politics, and Women in Britain,* 18-19.

> with their Wives and Children, had neither House nor Bread: For their former Maintenance served them but for the time, and few of them laid up any thing for the future[.][15]

Here, Baxter details that the intensity of the Act affected "thousands" of Dissenters almost instantly, depriving roughly two thousand ministers and their families of financial security or the means to adequately feed their families. This language of suffering and persecution is central to my chapter, with Rowe's adoption of this narrative throughout her poetry. In the 1660s and 1670s, these Dissenting ministers and their families became the primary victims in the push against nonconformity.[16] Those who would not comply with the terms of the Act found themselves met with intense persecution and harsh conditions. Meetings were often broken up with the use of violence and prison became the destination for many who attended, including the women and elderly. Private property was also considered to be a dangerous place for religious meetings, as forced entry and abductions of Dissenting occupants became common.[17] The Act of Uniformity, while intended to be a legal procedure, had transformed into a terrifying and unpredictable assault on Dissenting communities.[18] During times of real insecurity in the government and Established Church, specifically the early 1660s and 1680s, zealous authorities not only targeted Baptists and Quakers, but were also known to harass moderate Presbyterians.[19]

In the aftermath of this religious and political upheaval, formerly opposed factions, such as Independents and Presbyterians, found commonality

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[15] Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, Or, Mr. Richard Baxters Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times*, ed. Matthew Sylvester (London: Printed for T. Pankhurst, 1696), 384-5.
[16] Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500 - 1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 63.
[17] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 221-62.
[18] Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, 76.
[19] Zook, *Protestantism, Politics, and Women in Britain,* 21; For more on targeted persecution and case studies related to this issue, see Peter Collins, "On Resistance: The Case of 17th Century Quakers," *Durham Anthropology Journal* 16, no. 2 (2009): 8–22.

in their exclusion and persecution under the Act. Shortly after its publication, members of these sects held a meeting at Great St. Bartholomew's in London and even took the sacrament of communion together.[20] This newfound unity would continue to increase as the government continued to marginalise and (erroneously) simplify their theological differences under the inclusive label of "Dissenter". Closer to Rowe's home and family, Presbyterian ties in Somerset, and particularly those in Ilchester, strengthened despite the restrictions placed on them. In August of 1680, James, the so-called "Protestant" Duke of Monmouth, decided to display his popularity amongst the Dissenters in the West Country by touring from Wiltshire to Ilchester. James was met with great fanfare and up to 20,000 were said to have met him at Whitelackington to show their support.[21] In 1680, Rowe would have been six years old and still living in Ilchester with her family. Although there is no record of Rowe's father marching out to greet James, the Singer family would have been well-aware of the political and religious upheaval that directly impacted their community.

With the Toleration Act of 1689, some of the sanctions that prevented Dissenters from meeting together and enforced adherence to the Book of Prayer were alleviated. In King William III's *Toleration Being an Explanation of that Liberty of Religion* (1689), he described the Act as something meant to provide both "Comprehension and Indulgence, for the different Parties, that must serve the Nation." [22] William's political position demanded the establishment of religious indulgence throughout England.[23] The idea of Indulgence, according to

[20] Zook, *Protestantism, Politics, and Women in Britain,* 19.
[21] Ibid., 55; George Roberts, *The Life, Progresses and Rebellion of James, Duke of Monmouth Life of Monmouth* (London: n.p, 1844), 318.
[22] William III, King of England, *King William's Toleration Being an Explanation of That Liberty of Religion, Which May Be Expected from His Majesty's Declaration, with a Bill for Comprehension & Indulgence, Drawn up in Order to an Act of Parliament* (London: Printed for Robert Hayhurst, 1689), 4.
[23] Tony Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 151.

William III, meant that none were to be "Persecuted for his Conscience".[24] However, it is helpful to clarify what is intended by the word "toleration". According to Alexandra Walsham, the idea of toleration in the late seventeenth century did not stem from ideals of neutrality or indifference towards Dissenters. She explains that the idea of toleration was not a right, but a "contingent and provisional" privilege that could be "withdrawn without warning" as well as an act of forbearance.[25] Walsham goes on to discuss the idea of a "finely graded spectrum and continuous cycle" of tolerance, indicating that persecution was a gradual and cyclical process that stemmed from stereotypes and "wars of words".[26] The Act of Toleration, while intended to alleviate the sufferings of many Dissenters, did not immediately remedy the tense relationship between these non-conformers and the established church.

This type of relationship between Dissenters and their political environment calls into question the construction of a literary legacy of dissent, compelling us to consider the stakes in recording these accounts. According to Sharon Achinstein, these types of perspectives are worth exploring, as they "underpin the broader story of […] how more people became participants in political culture."[27] For Dissenters, their convictions regarding the political sphere and their religious convictions become stronger, with their reluctance to conform stemming from theological distinctions and a conscious departure from liturgy posited by the Church of England. For example, the majority of Dissenters found forced adherence to the Book of Common Prayer and allegiances of fidelity to the Church of England intolerable. The politics of seventeenth and eighteenth-century England were deeply interwoven with religion. Religious

[24] William III, *King William's Toleration,* 5.
[25] Walsham, *Charitable Hatred,* 4.
[26] Ibid., 128-9.
[27] Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4.

questions formed many political agendas and framed issues of domestic and foreign policy.[28]

For many Dissenting writers, the act of writing incorporated more than religious symbolism. Instead, the texts that entered the market place performed on multiple levels, speaking directly to fellow believers and rendering the opposition with crafted and nuanced perspectives. Individuals like John Bunyan, Richard Baxter, and a whole host of ejected ministers aired their grievances through public print, describing their hardships and providing a justification for their nonconformity to the Church of England. As the Dissenters lacked free access to institutions of the national establishment, they were extremely motivated to construct print as a viable alternative that could ensure them a public voice.[29] As a result, prose and poetry, flooded the market during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, presenting Dissenting discourse to a wider reading public and illustrating the nature of their struggle against a hostile government. For many, their prime challenge was to "maintain commitment" to God despite persecution and hardship.[30] The subjects of suffering and redemption pervaded the poetry and prose of Dissenters in both prison and exile, appearing in literary culture from wide-spread publications from the likes of John Bunyan to privately composed and circulated ballads, psalms, and songs. Many of these works seemed to relish affliction and gloried in the idea that Dissenters were being tested by the Lord's "winnowing and sifting".[31]

A proper and dignified Christian response to the suffering that Dissenters received at the hands of their enemies became a critical element of self-definition, even to the extent that some religious minorities were thought by

[28] John Spurr, "The Poet's Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, ed. Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 162.
[29] Whitehouse, *The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent, 1720-1800*, 19.
[30] Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, 3.
[31] Matthew 3:12, King James Version.

members of the Church of England to have "thrived" on persecution.[32] The backlash against Dissent was severe, finding form in legislation, print, and hostile encounters. For the many Dissenting texts to hit the shelves, there were also a great number of countering pamphlets and books published on the evils of nonconformity to the Church of England. Shortly after the Act of Uniformity was enacted by Parliament, both government and Established Church officials began to publish their rationales against these factions. In a speech given in the Banqueting House of Whitehall by House of Commons Speaker Sir Edward Turner on February 28th 1662, Dissent is seen as a weakening influence on both the monarchy and spiritual health of the nation. Turner appeals to the King himself, appealing to his ability to unify the country under one theological framework:

> [Dissent] will be a cause of increasing sects and Sectaries, whose numbers will weaken the true Protestant Profession so far, that it will at least be difficult for it, to defend it self against them: And, which is yet further considerable, those Numbers, which by being troublesome to the government, finde [sic] they can arrive to an Indulgence, will, as their numbers increase, be yet more troublesome, that so at length they may arrive to a general Toleration, which your Majesty hath declared against; and in time, some prevalent Sect will, at last contend for an establishment; which, for ought can be foreseen, may end in Popery.[33]

Here, Turner refutes the idea of granting Dissenters any form of indulgence on the grounds that it weakens the Protestant confession at large and could potentially destabilize the country, leading to Popery:

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[32] Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, 213.

[33] House of Commons, England and Wales, *The Votes and Orders of the Honourable House of Commons Passed February 25 & 26, 1662 upon Reading His Majesties Gracious Declaration & Speech Together with Their Reasons and Address Humbly Presented to His Majesty* (London: Printed by John Bill and Christopher Barker, 1662), 10-11.

> […]It is humbly conceived that the Indulgence provided will be so far from tending to the Peace of the Kingdom that it is rather likely to occasion a great disturbance. And on the contrary, That the asserting of Laws, and the religion establisht, according to the Act of Uniformity, is the most probable means to produce a settled peace and obedience throughout your Kingdom: Because the variety of Professions in Religion, when openly indulged, doth directly distinguish men into parties, and withal gives them opportunities to count their numbers; which, considering the animosities, that out of a Religious Pride will be kept on foot by the several Factions, doth tend directly and inevitably to open disturbance. Nor can your Majesty have any Security, that the Doctrine or Worship of the Several Factions, which are all governed by a several rule, shall be consistent with the Peace of your Kingdom.[34]

Turner considers the Act of Uniformity as the only way to secure "peace and obedience" amongst dissenters and Established Church, regarding any sort of tolerance or indulgence of religious diversity to be an affront to the national security and peace.

The Church of England has been described as a *via media*, an alternative to both Roman Catholic and Puritan beliefs. Emma Major describes this theological positioning as having "a virtue of its own that set it apart from other forms of Christianity."[35] For John Willes, the Church of England represented a "middle way", providing unity, moderate theology, and a bulwark against extremism within Protestantism as a whole:

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[34] Ibid., 11.
[35] Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33.

> Now the Church of England hath been Establish'd in a middle way, betwixt both extreams, and laid aside those things which on either hand gave the greatest Offence; by which means our Establish'd Church hath been look'd upon by moderate Men, as the very Center of Union and Harmony of all the Protestant Churches in the World.[36]

While the opinions of Willes and Turner seem moderated and reasoned, Dissent was also considered by many in Parliament as a means of sedition and violent insurgence. Even well in to the early decades of the eighteenth century and beyond, the idea of Dissent was considered to be something negative and potentially dangerous. During Rowe's lifetime, Dissent was still associated with the start of the Civil War, furthering suspicion that nonconformists to the Church of England were capable of staging a coup or overthrowing the government. The Civil War and Puritan rebellion against Charles I cast a long shadow, with many Dissenters under suspicion of inciting another uprising.[37] Many writers also thought of Dissenters as using particulars of their theological beliefs as a ruse for political activism.

In 1684, an anonymous publication, *Safety in a Tempest,* attempted to bolster the morale of marginalised and discouraged Dissenters by providing religious inspiration. Offering Dissenters an alternative source of mutual encouragement and support despite the inability to meet due to danger and persecution, *Safety in a Tempest* presented a curated selection of sermons and publications from Puritan ministers such as Richard Baxter, John Flavel, and Jeremiah Burroughs. The compilation of these texts, intended for individual

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[36] John Willes, *The Judgment of the Foreign Reformed Churches Concerning the Rites and Offices of the Church of England Shewing There Is No Necessity of Alterations: In a Letter to a Member of the House of Commons* (London: Printed by Robert Jenkinson, 1690), 6.

[37] Lawrence Kaplan, "English Civil War Politics and the Religious Settlement," *Church History* 41, no. 3 (September 1972): 307; For more on Puritans and the Civil War, see Glenn Burgess, "Was the English Civil War a War of Religion? The Evidence of Political Propaganda," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (1998): 173–201; S.K. Baskerville, "Puritans, Revisionists, and the English Revolution," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (1998.): 151–71.

edification and spiritual inspiration, provided an unconventional perspective into persecution and endurance during the early years of the Clarendon Code. In the introduction, the anonymous author made it very clear that suffering Dissenters shared the persecution of Christ. For the author, to suffer for a clear conscience and the freedom to practice their faith was to cast one's lot with the suffering Christ and to endure persecution as a true disciple:

> For any number of Dissenters to meet together in a solemn manner, to Pray and Preach and hear Sermons, is now become dangerous; but blessed be God there is no Law as yet that forbids the Reading of those Books which are written by Dissenting Ministers. Suffering is an unpleasing, but no unusual thing to the Followers of Christ, for we find them in all ages scorned and derided, Persecuted and Afflicted, and accounted unworthy to live. […] it is no wonder that Christians meet with Persecution and Trouble in the World, since our Lord himself, when he was on the earth, met with no better entertainment; they have been often charged with many horrid and malicious Crimes, so was our Saviour; they have been said to be enemies to the Church and State, so was he[.][38]

For those who suffered, the connection between the current "enemies of the Church and State" and Jesus' condemnation to death provided a sense of purpose and deepened their resolve. According to John Stachniewski, these periods of persecution for Dissenting believers appeared to provide a "certificate of profound spirituality", allowing the "spiritual credentials" of Jesus to also apply to their current situation.[39] This seen throughout *Safety in a Tempest*, particularly with the adoption of a Christ-like model of suffering and perseverance. The allusion to a faithful remnant, set apart for God's own

[38] *Safety in a Tempest: Or, the Way to Comfort in Suffering Times* (London: Printed by Edward Golding, 1684), 3-4.
[39] John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 44.

purposes and persevering through persecution for their faith, mirrored elements of John Calvin's theology and became an important component of Dissenting ideology, pervading their publications and engagement with print.[40] Seeing their suffering as a mark of divine favour, many found comfort and succour through their association with a suffering Christ. The authority of suffering ministers could also be enhanced, providing their imprisonment and persecution with incalculable impact. Publications that encouraged this sense of divine belonging, such as *Safety in a Tempest,* during the 1660s and 1680s gave public voice to conceptualisations of pain, suffering, and perseverance. Citing Isaac Ambrose (1591-1664), the author of *Safety in a Tempest* encourages the Dissenting reader to "suffer when and where you will" as a testimony and mark of adherence to Christ:

> Christ suffers then and there with you. Had Persecutors eyes, they would see this, and they would be afraid of this. […] Suffering Saints, Christ so loves you as that he suffers with you; are you in Dungeons? Christ is there too. Are you with Job on the Dunghil? Christ there sits by you; every drop of Blood you shed, goes to the heart of Jesus Christ. The Baptism of afflictions wherewith you are Baptized is Christ's; Surely he rather suffers in you, than you for him, or if you will say you suffer for him, yet know he sympathizeth with you in those Sufferings.[41]

Here, both the anonymous author of *Safety in a Tempest* and Isaac Ambrose make the connection not only with a New Testament Jesus on the cross but also with the Old Testament Job on his "dunghill". In combining the narratives of suffering from examples of a redemptive Christ and well-known Biblical figures, Ambrose provides the reader with the reassurance that their perseverance has been met with divine approval. By sharing the persecution and pain with Biblical

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[40] Ibid, 19.
[41] *Safety in a Tempest*, 45; Isaac Ambrose, *Media: The Middle of Things, in Reference to the First and Last Things*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed by T.R. and E.M., 1652), 499.

good company, one can be assured both of their salvation and heavenly favour. *Safety in a Tempest* also cites Oliver Heywood (1630-1702), further making the comparison of the suffering Dissenter with the patriarchs and heroes of the Bible:

> There are some so desperate in rejecting Gods favour, that they reject all that have it, the more God expresseth his love, the more they express their hatred, as Israel did mock Isaac, or as the Patriarchs their Fathers Darling Joseph, there is a spirit of envy that swells against such as are higher in Gods Books, than themselves in the hearts of wicked men; What envy wrought in the hearts of the Pharisees against our Saviour, because he said he was the Son of God? What Bedlam rage possessed the frantick Jews, against Stephen, when he said he saw the Heavens opened?[42]

Like Ambrose, Heywood also makes a clear comparison of Dissent with Jewish heroes such as Isaac, Joseph, Jesus, and the Stephen, the first martyr. Putting these comparisons into a public document and allowing them to have circulation throughout Dissenting communities, *Safety in a Tempest* offers a connection between private faith and public dissemination. According to Achinstein, this type of writing and publishing became a way to "withstand the pressures of oppression", allowing Dissenters access to public communication inaccessible due to government legislation. Presenting theological models, challenging the "libertine modes" of society, and creating a political legacy through public print became a central and defining component of Dissent.[43]

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[42] *Safety in a Tempest,* 95; Oliver Heywood, *The Whole Works of Rev. Oliver Heywood. Now First Collected, Revised and Arranged*, vol. 3, 5 vols. (n.p.: Printed by John Vint, 1825), 325.
[43] Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, 4.

Job's Model and Example

Beyond conceptions of suffering and imprisoned innocents, the figures of the Old Testament provided rallying points for Dissenting writers and lessons in perseverance. In this section of the chapter, I discuss the Biblical character of Job, looking at how Rowe and her contemporaries reimagine this figure for a public reading audience. I examine the connections between Job and Dissenting theology, as well as the nature of providing a public voice to his struggles and lessons in hardship. The mode of Dissenting creative writing can be seen to be both realistic and metaphorical, portraying theological abstractions and symbolism. Throughout this section of the chapter, we see the intimate and personal use of Old Testament narratives, with the individual's first-hand experience becoming an allegorical representation of the experience of saints and biblical figures.[44] In a separate mode from Bunyan's writing, the figure of Job is often seen as a suffering model that can be applied to a multitude of situations beyond Puritan narratives.

However, the story of Job's faith during divine testing is one that deeply resonated with the Dissenting community, with a multitude of poems, sermons, and hymns influenced by his example. Rowe is no exception, publishing both "The 38th Chapter of Job Translated" and "Job 19.26, Paraphras'd" in *Divine Hymns and Poems upon Several Occasions* (1704). The figure of Job, a Biblical character plagued by tribulation and hardship at the hands of the Devil, is a remarkable adaptation for a Dissenting audience in the respect that his awareness and perceptiveness towards his afflictions allows him to raise questions and doubts about justice, providence, meaning, and order.[45] The book of Job itself allows for the reader to not only look at the suffering and hardship of

[44] Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, 264-5.
[45] Jonathan Lamb, *The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6.

Job, but also to understand the divine machinations that cause his pain. Job became a popular subject for public Dissenting narratives, offering the reader a portrait of a suffering servant under heavenly affliction. In this knowledge, the pain, unrest, and sorrow facing the Dissenting community became palpable and recognisable not only to members of their own community, but also to a whole host of outside readers. Despite this representation, Job did not become an exclusively Dissenting figure; the Church of England also appropriated his struggle as a symbol of grace under affliction. However, the notion of a suffering servant, being tested by God, and not discarding good faith or doctrine, became a rallying point for many in the Dissenting community. The story of Job is, by nature, dynamic: evolving and shifting with a theologically transient set of readers.[46] The biblical account of Job regards him as "patient" through affliction, producing a divine response of pity and mercy towards the end of his story.[47] This section considers the role of Job both in Rowe's texts and broader Dissenting writing, including sermons published by Isaac Watts. I also explore Rowe's depiction of Job's struggles and how the articulation of his suffering echoes writings of several of her contemporaries, including Sir Richard Blackmore and Edward Young. Here, we have a sense of Rowe's connection both with other contemporary literary conceptualisations of Job, but also the ways in which she attempts to make this figure distinctive for a Dissenting audience.

For many Dissenting communities, the sense of suffering at the hands of ruthless authorities became a critical self-defining element. For many, these trials and tribulations became evidence of divine approbation, mirroring the Gospel's teaching that true disciples could expect to be repressed, hated, and despised. With the example of Job, many Dissenters embraced their afflictions

[46] Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent: A Study on Historical Counterpoint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9.
[47] James 5:11 (New King James Version)

with patience in the attempt to prove their allegiance to God.[48] In Hebrews 12:6, believers were warned that their faith would lead to being "chastened and scourged" for their beliefs.[49] This same perspective was held by the majority of Protestants throughout the years of the Reformation and later incorporated into Calvin's *Institutes*, continuing on throughout the majority of the nineteenth century in both Protestant and Catholic traditions.[50] In this act, they equated themselves with Old Testament Israelites, regarding their adversity as a sign that they were God's chosen people.[51] This emphasis on the suffering of God's faithful was reiterated by John Calvin in his *Institutes on the Christian Religion* (1536):

> It is the heavenly Father's will thus to exercise them so as to put his own children to a definite test. Beginning with Christ, his first born, he follows this plan with all his children […] Why should we exempt ourselves, therefore, from the condition to which Christ our Head had to submit, especially since he submitted to it for our sake to show us an example of patience in himself?[52]

The figure of Job became a symbol of constancy and faithfulness in a time of great distress. The book of Job is significant because it gives the reader a perspective on earthly occurrences and addresses divine machinations that drive seemingly meaningless actions. In the case of Job, God stakes the man's body against Satan's power but withholds the possibility of death. In the Biblical account, Satan confronts God, arguing that his continued goodness towards Job did not merit true faith. Satan challenges God to take away all of Job's family,

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[48] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 18-30.
[49] Hebrews 12:6 (King James Version)
[50] James Zink, "Impatient Job: An Interpretation of Job 19:25-27," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 2 (June 1965): 148.
[51] Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, 212-3.
[52] John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, ed. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel, vol. 3, 5 vols. (Munich: Kaiser, 1926), 8.

health, and possessions, sparing his life, with the expectation that Job will "curse thee to thy face".[53] Because of this challenge, the divine conflict between God and Satan falls on Job's shoulders: his faithfulness determines and decides a heavenly power struggle.[54]

For a devout reader, the understanding that there could potentially be some great celestial conflict, with their piety and faith as a deciding factor, compelled a perspective on suffering as something much greater than their immediate circumstances. In the case of the Dissenting reader, their sufferings and trials immediately became part of a larger divine plan, with the individual playing a major role in a cosmic power struggle. Accordingly, many sermons and theological writings revolved around a "right response" to suffering, with the heavenly machinations in mind. Puritan John Flavel (c. 1627-1691) emphasised Job's constancy and faithfulness, even likening his perseverance to that of the Old Testament Joseph:

> To this course [Job] was severe and constant, no incident occasions, how great or many so ever, could divert him from it. Neither was his holy Zeal and Christian care limited and circumscribed within his own Family, but was extended to the Souls of all in his Neighbourhood, who desired helps and means in the way of salvation. […] How many Witnesses to the truth of this are here this day. Like another Joseph, he provided food for your souls; he loved, honoured, received, and encouraged the Ministers of the Gospel in their deepest sufferings; gave them opportunities of service, when some durst not own them, and others violently persecuted them.[55]

Here, Flavel compels his reader to be "witnesses to the truth", citing Job's constancy as a motivator for enduring the trials that they face. For the individual,

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[53] Job 1:8-12. (King James Version)
[54] Lamb, *The Rhetoric of Suffering*, 31.
[55] John Flavel, *The Balm of the Covenant Applied to the Bleeding Wounds of Afflicted Saints* (London: Printed for J. Harris, 1688), 144.

the idea of remaining faithful to God, despite any and all adverse circumstances, functioned on multiple levels. Most importantly, it tied the seemingly minute and meaningless actions and thoughts to a larger and infinitely more complex heavenly order. According to Jonathan Lamb, this type of theology encouraged the idea of God's providence to become "dissipated within a system of reward and punishment that reconstructs a history of arbitrary moves tied to statements of certainty and the sensation of terror."[56] For a Dissenting believer, even the smallest act of obedience and forbearance had lasting and important consequences.

Because of Job's example and the manner in which God tested his faith, many saw the physical body as the primary agent of suffering. The body of Job, diseased and covered with sores, became the primary way for Satan's attempt to sway Job's allegiance to God.[57] Although Dissenters were not the victims of gross illness or plague at the hands of the Church of England, the imprisonment and mistreatment of their bodies found resonance within Job's experience. Rowe's poem "And tho' after my skin worms destroy this Body, yet in my Flesh shall I see God, Job 19.26", a creative paraphrase on the original verse, emphasised the destruction of the physical body alongside the eternality of the soul. In this poem, each verse emphasises the soul's ability to transcend the body, no matter what evil or pain befalls it:

> What tho' my Soul rent from the close Embrace
> Of this material comfort, takes her Flight,
> (Exil'd the Confines of her Native Place)
> And leave these Eyes closed in a dismal Night?
> She shall agen [sic] resume the dear Abode,

[56] Lamb, *The Rhetoric of Suffering*, 34.
[57] Job 2:7-9 (King James Version)

> And cloath'd in Flesh I shall behold my God.[58]

Similar to the teachings of John Calvin, Rowe establishes the body and soul as two differing entities. Calling the body the "material comfort" of earthly existence, the soul is something that "takes her flight". However, Rowe repeats the last line of Job's text, emphasising that a heavenly body will be restored and the soul will have a permanent and sufficient resting place after death. For friend Isaac Watts, both the soul and body were to be completely committed to God despite any circumstance. In a collection of his sermons on Job 10:2, he emphasises the body's role in persevering through persecution and difficulty:

> For when we have committed our souls and our bodies, all that we are, and all that is ours into the hands of our God, we can trust him with all; for we have devoted all to him: we can rest in his love, we can be satisfied in a kind providence that suffers us to be thus afflicted for a season, and our souls are all at peace; we can then believe we will conduct us by his grace, and through it be in a thorny way, yet it shall end in glory.[59]

For both Watts and Rowe, committing both soul and body into "the hands of our God" is a radical act. Like many Dissenters, the willingness to put their bodies in harm's way for their beliefs became a mark of profound faith and deep trust in the Divine.

The connection between the physical body and Job's suffering was also seen to have New Testament relevance, with the book of Job becoming a series of dialogues that had explicit ties to the coming of Christ and Jesus' resurrection. The connection between the restoration of Job's body and Christ's death became especially clear in Job 19:23-26, where many read these verses as having direct

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[58] Elizabeth Rowe, "And tho' after my Skin Worms destroy this Body, yet in my Flesh shall I see God, Job 19.26" in *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed by R. Janeway, 1704), 184-5, lines 1-6.
[59] Isaac Watts, *Four Sermons on Job X. 2.* (Bungay: Printed and Sold by C. Brightly, 1799), 26.

prophecy to the coming of Jesus.[60] Rowe's text also asserts this connection, making the comparison between the risen body of Jesus and the glorified body of the faithful believer:

> Tho' in the gloomy regions of the Grave
> Forgotten, and insensible I lye
> That tedious Night shall a bright Morning have,
> The welcome Dawnings of Eternity.
> My Soul shall then resume Her old Abode,
> And cloath'd in Flesh, I shall behold my God.[61]

Here, Rowe connects Job's redeemed body and Christ's resurrection, furthering the concept of the "flesh" as something that will eventually be restored for the faithful. Citing the "dawnings of eternity" and heaven against the backdrop of "tedious night" and "gloomy regions" of a terrestrial existence, Rowe's poem looks toward the "bright morning" of redemption and restoration. For those affected by the Clarendon Code and subsequent legislation, the intersection of expectation and belief indicated that God had a reason for their persecution and suffering. Plainly, everything had a purpose and fitted into a supernatural plan. With Job's story, many perceived their individual struggles as having a part in God's larger scheme. This perspective is also echoed in Watts' sermons:

> A saint believes that God afflicts not without reason. Faith always supposes there is a reason when God stretches forth his hand to afflict one of his children, and therefore Job desires that God would discover the reason to him."[62]

What is significant about both Rowe and Watts' conception of the individual's suffering and Job's narrative is the connection between allegory and experience.

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[60] Jonathan Lamb, "The Job Controversy, Sterne, and the Question of Allegory," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1990): 4.
[61] Rowe, "And tho' after my Skin Worms destroy this Body, yet in my Flesh shall I see God, Job 19.26", 184-5, lines 7-12.
[62] Watts, *Four Sermons on Job X. 2,* 42.

Throughout the biblical account, Job displays a level of self-awareness, demonstrating to the reader that he is cognisant of a divinely orchestrated plan and his placement within that narrative. Job is conscious of his relationship between truth, perception, and literary account. Specifically, the medium of writing and storytelling becomes a recurring theme throughout the text as Job struggles to comprehend his place within God's larger plan. For example, Job speaks frankly to the divine power about his perceptions, connecting aspects of literary culture with his own suffering: "Thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet;" and "thou writest bitter things against me".[63] Here, Job sees himself as an allegorical figure, acknowledging his place within both story and his realised experience.[64] In a similar way, both Rowe's poetry and Watts' sermons tap into the Dissenting perspective in the respect that the lived suffering of their communities went far beyond individual experience, connecting their lives and experiences within a greater cosmic scheme.

Similar to her conceptualisation of Job 19:26, Rowe's paraphrase of Job 38 attempted to connect the individual experience with larger allegorical conceptions as it looked at the relationship between the faithful believer and a divine creator. In the biblical account, this specific chapter has God speaking with Job, asking him a series of rhetorical questions that pertain to humanity's limitations and divine power. The image of God as a powerful creator, beginning an intimate dialogue with a mortal, provides an insight into the way that Rowe reimagined this exchange. As many readers found identification and common ground in Job's character, the authoritative voice of God provided both comfort and sense of greater purpose.[65] In terms of suffering and persecution, the

[63] Job 13:26-27 (King James Version)
[64] Lamb, "The Job Controversy, Sterne, and the Question of Allegory", 12.
[65] T.C. Ham, "The Gentle Voice of God in Job 38," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 3 (2013): 541.

rhetorical questions asked by God allow Job to look beyond his individual trials and glimpse into his larger work of creation.

Rowe's relationship to the character of Job and this particular chapter of the biblical account was established early in her writing life, having publicly started in 1696 at the age of nineteen with a paraphrase of the 38th chapter of Job composed at the request of Bishop Ken during a visit to Longleat.[66] Rowe's connection with Bishop Ken is particularly noteworthy and provides a significant insight into the ecumenical world in which Rowe inhabited. As demonstrated in the introduction and first chapter of this thesis, Rowe enjoyed an extensive and fruitful correspondence with a number of figures outside the remit of Dissent. A bishop within the Church of England, Ken was ejected in 1688 for refusing the oath of Indulgence to William and Mary. Following his dismissal, he took up a residency at the Longleat estate of Lord Weymouth, which is where he first encountered Rowe and became involved in her writing.[67] Ken is reported to have visited the Singer family "very frequently, sometimes once a week", seeing to Elizabeth's education and cultivating a cordial relationship with her Presbyterian family.[68] Although there is no knowing the extent to which Ken influenced Rowe's writing style, the impact of their relationship can be seen in the types of poetry and prose that she produced. Henry Stecher considers Ken to be a major force behind Rowe's movement away from her early forays into Pastoral poetry and into more serious and theologically dense pieces.[69] A pious and prayer-like tone became a characteristic of Ken's creative writing,

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[66] Theophilus Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe" in *MW,* 1:xvii.
[67] Hugh Rice, *Thomas Ken: Bishop and Non-Juror* (London: SPCK, 1958), 177.
[68] Edward Hayes Plumptre, *The Life of Thomas Ken, D.D., Bishop of Bath and Wells*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (London: Isbister, 1889), 297.
[69] Henry Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome: A Study in Eighteenth-Century English Pietism* (Frankfurt: Herbert Lang, 1973), 68.

something that Rowe also adopted and cultivated throughout her own writing career.[70]

Ken, a non-juring bishop, had also written on suffering and overcoming trials. Three years after the initial composition of Rowe's paraphrase, Ken published *The Royal Sufferer: A Manual of Meditations and Devotions* in 1699. Ken had initially intended this manual to be used by the Royal Family at an unspecified date and later committed it to the press in 1699. In his *Manual*, Ken reiterates the role of Job as a marker of perseverance and constancy:

> Now that we are Try'd in the Furnace of Affliction, we may have good hopes of coming forth like Gold, refined and made better; but if we faint in this Day of our Adversity, it will argue our Strength is but small. And first, The Example of Job is Illustrious, who was not more Eminent for his Riches than his Piety, which was so very remarkable, that he was the Nonsuch of his Age, the very boast of Heaven: Hast thou considered my Servant Job, says the Almighty, that there is none like him, a Perfect and an Upright Man, one that Feareth God, and Escheweth Evil? What Man cou'd [sic] have a fairer Character, especially considering who it was that gave it?[71]

Ken considered the trials and sufferings of the mortal life to be a "Furnace of Affliction", a method for refining piety and increasing devotion. For Ken, Job is also considered a model of divine perseverance, the "very boast of Heaven" and an example of faithful patience under difficult situations. Despite Rowe's connection of Job with Dissenting struggle, Ken's adaption is broader in the sense that he applies Job's example to a multitude of difficult situations and trials.

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[70] Ibid., 70.
[71] Thomas Ken, *The Royal Sufferer: A Manual of Meditations and Devotions. Written for the Use of a Royal, Tho' Afflicted Family* (London: n.p., 1699), 36.

Rowe and Ken were not the only writers to reimagine Job's struggle. For many who adhered to the Church of England, Job's conversation with God became an imaginative discourse between individual believer and the divine. Contemporaries such as Edward Young and Sir Richard Blackmore published Biblical paraphrase or poems based on Scripture, with the figure of Job taking up a significant part of their creative reinterpretations. Theophilus Rowe's biography lists both Blackmore and Young among Rowe's friendship and correspondence group.[72] The character of Job, especially the 38th chapter, became a popular topic for those seeking to paraphrase scripture. In the poem, Rowe explores the passage where God directly questions Job's knowledge and assumption of Divine Will:

> And tell me then what might thing thou wast,
> When to the world my potent word gave birth,
> And fix'd the centre of the floating earth?
> Didst thou assist with one designing thought,
> Or my idea's rectify in ought,
> When from confusion I this order brought?[73]

In Rowe's paraphrase, she employs the rich imagery of literary creativity, with God's "word" having the power to give "birth" to the universe and setting the base of the world, the "centre of a floating earth". As God questions Job and his ability to assist with a "designing thought", Rowe makes it clear that the act described in Genesis were, indeed, artistic ones. In Edward Young's *A Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job* (1736), he employs similar imagery to Rowe:

> Where didst Thou dwell at Nature's early Birth?
> Who laid Foundations for the spacious Earth?
> Who on its Surface did extend the Line,
> Its Form determine, and it's Bulk confine?

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[72] Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe" *MW*, 1:xcvii.
[73] Rowe, "The xxxviiith Chapter of Job Translated" *MW*, 1:61, lines 8-13.

> Who fix'd the Corner Stone? What Hand, declare
> Hung it on Nought, and fasten'd it in Air?[74]

Here, Young's characterisation of God assumes an architectural voice, with references to the "Corner Stone", as well as the "Foundations for the Spacious Earth". Like Rowe, Young notes that the earth is a floating creation, a world "Hung […] on Nought" and "fasten'd […] in Air". Rowe claimed familiarity with Young's works, frequently quoting them in letters to family and friends. She even went so far as to dedicate *Friendship in Death* (1728) to Young, expressing "Pleasure and Advantage" from reading his "Poem on the Last Judgement", as well as "Paraphrase on the Book of Job".[75]

Many of Rowe's other collections of poems boast many examples of paraphrase and creative reinterpretations of Scripture, specifically *Poems on Several Occasions* (1696) and *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (1704). In *Divine Hymns,* paraphrases by Sir Richard Blackmore appear alongside those of Rowe, who contributed the publication of "The 38th Chapter of Job". *Divine Hymns* is dedicated to Blackmore, citing his writings as having "retrieved the Honour of Poetry, and rescu'd the Muses from that vile Drudgery they've of late Years been Condemn'd to[.]"[76] Blackmore, primarily known to history as a physician, also dabbled in the creation of epic poetry and philosophical verse. In 1713, Blackmore and friend John Hughes published periodical *The Lay-Monk* which featured his works of poetry and prose and circulated until February 1714.[77] Although Blackmore contributed some paraphrase inspired by Psalms to *Divine Hymns*, he also published his own re-creation of the book of Job in verse, *Paraphrase on Job* (1716). Blackmore's

[74] Edward Young, *A Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job* (Dublin: Printed by S. Powell, 1736), 7.
[75] Elizabeth Rowe, Dedication to *Friendship in Death in Twenty Letters From the Dead to the Living* (London: Printed for T. Worral at the Judge's Head, 1728).
[76] Elizabeth Rowe, Dedication to *A Collection of Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed for R. Burrough and J. Baker, 1717), 3.
[77] E. Hudson Long, "Notes on Sir Richard Blackmore," *Modern Language Notes* 58, no. 8 (December 1943): 585–89.

paraphrase of Job employs the concept of God as a skilled labourer, using "Strength and Skill" in creation and who, with a compass, "circumscrib'd the Space" allotted for the earth. Unlike Rowe and Young's interpretation, with the language of design and art, Blackmore points out physical attributes:

> Know't thou the Strength and Skill, that I employ'd
> To dig out Matter from an empty Void?
> How, walking o'er the solitary Plains
> Of ancient Night I found the wealthy Veins
> Of Stones and Metals, which her Womb contains?
> How for the Universe I mark'd a place,
> And with what compass circumscrib'd the Space,
> When from the barren Waste I took in ground,
> Enclosed it for a World, and fenc'd it round?[78]

Citing the "Stones and Metals", the digging out of the "wealthy Veins" of the physical world, Blackmore's version of God makes something out of the "barren Waste", becoming a craftsman as he "[digs] out Matter from an empty Void". Although the subject matter is similar to that of Rowe and Young, Blackmore relies heavily on a sensory interpretation of Scripture, emphasising the physical act of creation. In the preface to his *Paraphrase on Job* (1716), Blackmore explains exactly why he chose to paraphrase the book of Job:

> Job […] is a Hero proper for an Epick [sic] Poem, an Illustrious Person fit to support the Dignity of that Character: By the Instigation of Satan he is brought into miserable Streights [sic] and unparallell'd Sufferings to try his Constancy and Integrity. He appears brave in Distress and valiant in Affliction; maintains his Virtue[.][79]

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[78] Sir Richard Blackmore, *A Paraphrase on the Book of Job: As likewise on the Songs of Moses, Deborah, David on Six Select Psalms, Some Chapters of Isaiah, and the Third Chapter of Habakkuk,* 2nd edition (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1716), 177.
[79] Ibid., xxxii.

For many writers, Job's dialogue with God became the fascinating subject of paraphrase and creative reinterpretation. Attempting to mimic divine rationale and speech, these writings attempted to justify Job's suffering and illustrate the depth of this faithfulness despite adversity.

In Rowe's poem, she matches the biblical account very closely, scanning the original verses and mimicking the same rhetorical questions throughout the chapter. Similar to the original text, Rowe's characterization of God speaks directly to Job's feeble humanity and limited understanding, calling his presumption to an account:

> Who, and where are thou, fond, presumptuous man,
> That by thy own weak Measures mine woud'st scan?
> Undaunted as an equal Match for me,
> Stand forth, and answer my Demands to thee.[80]

However, the biblical account is far more direct, with God asking Job "who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?"[81] With this introduction, both the biblical chapter and Rowe's poem establish rhetorical devices intended to convey knowledge and power. According to Michael Fox, this "circuitry of knowledge" establishes a "special intimacy of communication", indicating a shared transfer of specialised knowledge from one party to another.[82] But rather than Job merely receiving the benefit of this divine wisdom, the reader is also made aware and knowledgeable by this dissemination of information. The rhetoric of Job 38 functions by speaking to two different parties. In the case of Rowe's work, the conception of God in her poem not only addresses the character of Job, but also speaks outward to a public audience. For those who endured persecution and suffering, this type of exchange showed God's answer

[80] Elizabeth Rowe, "The xxxviiith Chapter of Job Translated" *MW,* 1:61, lines 3-6.
[81] Job 38: 2 (King James Version)
[82] Michael Fox, "Job 38 and God's Rhetoric," *Semeia* 19 (1981): 58.

to the heart of Job's pain and hardship, giving vital insight into divine action through the words of the speaking character.[83]

Joseph, Prison, and Innocence

According to N.H. Keeble, the Restoration literary ideal was a "person of the world" who took full advantage of its offerings, enjoying friendships and climbing the ladder of success. However, Dissenting literature created a new type of hero, one who was "in the world but not of it".[84] As I will show, the Biblical character of Joseph exists within this classic framework. In this section of the chapter, I discuss Rowe's depiction of Joseph in her epic *History of Joseph* and Bunyan's depiction of Joseph as a good model for suffering. Rising from an unjust prison sentence and offered all of the riches of Pharaoh, Joseph forgoes the pleasure and greed of the Egyptian empire to serve the god of the Israelites. By transcending the comforts and expectations of success, Joseph not only honours his deeply-rooted faith, but also becomes an archetype for moral behaviour during adverse circumstances. In the figure of Joseph, many people found recognition for their religious, political, and moral ideas. The biblical story provided readers with a multi-layered mental image that rendered itself powerful and dynamic in the hands of creative writers. For Kathleen Lynch, these types of writings allow for us to reconfigure our notion of a Dissenting community, looking to the gathered church and jail as places that fostered a profound sense of belonging and purpose.[85] In terms of literary history, Joseph's story became a canonical model, supplying writers with archetypal scenes and plots to imitate. Bernhard Lang even goes so far as to consider Joseph as an

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[83] Ham, "The Gentle Voice of God in Job 38", 541.
[84] Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, 229.
[85] Kathleen Lynch, "Into Jail and into Print: John Bunyan Writes the Godly Self," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (June 2009): 274.

exemplar of a "true believer" and providing an alternative to the "lures of libertinism."[86]

In another anonymous publication written for a Dissenting audience, *Counsel for Sufferers* (1683), Joseph is also described as a model of good faith and practice, persevering and maintaining his innocence despite languishing in prison:

> Fear not (saith God) I am with thee, when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee: and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee: when thou passest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame, kindle upon thee. God was […] with Daniel in the Lyons Den; with Joseph in the prison; Jeremiah in the Dungeon. The Lords presence is with his, to the end of the wold. The presence of God supports under all burdens, and sweetens the bitterest cups of affliction[.][87]

Citing Isaiah 43:2, the writer of *Counsel for Sufferers* makes it clear that suffering, even suffering in prison, for the sake of right faith and doctrine garners the favour and care of the divine. Alongside Joseph's example, this writer also includes Daniel and Jeremiah, figures who were also wrongfully imprisoned for their strong beliefs.

Even outside the world of English Dissent, Joseph was still considered to be a figure worthy of emulation. It has been a longstanding Christian tradition to hold Joseph as a character of long suffering, perseverance, and virtue, with the writer of Hebrews referring to him as an example to follow and a "man of faith".[88] One of the early church fathers, Saint Ambrose, considered Joseph to be not only a model of suffering in the face of unjust persecution, but also as a form of Christ:

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[86] Lang, *Joseph in Egypt*, 118.
[87] *Counsel for Sufferers, or Helps Under Sufferings From.* (London: Printed for Joseph Hall, 1683), 35.
[88] Hebrews 11:22 (King James Version)

> Joseph was sold, Jesus Christ was bought, the one to slavery, the Other to death. O detestable inheritance, O deadly sale, which either sells a brother to suffering or sets a price on the Lord to destroy Him, the Purchaser of the salvation of all. […] For both in the patriarch Joseph was there a type of Christ, and Christ Himself came in the truth of His Body, "Who counted it not robbery that He should be equal with God, but took on Him the form of a servant," because of our fall, that is to say, taking slavery upon Himself and not shrinking from suffering.[89]

Here, Saint Ambrose draws lines of comparison between Jesus and Joseph through their shared bondage, one through physical chains and the other through his human body. Referencing Joseph's trafficking into Egypt and slavery to Potiphar, Saint Ambrose likens Jesus' death to a type of prison sentence. Quoting Philippians 2: 6-7, Saint Ambrose perpetuates the connection between Jesus' deity and the "likeness of men" that he endured.[90]

The religious literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth century considered the story of Joseph to be something positive and an exemplar for fellow believers, following on from an established Christian tradition. Many of these narratives and creative reinterpretations chose to emphasise a variety of virtues, ranging from forgiveness and self-control, to perseverance and piety.[91] The story of Joseph enjoyed a wide range of interpretations from a variety of authors before, during, and after Rowe's lifetime. Religious leaders across the continuum of Christianity have used his story in a multitude of commentaries, epic poems, and biblical paraphrase. According to lists found in Fischer's *Handbuch zu Thomas Manns "Josephsromanen"*, over 110 titles pertaining to the

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[89] Saint Ambrose, "Chapter XVII" in *Ambrose: Selected Works and Letters,* Book II (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 399.
[90] Philippians 2:6-7 (King James Version)
[91] Deborah Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti: Sacred Drama and Biblical Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 127-8.

biblical story of Joseph were published between 1600 and 1800, spanning multiple languages and genres.[92]

This association of Joseph with the suffering Christ resonated deeply with Dissenters, especially his experience of prison. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Rowe was privy to the imprisonment and dissenting suffering under the Clarendon Code, the effects of which had a direct impact on her family's history and wider religious community.[93] Rowe's *History of Joseph* primarily takes its storyline from the biblical tale of Joseph as described in Genesis 37-47, with the character of Joseph moving from a state of destitution, languishing in prison for a crime he did not commit, to the height of political power as an advisor and dream interpreter to the pharaoh. First published in 1736, Rowe's epic *The History of Joseph. A Poem* became a publishing success, going through several editions throughout the eighteenth century.[94] Rowe originally conceived her epic to have eight books, the second edition in 1737 saw an expansion into an ambitious ten-book epic.

In an undated letter to friend and patron Frances Thynne, Rowe reflects on the unusual way that her *History* found its way to print, making particular note of the influencing role played by friends and correspondents:

> By the partiality of some of my acquaintance, the poem of *Joseph* has been so often transcribed, and is got into so many hands, that I have been at last flatter'd or teiz'd [sic] into a consent to let it be publish'd, on the condition that the author is never known or nam'd. As for success, I have no manner of vanity or concern: I

[92] Bernd-Jürgen Fischer, *Handbuch zu Thomas Manns "Josephsromanen"* (Tübingen: Franke, 2002), 236-73.
[93] Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe" in *MW,* 1:iv.
[94] Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 105–106.

> am as proud of adjusting a tulip or a butterfly in a right position on a screen, as of writing heroics.[95]

Reluctantly considering herself to be "flatter'd" into making her manuscript public, Rowe makes it clear that personal pride and recognition are not a factor in her creation of "heroics". Stating that she would never wish for herself to be "known or nam'd", Rowe's authorial relationship with her *History* is anything but straightforward. However, in a biography written by Theophilus Rowe in 1739, we learn that Rowe's *History* went through significant revisions, with some not of her own design. Originally written during her earlier career, Rowe's "History" was not made known to her acquaintances until much later in life, where it was widely circulated and copied by many hands. Originally conceived to end with Joseph's marriage in the eighth book of the *History,* Frances Thynne made requests for the story to continue, for the relationship between Joseph and his brothers to see a happy and reconciled end. Ultimately, Rowe listened to Thynne and added two extra books of the extended storyline, with a new version published in the months before her own death.[96] Rowe's relationship with her own work calls into question her authorial intent and authority. How are we, as modern readers, to interpret this piece, given Rowe's self-conscious and fractured relationship to it?

The representation of innocence in publications meant specifically for a Dissenting reader is significant in the respect that it provided them with the reassurance that their fight for their faith was not in vain. Depicting an innocent in prison was nothing new for Dissenting writers during the years of the Act of Uniformity and beyond. In particular, the publications of John Bunyan found resonance and circulation within non-conforming circles. His arrest on November 12, 1660 for leading a secret religious service in Bedfordshire

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[95] Elizabeth Rowe to Frances Thynne, n.d., "Letter CI", *MW,* 2:176-7.
[96] Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe" *MW,* 1:35-36.

brought about a harrowing indictment, examination, and sentencing process that profoundly shaped his literary and theological writings. Despite being marked as socially inferior, mocked, and belittled, Bunyan displayed a formidable knowledge of scripture passages and infused his writing with messages of perseverance.[97] Kathleen Lynch argues that for a writer like Bunyan, his writings actually enabled him to " exemplify the faithful Christian" and gave him moral authority due to his incarceration.[98] His exemplary story became a unifying factor for Dissenting communities. This legacy often appeared in the form of the prison narrative, with the most notable pieces coming from the jail cell of John Bunyan. Works such as *Grace Abounding* and *Pilgrim's Progress* were works that first found inspiration during his incarceration for his dissenting beliefs.

Rowe's *History* paid considerable attention to the unjustness of Joseph's prison sentence at the hands of Potiphar. In Rowe's *History*, he is sent to jail for an attempted rape that he did not commit. While lingering in jail, Rowe goes to great lengths to show that he is innocent both in the eyes of God and man:

> Some God, he cries, who innocence defends,
> Some God in that propitious light descends.
> This stranger sure, whate'er the fact can be,
> Alledg'd against him, from the guilt is free.
> The sacred vision to the youth appears,
> His spirits with celestial fragrance chears. [sic]
> His heav'nly smiles would ev'n despair controul, [sic]
> And with immortal rapture fill the soul.[99]

In a scene of divine visitation, the character of Joseph finds himself greeted by the angel Gabriel during his unjust imprisonment. Describing the "immortal

[97] Laura Knoppers, "Bunyan's Judges," *Bunyan Studies* 19 (2015): 56.
[98] Lynch, "Into Jail and into Print", 289.
[99] Elizabeth Rowe, *The History of Joseph. A Poem* (London: Printed for T. Worrall, 1736), Book VII, 58-9, lines 7-14.

rapture" of Joseph and the encouragement that Gabriel provides, Rowe makes the matter of his "innocence" beyond question. Despite all that is "alledg'd against him", both Gabriel and Joseph know that he is blameless before God. Quick to note his guiltless conscience and God's favour, Rowe's inclusion of Gabriel becomes a symbol of Joseph's moral conduct and a reminder to the reader that his faith, despite imprisonment, will not be forgotten.

What is significant in respect to Rowe's conceptualisation of Joseph in prison and Bunyan's prison writing is the portrayal of an innocent, at the mercy of a corrupt and powerful governing force. These narratives consider the way that faith, and in particular the Dissenting faith, came to be at odds with a political system. Like other Dissenting ministers across a theological spectrum, Bunyan felt the need to justify the suffering of his community during a time where many of them were imprisoned or impoverished by severe and unevenly applied laws.[100] In his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), he takes great pains to justify his incarceration while also providing the Dissenting reader with encouragement:

> I was indicted for an Upholder and Maintainer of unlawful Assemblies and Conventicles, and for not conforming to the National Worship of the Church of England; and after some conference there with the Justices, was sentenced to perpetual banishment because I refused to Conform. […] In which condition I have continued with much content through Grace, but have met with many turnings and goings upon my heart both from the Lord, Satan, and my own corruptions; by all which (glory be to Jesus Christ) I have also received, among many things, much conviction, instruction, and understanding[.][101]

[100] John Knott, "Bunyan and Holy Community," *Studies in Philology* 80, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 207.
[101] John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, Or, A Brief and Faithful Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ, to His Poor Servant John Bunyan* (London: Printed by George Larkin, 1666), 87.

For many Dissenters, the prison became a conceptual and physical locus where they could engage with questions of loyalty and their own identity. Although both the prison and prisoner were traditionally portrayed as disgraceful and irreligious elsewhere, many of the writings that came from imprisoned dissenters generated devout and dutiful portrayals of Dissent.[102] As a result, prison writing shows us how Dissenters understood a multitude of discourses, subverting typical genres as a means to encourage and strengthen community ties. As many were literate and motivated to write, the incarcerated Dissenters had a strong desire to win sympathy, justify their civil disobedience, and unify their supporters on the outside.[103] Many works of personal devotion were generally not subject to suppression, which allowed Bunyan's writing to find its way to press without censorship. The core of the target market for types of publications such as these came from anxious family and friends with the addition of members of the larger Dissenting community. In the several early publications that announced his incarceration, Bunyan is often referred to as the "Prisoner of Hope".[104]

In the case of Bunyan, the commitment to his Dissenting faith and convictions gave his prison writings a dynamic and vibrant flair. Rather than agreeing to recant his statements of faith or conforming to the Church of England, Bunyan's time in prison only worked to strengthen his resolve and sharpen the rhetoric of those texts that came from his cell.[105] In particular, Bunyan's *Seasonable Counsel: Or Advice to Sufferers* (1684) demonstrated how

[102] Jerome de Groot, "Prison Writing, Writing Prison during the 1640s and 1650s," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (June 2009): 194.
[103] Thomas S. Freeman, "The Rise of Prison Literature," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (June 2009): 134.
[104] Lynch, "Into Jail and into Print": 274.
[105] N.H. Keeble, "Bunyan's King," *Bunyan Studies* 19 (2015): 21.

and why suffering should be endured, concluding that difficulty was sent by God for a reason and could not affect the soul.[106]

> It is a great delight to our God to see his people hold fast their integrity, and not to deny his Name when under such cloudy dispensations, and discouraging circumstances. And considerations that they are thus doing is pleasing in his sight thorough Christ, will be a support unto thee. God sees thee, though thou canst not now see him, and he observeth now thy way, though darkness is round about him: and when he hath tryed thee, thou shalt come forth like Gold.[107]

This notion of integrity during moments of "cloudy dispensation" became a hallmark of Bunyan's prison writing, emphasising both innocence and divine trial. Rather than inducing a sense of penitence and remorse, the prison only served to strengthen conviction and deepen a sense of divine right. As a result, Bunyan's writings provided a model where the confinement could be conceived to be a religious trial, ordained by God for the soul's purification.[108] Bunyan considered meditations on the lives of biblical figures to be crucially important, using their faithfulness and perseverance as a model for a right response to suffering and persecution.[109]

Throughout his writings, and specifically in his poem "Prison Meditations" (1683), Bunyan was keen to not only establish himself as a sufferer for good Dissenting practice, but also as the recipient of divine pardon:

> This was the work I was about,
> When Hands on me they laid,
> 'Twas this from which they pluck'd me out,

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[106] Knott, "Bunyan and Holy Community": 207.
[107] John Bunyan, *Seasonable Counsel, Or, Advice to Sufferers by John Bunyan* (London: Printed for Benjamin Alsop, 1684), 220-1.
[108] Freeman, "The Rise of Prison Literature", 136-7.
[109] Nancy Rosenfeld, "'Blessed Joseph! I Would Thou Hadst More Fellows,'" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, C. 1530-1700*, ed. Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith, and Rachel Willie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 538.

And vilely to me said,
You Heretick, Deceiver, come
To Prison you must go,
You preach abroad, and keep not home,
You are the Churches foe.
But having Peace within my Soul,
And Truth on every side,
I could with comfort them controul,
And at their charge deride.[110]

Bunyan's "Prison Meditations" establishes him both as blameless before God but guilty in the eyes of men. Branded a "Heretick" and "Deceiver" by those who supported the Church of England, Bunyan was accused of being the "church's foe". But despite this type of dramatic appraisal of Bunyan's beliefs, he still maintains a position of innocence, noting the "peace within" and the ability to distinguish the "truth". Earlier in the poem, Bunyan points out that despite the body's physical presence in a prison, his mind is unencumbered and free to worship and "study Christ":

I am (indeed) in Prison (now)
In Body, but my Mind
Is free to study Christ, and how
Unto me he is kind.
For though men keep my outward man
Within their locks and bars,
Yet by Faith of Christ I can
Mount higher than the Stars.
Their *Fetters* cannot *Spirits* tame,
Nor tye up God from me;
My Faith and Hope they cannot lame,
Above them I shall be.[111]

[110] John Bunyan, "Prison Meditations, Directed at the Heart of Suffering Servants and Reigning Sinners" in *One Thing is Needful: Or, Serious Meditations upon the Last Four Things* (London: Printed for Nathaniel Ponder at the Peacock in the Poultry, 1683), 2, Lines 53-64.

In *Seasonable Counsel,* Bunyan further discusses his perceived freedom from guilt or blame, despite the chains holding "outward man" and the "injustice" that he faces:

> God has his consolations for his suffering people, and those too such as are proportioned to the nature or degree of their sufferings. They which shall assuredly be made appear to them that shall after a godly manner stick to his truth, and trust him with their Souls. Joseph was cast into Prison, but God was with him.[112]

Here, Bunyan makes a direct reference to Joseph but also makes it clear that God was with Joseph in the midst of his cell and immoral trial. Nancy Rosenfeld considers Bunyan's use of Joseph to be a "moral exemplar", particularly in his "willingness to speak truth".[113] Bunyan's use of biblical characters in his sermons and creative writing allowed him to draw comparisons between himself and scriptural heroes.[114] On a larger scale, the inclusion of innocent characters such as Joseph within narratives such as these helped to facilitate community amongst the displaced, offering an alternative source of encouragement. This same emphasis on innocence is also seen in Rowe's text, as she pays particular attention to Joseph's imprisonment:

> Dungeons [Joseph] said, and chains I can defy,
> But would not, curst with your displeasure, die.
> This sad reflexion aggravates my fate:
> How shall I bear my gen'rous master's hate?
> Oh stay! At last my vindication hear,
> While by th'Unutterable Name I swear,

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[111] Bunyan, "Prison Meditations", 2, Lines 17-28.
[112] Bunyan, *Seasonable Counsel*, 210.
[113] Rosenfeld, "'Blessed Joseph! I Would Thou Hadst More Fellows'", 539-40.
[114] Ibid., 534.

My thoughts are all from this injustice clear.[115]

Bunyan's experience and Rowe's creative reinterpretation both portray prison as a place of deep spiritual benefit. Indeed, Bunyan frequently described the jail cell as holding profound nourishment for the soul, calling it a "consolation for his suffering people" and mastering the rhetoric of religious confession among the godly.[116] In doing so, he quickly personified the ethic of long suffering.[117] With the shared claim to innocence, both Joseph and Bunyan transcend the physical barriers of their cells and claim divine blessings. Rowe also depicts Joseph as profoundly benefitting from his time in prison, writing that he hears his "vindication" through the "Unutterable Name" of the divine.

Rowe's use of the biblical Job and Joseph throughout her creative writing is significant, providing a platform to discuss the dissenting experience and hardship during the years of the Clarendon Code and subsequent toleration. Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated Rowe's depiction of hardship and distress, along with its connections to the wider dissenting experience. Rowe's treatment of Job throughout her many examples of biblical paraphrase and poetry establishes him as a Dissenting model for perseverance and enduring divinely-ordained testing during physical periods of suffering. With her portrayal of Joseph throughout *A History of Joseph*, Rowe delves into the genre of prison writing and narratives of persecution. Similar to the writing of John Bunyan, Rowe's representation of suffering and perseverance through her poems emphasises innocence before the divine and an absolution of guilt.

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[115] Rowe, *The History of Joseph,* Book VI, 57, lines 203-209.
[116] Lynch, "Into Jail and into Print", 274.
[117] Ibid., 275.

Chapter Four:

Providence, Epic, and Devotional Writing

In her religious meditation, "God my Supreme, my only Hope", Rowe acknowledges Providence's supreme influence over all creation. Providence appears an all-powerful and pervasive force in both the celestial and terrestrial realm, citing control over the "Armies of Heaven" and "Inhabitants of Earth":

> Thy kingdom ruleth over all, O Lord, and thou dost according to thy Will in the Armies of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth: I confess and acknowledge thy providence. The ways of Man are not at his own disposal, but all his Goings are order'd by thee; all Events are in thy Hands, and thou only canst succeed or disappoint his Hopes.[1]

The concept of Divine Providence dominated wider Protestantism throughout Rowe's lifetime, appearing throughout her poetry and correspondence. Michael Winslip refers to providence as a "fundamental aspect of religion" for early modern England, irrespective of one's position to the Established Church.[2] Throughout the literature of the last decades of the seventeenth century, references to divine providence became a pragmatic consolation for events outside an individual's control.[3] This chapter discusses Rowe's continued use of providence as a major shaping influence not only to her creative writing and conceptualisation of the epic, but also in the private and intimate understanding of her own salvation. Here, I argue that providence is a pervading presence for

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[1] Elizabeth Rowe, "God my Supreme, my only Hope" in *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), 16.
[2] Michael Winship, *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1.
[3] Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2-3.

adherents to the Established Church and Dissenters following the Glorious Revolution, with a powerful impact on Rowe's creative and religious writing.

The first section of this chapter continues on from my discussion of Rowe's epic *History of Joseph*, looking at her adoption of Milton's narrative premise and characters in *Paradise Lost* alongside a comparison with other contemporary retellings of Joseph's story and stylistic influence from Joshua Sylvester's translation, *The Maidens Blush* (1720). I explore her construction of Joseph's holy lineage, tracing a familial arc from Abraham to Joseph as a way to illustrate divine providence. The second section of this chapter focuses on providence as it appears in Rowe's collection of religious meditations, *Devout Exercises of the Heart*. Written at various points throughout her life, compiled into manuscript, and commissioned to print through the editorial hand of Isaac Watts, *Devout Exercises* portrays providence as an intimate and personal part of Rowe's religious experience. Rowe's influence on other devotional writers' engagement with providence is key here, and I explore the poetry, diary entries, and devotional texts written by contemporaries Elizabeth Burnet, Jane Turell, and Sarah Savage. Rowe's use of providence throughout her *Devout Exercises* not only indicates the sincerity of her faith, but also signifies that it had a continuing importance on devotional writing well into the eighteenth century.

Definitions of providence within early modern Protestantism vary amongst modern critics, with many considering it to be a pervasive doctrine that had a potent impact on the individual's conception of their own intimate experiences and their place within a larger nation state. Alexandra Walsham considers providence to be a "single teleological thread which wove together past, present, and future", a framework for interpreting events from the national to the personal and a "blueprint for human history".[4] Richard Cust bluntly

[4] Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 9.

regards providence as "part of the mental furniture" for early modern Protestants, a ubiquitous theological lens through which to perceive both good and bad.[5] Similarly, Phillip Donnelly defines providence as "neither fate nor predestination", but instead the idea that God's governance of the universe will ultimately be for the good of the individual in an unexpected or unseen way.[6] This chapter builds upon Walsham, Donnelly, and Cust's definitions of providence, exploring Rowe's usage throughout her epic and devotional meditations. Rather than a mental framework or simply appearing as "part of the furniture", providence held deep and powerful ties to an individual's concept of divine power and an ordering of the universe in which they inhabited.

Unlike the operations of the classical Fate, the good or happy end became a distinguishing feature of providence for many early modern Christians. John Calvin's *Institutes* considered providence to be a fundamental component alongside the established belief in Judeo-Christian theology of an all powerful supreme being, supernaturally orchestrating forces beyond human control.[7] It is important to note that Calvin's *Institutes* were effectual throughout the Church of England and wider Dissent during the seventeenth century, contributing to a shared theological language and playing a powerful role in defining providence for a wider audience.[8] Walsham notes that Calvin devoted an entire treatise, as well as several chapters in his *Institutes* to providence; she refers to it as the "very kernel and keystone of Christian life and thought".[9] This ecumenicalism was also borne out through interpersonal relationships, such as Rowe's

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[5] Richard Cust, "Charles I and Providence," in *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England*, ed. Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake (Suffolk: Bowdell & Brewer, 2006), 194.
[6] Phillip J. Donnelly, *Milton's Scriptural Reasoning: Narrative and Protestant Toleration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 81.
[7] Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 8.
[8] Patrick Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft: Essays on English Religion in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York, NY: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 75-100.
[9] Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 8.

friendship with Bishop Thomas Ken and Frances Thynne.[10] Rowe frequently exchanged poetry with Ken and his influence prompted her to make her first attempts at biblical paraphrase.[11]

In their most recent and comprehensive accounts of divine providence, both Walsham and Blair Worden fail to explore its impact on the individual and spiritual lives of Protestants, and the ways in which it impacted those within the Church of England and extended to the wider spectrum of Dissent.[12] Many of Walsham and Worden's ideas regarding providence largely rest on the ideology of the Puritans and political circumstances surrounding the English Civil War (1642–1651).[13] Walsham describes providence as a theological concept "slowly mutating" under the advances of natural philosophy and epistemological shifts, retreating to the edges of the "intellectual mainstream" after the instability caused by the Civil War and Interregnum.[14] Here, Walsham primarily considers providence as an artefact of Puritan thought that failed to continue in popularity in the decades of the Restoration, weakened and diminished by the growing movement towards Enlightenment philosophy. Similar to Walsham, Takashi Yoshinaka considers providence as a doctrine weakened by political turmoil and an Arminian theological influence during the mid-seventeenth century, evolving as many continued to perceive history and current events as something "independent of God".[15] Yoshinaka even argues that providence "was no longer relevant to the development of the nation" in the decades following the Civil

[10] Henry Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome: A Study in Eighteenth-Century English Pietism* (Frankfurt: Herbert Lang, 1973), 60.
[11] Ibid., 87.
[12] For more on Walsham, Worden, and depictions of early modern Providence see Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Blair Worden, 'Providence and Politics in Cromwellian England', PP, CIX (1985), 55–99; Blair Worden, *God's Instruments: Political Conduct in the England of Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[13] Cust, "Charles I and Providence", 193.
[14] Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 333.
[15] Takashi Yoshinaka, *Marvell's Ambivalence: Religion and the Politics of Imagination in Mid-Seventeenth Century England* (Suffolk: Bowdell & Brewer, 2011), 2.

War.[16] Although Walsham and Yoshinaka consider providence to have limited influence in the decades following 1642, there is ample evidence to suggest that it continued to have a strong and widespread association with national identity and religious belief well into the eighteenth century.

Representations of William III and Providence

Many early modern Protestants divided providence into the distinctive categories of ordinary and extraordinary. Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* (n.d.) defines extraordinary providence as an "effect outside the normal order of nature or given to some chosen person the power of producing this effect", with ordinary providence as the process by which God "maintains and preserves that constant and ordered system". [17] Raymond Waddington notes that many perceived God's "eternal vigilance to work in tandem with his omnipotence", causing boundaries between ordinary and extraordinary providence to "blur" in the case of major political and religious events.[18] Accordingly, providence held a particularly important place in the conception and understanding of seventeenth-century political discourse. [19] For many seventeenth-century Protestants, the fifth of November held a particularly auspicious place in the annual calendar, marking key moments of England's deliverance from threats of Catholic rule. With the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 and William III's landing in Devon in 1688, November fifth became a providentialist explanation of significant national events.[20] Yoshinaka notes that the mid-seventeenth-century

[16] Ibid, 40.
[17] John Milton, "De Doctrina Christiana," in *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. John Hale and Donald Cullington, vol. 7, 8 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 340-41; For ambiguity regarding the dating of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana,* see James Holly Hanford, "The Date of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana," *Studies in Philology* 17, no. 3 (July 1920): 309–19.
[18] Raymond Waddington, *Looking Into Providences: Designs and Trials in Paradise Lost* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 12.
[19] Tony Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 31.
[20] Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?: England 1689-1727* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

politics considered providence as a marker of the "inscrutability" of God and a confident way of discerning the purposes of the Divine.[21] Accordingly, many Protestants during Rowe's lifetime saw William of Orange's ascension to the throne following the Glorious Revolution as a token of God's blessing and favour upon the English nation. James McConnel observes that Anti-Catholic sentiments regarding providence became "closely entwined with English Protestant identity", marking a "series of remarkable deliverances from Popery that provided [...] incontrovertible evidence of God's special favor for Protestant England."[22] Consequently, providence played an important part in an idealised vision of English nationhood, promoting an ecumenical and shared vision of national prosperity.[23]

Rowe's earliest foray into public print depicted William III as a divinely-appointed and providential figure, sent to serve and protect the nation from popery. Poems "Upon King William's Passing the Boyn,", "A Poetical Question Concerning the Jacobites, sent to the Athenians,", and "A Pindarick Poem on Habbakuk" all lauded William as a conquering hero, triumphing over the forces of evil. A similar perspective on William's divine right to rule and to conquer Catholic James II is particularly noted in biographies *Character [of William, Prince of Orange]* (1688) and *Character of his Royal Highness, William Henry, Prince of Orange* (1689). In these biographies, William was commended for his diligence, piety, and temperance, considered to be chosen by God and a "wondrous blessing by providence" upon the nation.[24]

Rowe also circulated works by other authors that supported a providentialist interpretation of national events. In a letter to Frances Thynne,

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[21] Yoshinaka, *Marvell's Ambivalence,* 38.
[22] James Richard McConnel, "The 1688 Landing of William of Orange at Torbay: Numerical Dates and Temporal Understanding in Early Modern England," *The Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 3 (September 2012): 544.
[23] Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 333.
[24] *Character of his Royal Highness, William Henry, Prince of Orange* (London: Printed for Randall Taylor, 1689), 6; Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution,* 54.

Rowe transcribed the entirety of an unpublished political poem by her husband's nephew, the name partially given to the reader as Mr. N. Munckley.[25] Entitled "On the Nuptials of the Prince and Princess of Orange", Munckley's poem presents William III as a political victor destined to rescue Britain from the hands of Catholic evildoers. Munckley considers William to be a providential answer to prayer for the nation and a divinely-appointed assurance of "bliss continued thro' each future age".[26] For a majority Protestant audience, the arrival of William III and the timing of the Glorious Revolution signified a form of divine blessing upon the nation, reinforcing a national perspective regarding providence and God's favour over England's return to Protestantism.

Providence and Rowe's History of Joseph

The Old Testament story of Joseph is often considered by Christian tradition to be an example of God's providence: Joseph is the archetype of a righteous and blameless man who endures unjust suffering, only to be rewarded for his faithfulness and patience. As we saw in my third chapter, Joseph's good conduct and perseverance under unjust persecution presented a classic Dissenting narrative, one where Joseph functioned as an innocent imprisoned hero while also the recipient of divine favour.[27] Lauded as a model of perseverance under trial and a figure of good judgment, Joseph's prudent actions as the Pharaoh's envoy proved not only to benefit the country of Egypt during a time of famine, but also preserved his own family in an extraordinary act of forgiveness. From his bondage at the hands of his brothers and unjust prison sentence through the indiscretion of Potiphar's wife, to his exemplary conduct and rise to indisputable power and position of influence, the story of Joseph

[25] Elizabeth Rowe to Frances Thynne, n.d., "Letter LXXXVIII" ,*MW,* 2: 155.
[26] N. Munckley, "On the Nuptials of the Prince and Princess of Orange", *MW*, 1:158, line 100.
[27] Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 249-50.

provided Rowe with a wealth of examples from which she can allude to God's provision through difficult and trying circumstances.

For Rowe, Providence becomes an underlying theme in the story of Joseph, a way of demonstrating to readers that God's promises to the Patriarchs and believers are binding, active, and sure. This section of the chapter builds upon my previous discussion in chapter three, exploring divine providence as it appears in Rowe's *History of Joseph* and engaging with contemporary interpretations of Joseph's story. I consider Milton's *Paradise Lost* and depictions of Providence throughout his text, linking Rowe's *History* through a shared pantheon of pagan and angelic characters. I also argue that Fracastoro's *The Maidens Blush* (1620) is a critical shaping influence on Rowe's epic, along with Bunyan and Flavel's understanding of Providence and Joseph's imprisonment. Texts from William Rose and an anonymous interpretation of Joseph also inform a wider reading of Rowe's *History* and give critical context.

Despite its popularity, it is unclear when Rowe's *History* was actually composed, as Theophilus Rowe's biography vaguely indicates that her *History* was written "in her younger years" and commissioned to print at the request of her friends:

> In the year 1736, the importunity of some of Mrs. Rowe's acquaintance, who had seen the *History of Joseph* in manuscript, prevailed upon her (though not without real reluctance) to suffer it to be made public. She wrote this piece in her younger years, and when first printed, had carried it no farther than the marriage of the hero of the poem; but at the request of her friends (particularly of an illustrious lady, to whom she could scarcely refuse any thing) that the relation might include Joseph's discovery of himself to his brethren; she added two other books, the composing of which, I am inform'd, was no more than the

> labour of three or four days. This additional part, which was her last work, was published but a few weeks before her death.[28]

Lori Perry theorises that Rowe's *History* saw its initial form in the early decades of the eighteenth century, writing that its topic and style "closely resembles" that of her other works. Additionally, Perry considers Joseph to be a "literary representation" of Rowe's husband who passed in 1715.[29] This remains to be seen or confirmed, as any manuscript evidence has yet to be discovered. However, it is probable that Rowe began to conceptualise her *History* in the early decades of the eighteenth century, continuously editing and refining her manuscript until its initial publication in 1736.

Rowe's familiarity with Charles Rollin's *The Ancient History of the Egyptians* (1730) provides an insight into a potential timeline of Rowe's creative process as well as representations of Providence throughout her *History of Joseph*. Given that Rollin's text wasn't published until 1730, it is reasonable to assume that unpublished forms of Rowe's *History* were influenced by Rollin's text and that it continued to see major revisions and manuscript circulation until 1736. In an undated letter to Frances Thynne, Rowe recalls reading Rollin's text and noting a connection to providence:

> I have always the brightest expectations from an author that your Ladyship recommends, nor have I been disappointed in *Rollin's* history; the first two volumes of which I have been reading with a true rational delight. His remarks on the conduct of divine providence are a proof to me of the author's piety, and thro' every page the delicacy and justice of his sentiments appear.[30]

Rollin provided a wide-ranging historical study of ancient Egypt, making particular note of God's Providence in the nation's history and its intersection

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[28] Theophilus Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe" *MW* 1:35-36.
[29] Lori Perry, "The Literary Model for Elizabeth Singer Rowe's 'History of Joseph,'" *Notes and Queries* 52 (September 2005): 351.
[30] Rowe to Thynne, n.d. n.p. "Letter XCIII", *MW,* 2:166.

with the Biblical Joseph. Rollin references an expansive "Providence which governs the Universe" and later connects the prosperity of the nation with the eventual arrival of Joseph's family.[31] Rollin makes clear that the "History of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses" had profound and divine ties with Joseph's continued faithfulness.[32] Likewise, Rowe's text emphasises the patriarchal lineage of Joseph throughout her text. Joseph's connection to his family is made particularly evident throughout this section when discussing Rowe and other contemporary accounts of Joseph's story.

Paradise Lost and Providence

Dustin Stewart argues that for many religious writers before Rowe's time and after, Milton became an exemplar for a type of "new poetics", one that conflated Whig political agendas, biblical paraphrase, and modern ways of enacting change.[33] While Stewart primarily sees many of Rowe's poems as harking back to Milton's individual poetic style and adopting elements of *Paradise Lost,* as we shall see, the links between Rowe, Milton, and representations of providence in her *History of Joseph* have not been fully explored. Rowe's adoption and use of providence as a major theme throughout her *History* deserves further study, particularly given Rowe's purposeful imitation of Milton's characters and plot elements as previously explored in the introduction to this thesis. John Shawcross has identified providence as an important theological component that "informs the total poem" of *Paradise Lost*, providing the "absolute means whereby the ways of God are justified to men."[34] Furthermore, Shawcross suggests that an understanding of divine providence to

[31] Charles Rollins, *The Ancient History of the Egyptians* (London: Printed and Sold by A. Dodd, 1730), 46.
[32] Ibid., 67.
[33] Dustin D. Stewart, "Elizabeth Rowe, John Milton and Poetic Change," *Women's Writing* 20, no. 1 (February 2013): 13-14.
[34] John Shawcross, *John Milton: The Self and the World* (Louisville, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 160.

be the logical conclusion after a "right reading" of Milton's epic.[35] *Paradise Lost* held an important place for his readers by referencing basic tenets of Protestantism and emphasising the external authority of scripture, all the while acknowledging the providential work of the Divine.[36] Likewise, Rowe's *History* reinforces scriptural authority by closely following the biblical text and appealing to a shared understanding of providence.

Not only were Rowe and Milton united through their conception of Biblical narrative through their epics, they were labelled as Dissenters in the decades following their death, albeit with different results upon their legacy and personal writing.[37] Both Rowe and Milton wrote their epics in a contestable ecclesiastical landscape. Milton's writing championed the cause of reform, particularly in regards to a need for religious toleration and the separation between church and state.[38] Rowe's immediate community and subsequent forays into public print saw the impact of the Clarendon Code, Test Acts, and the Toleration Act of 1689. Walsham describes this period as particularly unstable for religious minorities, as they were prone to "dramatic reversals of fortune that could transform them virtually overnight from victims into victors".[39] Both *Paradise Lost* and *History of Joseph* assert God's providence in an unsure and capricious political climate, exploring scriptural justification of divine action.[40]

According to Phillip Donnelly, Milton exploited the "interpretive openness" of scripture as a way to engender mass appeal and to leave aspects of theology open for interpretation.[41] Beyond Rowe's penchant for adopting Miltonic characters, her *History* also mirrors Milton in its relationship to

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[35] Ibid, 269.
[36] Donnelly, *Milton's Scriptural Reasoning*, 57-58.
[37] Stewart, Dustin D. "Elizabeth Rowe, John Milton and Poetic Change." *Women's Writing* 20, no. 1 (2013): 13.
[38] Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, "Paradise Lost and Milton's Politics," *Milton Studies* 38 (2000): 142.
[39] Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500 - 1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 20.
[40] Donnelly, *Milton's Scriptural Reasoning*, 84.
[41] Ibid., 74.

scripture and inclusion of providence as a major component in her epic. Donnelly also makes the persuasive suggestion that Milton was able to dramatically restructure the Biblical story of Genesis without distorting its content through a rigorous "biblicist narrative strategy", using the idea of "types" as a way to make continuity between the Old and New Testament.[42] In particular, Donnelly introduces the idea that typological interpretation of the Bible provides readers with the means by which they can trace divine providence through seemingly random events in the Old Testament. Rowe adopts this narrative throughout her text, connecting the supernatural conflict with the events, good and bad, that occur within Joseph's story. In a letter to Thynne, Rowe describes her fascination with the idea of "sparkling assemblies" beyond the veil of human life:

> I have been entertain'd with some very beautiful remarks on the expression us'd in the sacred writings, of the Patriarchs dying and being gathered to their people. It has reconciled me to assemblies, by giving me such a grand idea of that august and sparkling assembly, to which the spirits of the just have been gather'd since the first ages of the world.[43]

Although Rowe specifically looks forward to the idea of Patriarchs and Saints being "gathered to their people" in Heaven, she reinforces the notion that there is another world which awaits beyond human experience, one which is currently inaccessible to mere mortals. By framing her *History* as a way to glimpse past the events of human history, Rowe alludes to a time and place when sacred past and faithful present become one and the same. Milton's understanding of providence closely paralleled John Calvin's *Institutes*, which emphasised the intersection of divine foreknowledge with individual responsibility. Calvin considered

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[42] Ibid, 82.
[43] Elizabeth Rowe to Frances Thynne, n.d., n.p., "Letter LXIV", *MW,* 2:118.

providence as a way to make man a "partner with God", combining the "movement" and power of deity with the "voluntary regulation" of human action.[44] Likewise, Milton believed that scripture and sacred history enabled the individual to perceive divine providence, looking to life beyond the Bible as something to faithfully endure[45]. This is clearly seen in the famous opening lines of *Paradise Lost* as the narrator attempts to work out the "great argument" of providence, justifying the "ways of God to men".[46]

Both Milton and Rowe describe the supernatural clash of good verses evil, unseen by the protagonists which dominate their respective narratives. With Milton, he begins *Paradise Lost* by outlining a celestial conflict between God and Satan, placing Satan in hell due to a failed "impious War in Heav'n".[47] As Satan surveys his surroundings, the reader is privy to his supporting demons, the "companions of his fall".[48] Milton notably names Moloch, Beelzebub, Mammon, and Belial as co-conspirators and accomplices, exploiting the openness of scripture to flesh out the character of Satan, as well as his supporting demonic cast. Likewise, Rowe adopts these characterisations, continuing their storylines in an attempt to thwart the divine lineage that would lead to David's line, and the eventual birth of Jesus. With its host of celestial and pagan characters, Rowe's *History* becomes an epic rich with allusion, contrasting the evils of heathenism and sin with the goodness of divinity and obedience. Despite adopting many of Milton's demonic characters, Rowe refrains from writing Satan into her *History*, instead choosing to focus on the lesser demons who supported Satan in *Paradise Lost.* Rowe's reasons for omitting Satan's character are unclear, particularly given the anti-hero's importance in Milton's

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[44] Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 175.
[45] Raymond Waddington, *Looking Into Providences: Designs and Trials in Paradise Lost* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 40.
[46] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 24-26.
[47] Ibid, Lines 41-44.
[48] Ibid., Lines 75-80.

text. Rather, Rowe focuses on Milton's horde of pagan antagonists, fully fleshing out the character of Moloch, a pagan god of the city Carthage with strong associations to the child-sacrificing cult of Baal-Hammon.[49] In doing so, Rowe makes the conscious decision to present evil through a vicious and multi-faceted horde, intent on subverting divine providence. She describes a gathering of demonic forces at the beginning of her *History,* particularly a convergence at Moloch's temple, a place where "the cries of infant ghosts were heard".[50] In doing so, Rowe alludes to Milton's powerful description of Moloch and the child-sacrifice associated with his cult:

> First *Moloch*, horrid King besmear'd with blood
> Of human sacrifice, and parents tears,
> Though, for the noyse of Drums and Timbrels loud,
> Their children's cries unheard that passed through fire
> To his grim Idol. Him the Ammonite
> Worshipt in Rabba and her watry Plain[.][51]

According to Lee Erickson, Milton's inclusion of the demonic host has a very pointed and specific purpose. Erickson writes that these types of characters point to a Christological pattern, providing a look into the "epic machinery" behind extraordinary events in scripture.[52] Rowe's *History* continues along the very same lines, providing readers with a fictional look behind the curtain of divine providence. Rowe introduces the demonic host as a group at risk, hastily joining forces in an attempt to thwart the prophecy given at the end of Genesis, one that would eventually produce the Messiah:

> 'Twas night, and goblins in darkness danc'd,

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[49] David Quint, "Milton's Book of Numbers: Book I of 'Paradise Lost' and Its Catalogue," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 13, no. 4 (Spring 2007): 531.
[50] Rowe, *The History of Joseph*, Book 1, line 73.
[51] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 392-97.
[52] Lee Erickson, "Satan's Apostles and the Nature of Faith in 'Paradise Lost' Book I," *Studies in Philology* 94, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 392-93.

> The priest in frantick vision lay entranc'd;
> While here conven'd the *Pagan* terrors sate,
> In solemn council, and mature debate,
> T'avert the storm impending o'er their state.[53]

As in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Rowe's cast of demonic characters work behind the scenes in her epic, influencing the protagonists and antagonists alike, drawn together by their common plot to prevent Jesus from being born. Rowe carefully constructs the trials that befall Joseph as a function of divine providence, a celestial clash of heavenly good and pagan evil. Accordingly, Joseph's hardships and triumphs function as the complex outworking of a nefarious and supernatural plot:

> Th' apostate princes with resentment fir'd,
> Anxious, and bent on black designs, conspir'd
> To find out schemes successful to efface
> Great *Heber*'s name, and crush the sacred race;
> from whence they knew, the long predicted king,
> Th'infernal empire's destin'd foe should spring;
> Who conqu'rour o'er their vanquish'd force should tread,
> And all their captive chiefs in triumph lead.[54]

With this decision to structure the introduction to Joseph's story in such a way, Rowe mimics *Paradise Lost*'s two-fold purpose: the demonstration of Eternal Providence and the display of God's justice.[55] The idea of Divine Providence allowed the faithful to see their lives as interwoven into the fabric of God's supreme plan and contributing to a divine agenda. Rowe makes it clear throughout her *History of Joseph* that providence has a large role to play in establishing Joseph as blessed and successful. In casting the concept of providence as a conduit for divine favour, readers are able to see their own

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[53] Rowe, *The History of Joseph*, Book I, 4-5, lines 78-83.
[54] Ibid., 5, lines 83-90.
[55] Donnelly, *Milton's Scriptural Reasoning*, 82.

struggles in Joseph's story. His tale of woe and rise to power becomes a blueprint or a model for how they should react to their own misfortunes. This concept continues throughout Rowe's *History*, most clearly seen at the end of her epic as Joseph becomes absolved of his wrongful convictions, given power throughout the land, and a wife:

> The fiends, in hopes to cross the great design,
> And awful will of providence divine,
> With penalties forbid the king's intent,
> The Hebrew's future greatness to prevent:
> Then nam'd the fair Asenath for his bride,
> And blindly with eternal fate comply'd:
> Effecting Heav'n's predestinated ends,[56]

Rowe describes an ending where the pagan host who sought to destroy Jesus' lineage are foiled, complying "blindly" with the "predestined ends" of divine will. By ending her *History* in this way, Rowe makes it clear that Providence plays a major part in the story of Joseph throughout the story, unable to be knocked off course or altered in any way.

In addition to mimicking Milton's host of pagan and demonic characters, Rowe also introduces the character of Gabriel to her *History* as another example of divine providence. Milton initially presents Gabriel as the "Chief of the Angelic guards" and one who keeps "Charge and strict watch" over earth and heaven.[57] Carver indicates that Milton's inclusion of an angelic host throughout *Paradise Lost* is a representation of "pure intellect and will", an outworking of divine purpose and providence.[58] Similarly, N.K. Sugimura reflects on the role of angels within *Paradise Lost*, referring to them as a "complex" manifestation of Milton's

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[56] Rowe, *The History of Joseph,* Book VIII, 77, lines 193-99.
[57] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, lines 547-60.
[58] P. L. Carver, "Angels in Paradise Lost," *The Review of English Studies* 16, no. 64 (October 1940): 430.

epistemology and ontology.[59] Rowe's character of Gabriel, an angel who arrives at key moments throughout her *History,* materialises in situations where it would appear that Joseph's faith is waning or when he prays for assistance.

At the beginning of Joseph's story, his brothers abduct him and intend to kill him. At the last moment before they commit murder, brother Reuben interferes and convinces them to leave Joseph in a pit for the evening, intending to sell him into slavery the next morning. In this section, we see Joseph at the bottom of the pit in the dead of night, pleading with God for mercy:

> Frenzy and faction, love and envy slept;
> A still solemnity all nature kept;
> Devotion only waked, and to the skies
> Directs the prisoner's pious vows and eyes:
> To God's high throne a wing'd petition flew,
> And from the skies commission'd Gabriel drew;
> One of the seven, who by appointed turns
> Before the throne ambrosial incense burns.[60]

Here, Joseph's "pious vows" and "Devotion" bring forth Gabriel, summoned by a "wing'd petition". In a reference to Revelation 8:2-4, Gabriel is cast as one of the seven angels who attend God's throne, burning the "ambrosial incense" that represents the prayers of the faithful. Gabriel is seen as responsive to Joseph's faith, coming to him in his hour of need. Rowe also gives another example of Gabriel as a manifestation of God's grace, when Joseph is put into prison for the attempted rape of Potiphar's wife, a crime of which he was unjustly accused and imprisoned. As Joseph, cast into a dungeon, prays for deliverance and trusts God

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[59] N. K. Sugimura, *"Matter of Glorious Trial": Spiritual and Material Substance in Paradise Lost* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 158; For more on angels and Milton, see Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Stephen Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).
[60] Rowe, *The History of Joseph,* Book II, 25-6, lines 66-73.

to rescue him, Gabriel once again appears. But what is crucial about this section is that it is made clear that Joseph benefits from Providence:

> The sacred vision to the youth appears,
> His spirits with celestial fragrance chears [sic].
> His heavenly smiles would ev'n despair control,
> And with immortal rapture fill the soul.
> […]
> From the unclouded realms of day above,
> From endless pleasures, and unbounded love,
> From painted fields deck'd with immortal flow'rs,
> From blissful valleys, and etherial bowers,
> I come, commission'd by peculiar grace,
> With great presages to thy future race.[61]

Gabriel is not only a figure to lighten Joseph's spirits, but also gives Joseph the knowledge that he acts on behalf of "peculiar grace", foretelling the way in which Joseph will contribute to the lineage of Jesus.

As Joseph is a key link to a "future race" of Israel, as well as to Jesus, Rowe emphasises the familial and national bonds of Providence, showing that the relationship between Joseph and the Divine has lasting benefits that go beyond his lifetime. Just as Milton sought to "justify the ways of God to men", Rowe is keen to give her readers an overview of the entire story of Joseph, from the divine machinations in the beginning to the individual decisions made by the protagonist throughout her epic. Rowe's alignment with Milton's own characters and insight into providence firmly establishes her *History* as being not only in the style of Milton, but also as providing a creative and perceptive insight into seemingly random or unpleasant events.

[61] Ibid., Book VII, 59, lines 11-14, 24-29.

Providence and Contemporary Accounts of Joseph

Despite its overwhelming popularity, *Paradise Lost* is not the only text informing Rowe's paraphrase or emphasising divine providence. Rowe's *History* appeared in print at a time when other writers were also experimenting with biblical paraphrase and the poetic form, with many in hope of imitating Milton's epic. Abigail Williams has shown that a large number also paid particular attention to the Psalms, while others, such as Isaac Watts, tried to produce original poems that merely borrowed the subject matter or style from Scripture.[62] According to Bernhard Lang, Rowe's conception of the figure of Joseph adheres to the traditionally stoic-Christian morality and echoes shared sentiments of many early modern Protestants.[63] Here, I build upon Lang's discussion of Rowe's text, further positioning her epic alongside other contemporary accounts of Joseph's story. Lang asserts that Rowe's *History of Joseph* not only mimics Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but also draws inspiration from *The Maidens Blush: Or, Joseph, Mirror of Modesty, Map of Pietie, Maze of Destinie, Or Rather Divine Providence* (1620), an epic poem composed at an unknown date by Renaissance writer Girolamo Fracastoro (1478-1553) in Italian and later translated into English by Joshua Sylvester (1563-1618).[64] Sylvester's translation emphasises Providence as a major theme throughout the storyline of Joseph. In this section, I consider the works of John Flavel and John Bunyan as they also discuss providence within the story of Joseph. Additionally, William Rose's own *History of Joseph* (1712) and an anonymous publication of *The History of Joseph in Verse* (1736) work to inform my reading of Rowe's *History*

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[62] Abigail Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 182-3.
[63] Bernhard Lang, *Joseph in Egypt: A Cultural Icon from Grotius to Goethe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 117, 123.
[64] Ibid, 117; For more information regarding Fracastoro's work see Spencer Pearce, "Nature and Supernature in the Dialogues of Girolamo Fracastoro," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 111–32.

alongside the Protestant tradition from which it emerges. These texts are important because they highlight Rowe's text as it appears in concert with many other treatments of biblical paraphrase, innovative reinterpretations of familiar cultural and religious narratives, and alternative histories of the biblical character of Joseph. While these texts all portray Joseph as a righteous and upright man, an ideal model for faithfulness despite hardship, divine providence appears as a defining central theme.

Sylvester's translation of *Maidens Blush* constructs Joseph as a model of good conduct and perseverance, the recipient of divine providence due to his patience and virtue.[65] Giles Jacob's *Historical Account of the Lives and Writings of Our Most Considerable English Poets* (1720) refers to Joshua Sylvester as a "very eminent translator" of Italian epics from Du Bartas and Girolamo, considering his translation of *The Maidens Blush* to be a "minor epic" and a "historical curiosity".[66] In addition to *Maidens Blush*, Sylvester also translated and re-published Guillaume Du Bartas's *La Semaine ou creation du Monde* (1578), which boasted great popularity and circulation throughout the seventeenth century.[67] Rowe's initial exposure to Italian epic and Sylvester's translated works likely came from her early association with the Thynne family at Longleat and tutelage in Italian and Latin from Henry Thynne.[68] Rowe is thought to have been particularly fond of Sylvester's folio and often referenced his translations in letters to Frances Thynne.[69] Sylvester's influence on Rowe's translation can be

[65] Kenneth John Atchity, "Renaissance Epics in English," *Italica* 50, no. 3 (Autumn 1973): 437-8.
[66] Giles Jacob, *A Historical Account of the Lives and Writings of Our Most Considerable English Poets, Whether Epick, Lyrick, Elegiack, Epigramatists* (London: Printed for E. Currell in Pater-Noster-Row, 1720), 209.
[67] Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 89.
[68] Henry Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome: A Study in Eighteenth-Century English Pietism* (Frankfurt: Herbert Lang, 1973), 35.
[69] Ibid, 31; Elizabeth Rowe to Frances Thynne, n.d., "Letter XLVII" in *MW,* 2:94.

seen throughout her *History*, particularly in the formation of the plot and names of minor characters.[70]

In his translation, Sylvester paints Joseph as a "rare-Modest Youth", a holy and important member of Abraham's line.[71] Connecting Joseph to the bloodline of Christ, Sylvester emphasises that he is a "Founder" of a "holy seed" and represents a "hope of future life":

> [Joseph was] a Friend and Founder there to be
> Of th'happy People, and the holy Seed,
> From Whence, should Hope of future Life proceed;
> And Whence salvation should be freely given,
> Through th'heavenly Key that shuld [sic] re-open Heaven.[72]

Similar to Sylvester's translation, Rowe's entire *History* pivots around promises of divine lineage and preservation made by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the book of Genesis. Prophesied in the Bible that Abraham and David's line would produce the Messiah, Joseph's story is framed with the larger purpose of leading to Christ, as well as salvation and the redemption from sin.

Rowe represents the concept of providence throughout her *History* through the promise to continue Abraham's line and the knowledge that Joseph is a patriarch in the lineage that leads to Jesus. In the first two books of her epic, Rowe sets the scene for the reader in an unconventional way by establishing Joseph as a direct descendant of Jacob and Abraham, and therefore under the umbrella of God's providence to prosper and multiply their families. God is portrayed as directly speaking to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, promising them a "peculiar grace" for their "race" and "scepter'd sons":

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[70] Lang, *Joseph in Egypt*, 129; Rowe names Potiphar's wife "Sabrina" after one of Sylvester's characters, alongside a few other minor characters.
[71] Fracastoro Girolamo, *The Maidens Blush: Or, Joseph, Mirror of Modesty, Map of Pietie, Maze of Destinie, Or Rather Divine Providence*, trans. Joshua Sylvester (London: Printed by H.L., 1620), 1.
[72] Ibid., 2.

> By my great self I will swear, to bless thy race
> With endless favour, and peculiar grace;
> thy scepter'd sons the spacious East shall sway,
> While vanquish'd kings obedient tribute pay.[73]

Sylvester's translation also emphasises divine "Favour and Fortune", citing providence as a form of divine destiny that will lead to a "high Estate, and glorious Empeire":

> So that where-ere thou goe, what-ere thou doe,
> Favour and Fortune shall attend thee too.
> And that thou maist with greater confidence
> Condemne thy wrongs, and trust his Providence,
> Know for a certaine, he hath destin'd thee
> A high Estate, and glorious Emperie[.][74]

Accordingly, Rowe makes note of God's promises to Jacob throughout her *History*, particularly those promises that ensure that the Hebrew nation would be numerous and successful, going on to produce the Messiah. This is predominantly illustrated in the second book of Rowe's *History* as Jacob recounts stories of Abraham to his sons, as well as reiterating his own covenant with God at Bethel.[75]

Carefully setting the context through which the reader should interpret the entirety of her epic, Rowe establishes Jacob as not only a recipient of God's favour, but also as an important figure in the story of Joseph. Joseph, as a beloved son of Jacob and part of his lineage, benefits from Divine Providence and provides a further conduit to the lineage of Jesus. Specifically, the character of Jacob goes into great detail about the way that God proved his covenant to

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[73] Rowe, *The History of Joseph*, Book II, 21, lines 231-4.
[74] Girolamo, *The Maidens Blush*, 17.
[75] Rowe, *The History of Joseph*, Book II, 15-21.

Abraham through his relationship with Melchizedek and the attempted sacrifice of his only son, Isaac:

> 'Tis heav'n, the Patriarch said, this fact requires,
> 'Tis heav'n - be witness yon etherial fires!
> Yet, countless as the stars, from thee must spring
> Victorious nations, and the mystick King:
> 'Tis past relief - yet by himself he swore,
> Who from the dead thy relicks can restore;
> What obstacle surmounts almighty power?[76]

As Abraham considers what Heaven is requiring of him, he also calls into question how a promise of salvation can continue between himself and the Divine if Isaac dies. Abraham is well aware that Isaac represents the continuation of his line, an heir leading to "Victorious nations" which will eventually produce the "Mystick King". Despite knowing that Isaac's death will effectively put an end to a promised redeemer, Abraham decides to obey this divine command and commit this unthinkable act. In a show of faith, Abraham reasons that divine power can "restore" his line, believing that no death can "surmount almighty power". And because of his willingness to obey, an angel intervenes, preventing the "fatal stroke":

> Blest Abram shook off all paternal strife,
> And forward thrust the consecrated knife.
> As lightning from the skies, an angel broke,
> And warded with his hand the fatal stroke;
> When thus a voice streams downward from above,
> Breathing divine beneficence and love.
> By my great self I swear, to bless thy race
> With endless favour, and peculiar grace;
> Thy scepter'd sons the spacious East shall sway,
> While vanquish'd kings obedient tribute pay.[77]

[76] Ibid., Book II, 20, lines 217-23.

As the attempt to sacrifice Isaac has divine interference, a voice from heaven descends and provides Abraham with "endless favour and peculiar grace" for his blind obedience. Rowe is quick to make the link between obedience to God and a favourable outcome, with God promising that Abraham's lineage will eventually have influence and prestige. This promise finds continuation in Joseph's story, where he is elevated to a position of influence and power.[78] Making clear links from the stories of Abraham, Jacob reiterates to his sons that God will continue to bless and grow his family, eventually producing the Messiah.

By representing the line of Abraham and Jacob in this way, Rowe makes theological links with the Biblical story of Joseph that would have been obvious and clear to her contemporary readers. For Rowe, the story of Joseph and the lineage that he claims holds just as much importance as her own promise to God and the faithfulness of her ancestors. Similarly, John Bunyan's poem "Life of Joseph", first published in 1700, reinforces Providence as a key factor to the story of Joseph. Bunyan begins his poem by introducing the concept of lineage alongside Providence, recounting how the hand of God not only benefitted Jacob, but also his son Joseph:

> When Jacob from his Brother, Esau fled,
> He by the Hand of Providence was led
> To Padan-aram, in Assyria, where
> He serv'd his Uncle Laban twenty year;
> During which time he was in all things blest,
> And with a num'rous Issue 'mongst the rest:
> Amongst whome none so pleasing in his sight
> As Joseph was, who was his chief delight:
> Who by the time that Jacob was return'd
> Into the Land, where's Fathers had sojurn'd,

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[77] Ibid., Book II, 20-21, lines 225-34.
[78] Ibid., Book VII, 60, lines 37-45.

Was full arriv'd at seventeen years of Age;[79]

Like Rowe, Bunyan sees the familial relationship as a key factor in Joseph's story, emphasising the experiences of his father, Jacob. In doing so, Bunyan outlines the way providence worked through Jacob and Joseph to benefit Israel and their inheritance of the Promised Land. Linking the idea of a favoured lineage with God's providence, Bunyan makes it very clear that the relationship between the individual and the Divine works as something to benefit Joseph's family group. Towards the end of this poem, when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, Bunyan establishes Joseph as a father-figure, sent through trials to save his family from famine and destruction:

> The Lord I say hath sent me to provide
> A Place, and strangely save your Lives beside.
> So now ye sent me not, but it was rather
> The Lord, and he hath made me as a Father
> Unto the King, Lord of his Household, and
> A Ruler over all this spacious Land.[80]

Rowe's depiction of Joseph as a divinely-sent saviour of the Abrahamic line is also reflected in her *History.* Here, Joseph cites God's "goodness" as a defining factor in his trials:

> Come near, my brethren, then he mildly said,
> Reflect not on your selves, with thoughts severe,
> It was not you, but God, that sent me here;
> His goodness rul'd the circumstance and place,
> To save the stock of Abraham's sacred race[.][81]

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[79] John Bunyan, "The Life of Joseph, Taken Out of the latter Part of the Book of Genesis, Chap. xxxvii" in *Scriptural Poems. Being Several Portions of Scripture Digested into English Verse* (London: Printed for J. Blare, 1700), 48.
[80] Bunyan, "The Life of Joseph", 73.
[81] Rowe, *The History of Joseph,* Book x, 95, Lines 143-7.

Both Bunyan and Rowe place particular emphasis on God ordaining Joseph to go through hardship and difficulty, ultimately linking it to a positive outcome for his family and the future of the Israelites. In doing so, Providence becomes more than a manifestation of divine control, but also a tool used to benefit larger groups of people and the individual in unforeseen ways.

For minister John Flavel (c. 1627-1691) the concept of providence was also considered to be a divine working of circumstance. A Presbyterian like Rowe, Flavel also suffered under the Clarendon Code and Test Acts, cast out under the Act of Uniformity because of his stated opposition to the Established Church.[82] In his *Divine Conduct: or, The Mystery of Providence* (1678), Flavel depicts providence as a crucial element to the story of Joseph, considering it as something "for our good":

> What a transporting Pleasure is it, to behold the great Blessings and Advantages to us wrought by Providence, out of those very things that seemed to threaten our Ruin or Misery? And yet by due observing the Ways of Providence, you may to your singular comfort find it so. Little did Joseph think his Transportation into Egypt had been in order to his Advancement there; yet he lived with Joy to see it, and with a thankful Heart to acknowledge it. Wait and observe, and you shall assuredly find that Promise, working out its way through all Providences. […] O what a Difference have we seen betwixt our Afflictions at our first meeting with them and our parting from them! We have entertained them with Sighs and Tears, but parted from them with Joy, blessing our God for them, as the happy Instruments of our Good. Thus our Fears and Sorrows are turned into Praises and Songs of Thanksgiving.[83]

[82] John Flavel, *The Whole Works of the Reverend John Flavel, Late Minister at Dartmouth in Devon*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (London: Printed by R. J. for Thomas Pankhurst, 1701), 4.
[83] John Flavel, *Divine Conduct: or, The Mystery of Providence* (London: Printed for J. and B. Sprint at the Bell, 1727), 158-9.

Flavel uses the story of Joseph as an example of the "Blessings and Advantages" of Providence, noting his slavery to Egypt had ultimately been "to his Advancement". Addressing his reader, Flavel asks his audience to "wait and observe" through the difficult circumstances of their lives, looking expectantly towards "that Promise". Offering an alternative view to sorrows and troubles as inherently evil or negative, Flavel's *Divine Conduct* offers individuals a framework through which they can make sense of their lives.

Another important example of a writer who connected the story of Joseph with divine providence was William Rose, with his poetic epic *The History of Joseph in Verse* (1712). Very little is known about Rose, save for one scant parish record that remains. What we do know, however, is that he was appointed to the office of Curate on the twenty-first of September, 1702 by the East Clangdon parish in Surrey.[84] We do not know if Rose and Rowe ever met, nor if they ever read each other's work. However, Rose's inclusion and comparison with Rowe is significant in the respect that it shows the degree to which the story of Joseph and his connection to divine providence became popular subject matter for Biblical paraphrase and publication amongst adherents to the Established Church. In a very similar format to both Rowe's *History* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Rose structured his *History* in six books with a similar rhyme and metrical scheme. But unlike Rowe's *History,* where the plot against Joseph is primarily driven by a superlunary plot to cut off Christ's lineage, Rose's epic follows the Biblical text closely and does not stray into the realm of classical or pagan mythology, choosing instead to emphasise the evil conspiracy of Joseph's brothers and divine providence throughout Joseph's trials.

[84] Woking, Surrey History Centre, Subscription Book M65, Fol. 6.

From the beginning of Rose's *History,* he makes it very clear that the thread running through his poem is the divine wisdom of God in trials and sufferings, giving encouragement to discouraged believers. In the preface, Rose explains his rationale for writing Joseph's story in such a way:

> I have, in the following Lines, endeavour'd to set before the Reader a Passage in Holy Writ, replete with Incidents highly demonstrative of a Providence; and equally tending to encourage a rational and just Dependence on the Divine Favour, to the Good and Virtuous, under all Discouragements and Adversities incident to them.[85]

Seeking to mimic a "Holy Writ", Rose is concerned mainly with the demonstration of divine providence, hoping to encourage a "rational and just dependence" on God. His paraphrase emphasises "God's o'er-ruling Hand" through the trials and triumph of Joseph.[86] In an anonymous publication of *The History of Joseph in Verse* (1736), Providence is also portrayed as a key player in Joseph's story and a protagonist in its own right:

> Mysterious Providence I now recall,
> A Wheel within a Wheel, and full of Eyes;
> To view Things past, and wisely order all
> Things yet to come; with Truth to harmonize.[87]

Here, the author describes Providence as an all-seeing entity, having the capacity to order events and to see both the past and the future, an unknown mysterious force "full of Eyes". The author of *The History of Joseph in Verse* makes it clear throughout the poem that Joseph is a recipient of providence, establishing the

[85] William Rose, Preface to *The History of Joseph. A Poem in Six Books* (London: Printed for James Knapton, 1712.), I.
[86] Rose, *The History of Joseph,* Book 1, 3, lines 9-16
[87] *The History of Joseph in Verse* (Ipswich: Printed by J. Bagnall, 1736), 1, lines 5-8.

pattern of grave misfortune and sorrow as something leading to a positive or favourable end:

> Now Joseph must in great Affliction share;
> But as the Day is, so the Strength shall be,
> If God will call his Saints to do, or bear,
> His Grace, in Measure, always shall agree
>
> Tho' for a Night their Weeping may endure,
> The case of Pious Souls shall always mend;
> As God is true, and all his Word is sure,
> Their present Griefs shall have a joyfull [sic] End.[88]

Rowe's *History* makes use of Providence to emphasise not only God's hand of blessing on Joseph but also as a means to preserve and continue his holy lineage. It is important to emphasise Rowe's cross-denomination appeal, particularly as she situates her *History* alongside paraphrases by members from the Church of England, as well as her fellow Dissenters. Throughout her epic, she borrows both theme and content from Sylvester's translation and Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a way to illustrate Providence's wide-ranging effects in the story of Joseph. Additionally, texts from Bunyan, Flavel, Rose, and the anonymous author of *The History of Joseph in Verse* draw attention to multiple facets of Providence, setting Rowe's text in concert with those of her contemporaries.

Providence and Devotional Meditation

In a religious meditation written in September 1728, Rowe sought to renew the bonds between her and God, invoking the notion of a sacred covenant. Imploring the Divine to "Remember" the promises made to her "pious ancestors", Rowe asks for his compassion and loving-kindness to endure through physical and spiritual lineage. For Rowe, a relationship with God

[88] Ibid., 3, lines 73-80.

involved an expectation that his compassion would follow her throughout her life:

> My God, and my father's God, who keepest covenant and mercy to a thousand generations, I call thee to witness, that with all sincerity of my soul I consent to this covenant, and stand to the solemn dedication made of me in my baptism: And to this I God's high name my awful witness make. And thus, with the utmost willingness and joy, I subscribe with my hand to the Lord. […] Oh! Remember thy covenant with my pious ancestors, to be a God to them, and their seed after them, by an everlasting covenant. Thy compassions exceed those of the tenderest relations on earth; thou dost delight to exercise loving-kindness and truth in the earth; thou art the God of all grace and consolation[.][89]

Employing imagery and language similar to her understanding and depiction of Joseph's Abrahamic lineage earlier in this chapter, Rowe's religious meditations also emphasise divine providence as an important factor in her personal beliefs.

I have established that the concept of Providence extended to a wide variety of Protestant beliefs and was inclusive to the majority of Dissent and Established Church. This half of the chapter specifically discusses Rowe's use of Providence and devotional writing as it pertains to a heterodox female readership. Here, I not only consider Rowe's use of the Providence throughout her posthumous collection of meditations, *Devout Exercises of the Heart,* but also the way that these same meditations and theological perspectives reflect other writings composed by women from both the Established Church and Dissenting traditions. Some of these individuals, such as Elizabeth Burnet, did not have stated connections to Rowe but employ similar language and political views, while others, such as Jane Turell and Sarah Savage, were known to have read and imitated Rowe's works in their own diaries, poems, and meditations.

[89] Rowe, "The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe", *MW*, 1: lxxxv-ii.

Throughout this section, I explore not only Rowe's depiction of her private religious practice, but also consider her contributions to a shared theological language amongst her contemporaries. I set Rowe's meditations within a rich context of female devotional writing, reflecting on aspects of divine providence and the impact of personal faith. Specifically, I discuss two prominent aspects of Providence throughout Rowe's *Devout Exercises*: its intersection with the physical body and the state of the eternal soul.

Melinda Zook has identified political and religious turbulence during the 1660s and 1680s as having an important role in shaping and defining the role of women religious writers. Zook notes that a "space for female agency" arose from this uncertainty, rooted in the writings and actions of "political radicalism" and increasingly strong bonds within their theological groupings.[90] However, it is important to note that Zook overlooks the agency of women robustly engaged with politics and religion during the years of the Civil War (1642-1651), as evidenced through the writings of Anne Askew, Katherine Par, Anne Locke, and Elizabeth I.[91] In the last decades of the seventeenth century, women continued to engage in social, political, and doctrinal discourse through their religious writings.[92] Throughout these years, a critical and introspective analysis of biblical imagery became popular, providing a space for women writers to express their relationships to the divine.[93] Despite this engagement with religious discourse, many women did not cross into the realm of biblical paraphrase. While some like Lucy Hutchinson chose to reinterpret the book of

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[90] Melinda S. Zook, *Protestantism, Politics, and Women in Britain, 1660-1714*, Early Modern History : Society and Culture (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 55.

[91] Sarah Ross, *Women, Poetry, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12. For more on women writers during the Civil War, see Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[92] Sarah Ross, "Epic, Meditation, or Sacred History? Women and Biblical Verse Paraphrase in Seventeenth-Century England," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, C. 1530-1700*, ed. Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith, and Rachel Willie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 483-4.

[93] David Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in 18th-Century England* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 35.

Genesis in epic form, the vast majority of women found a primary outlet for their theological writings through diary entries, letters, poems, or religious meditations.[94] According to Timothy Whelan, Protestant women became "avid readers" of spiritual autobiographies and religious meditations, with many of these texts seeing frequent circulation through family, friends, and church groupings.[95] Whelan emphasises that many of these individuals did not have a "fragmented or isolated perspective" when it came to their lives, instead recognising the "omnipotence and omniscience of a sovereign God and [...] contemplating and recording [these facets] in their diaries".[96] Although Rowe did not leave behind a diary, her *Devout Exercises* engages with similar subjects, providing her readers with a view of the divine which emphasised providence. Additionally, Walsham has identified the workings of providence during the later decades of the early modern period as a major component of one's individual expression of faith:

> Heightened awareness of the awesome and irresistible power of the Almighty was a logical corollary of elevating divine grace above strenuous human effort and making it the sole criterion for salvation. Like their Continental counterparts, English Protestant divines discussed the doctrine in exhaustive detail and with wearisome frequency; it was a prominent theme of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century academic theology and practical divinity.[97]

Although many Protestant women used a wide range of literary genres and aesthetic techniques during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, a large portion of their religious writings concentrated on the presentation of divine truth, including representations of providence, in a plain and accessible

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Timothy Whelan, *Other British Voices: Women, Poetry, and Religion, 1766-1840*(New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 19.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 9.

style. Balancing truth and art, these writings were grounded in scriptural language, intended to edify the reader.[98] According to Sarah Ross, the "Bible-centric reading practices" of Protestant women during the late seventeenth century helped to inform their works of theology, prayer, meditation, biblical paraphrase, and spiritual diaries.[99] Felicity Nussbaum identifies the act of shared "private emotions" and confessional writings within published religious texts as a way to construct a "collective […] subjectivity available to women".[100] For adherents to the Church of England and Dissenters alike, the fate of their souls after death became of supreme importance. As a result, a major focus of their lives on earth needed to be concentrated on their spiritual wellbeing. While this naturally applied to one's personal life, it also found application in a framework of Christian society, borne out by local congregations and the shared spiritual destiny of fellow worshippers.[101]

With devotional meditations like Rowe's *Devout Exercises*, the aspect of the confessional became an important component of an individual's spiritual practice. Brian Cummings has identified the act of confession as a "central religious practice" in Christian history, forming a "ritual means of uncovering the truth" while also "constructing the language of truth".[102] Rowe's *Devout Exercises* are profoundly confessional in nature, providing a powerful insight into her own struggles with besetting sin and her relationship with the divine through all aspects of her devotional life. Written in a Psalmic style, Rowe's meditations attempt to balance her lofty Christian ambition, "unbounded Desires which the Creation cannot limit", with knowledge and acceptance of her own depraved

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[98] Whelan, *Other British Voices*, 13.
[99] Ross, "Epic, Meditation, or Sacred History?", 483-4.
[100] Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 172.
[101] Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge, French Thought (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 152.
[102] Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 347.

state on earth.[103] Rowe's personal religious meditations reveal an extensive devotion to piety, tied to her Dissenting beliefs but also influenced by wider Protestant culture.[104] Rachel Willie notes that an imitation of the Psalms during the early modern period "epitomised biblical truths", often translated and "regarded as the Bible in miniature".[105] Although Rowe's mediations are written in prose, they imitate the Psalms through their representations of a dynamic spiritual life and a strong desire to be reconciled to the divine. With this depiction of Providence, Rowe touches upon two recurrent themes found in many Calvinistic devotional writings: the regeneration of the soul through Christ and an emphasis on the depraved body while it remains on earth. Providence becomes a tool for mediating for the ups and downs of Rowe's private religious practice, providing an insight into salvation and the confines of the physical body.

Providence and the Physical Body

One of the prominent themes throughout Rowe's *Devout Exercises* is the intersection of divine providence with bodily preservation and wellbeing. As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, there is a particular Calvinistic interest in the soul and the body, with the body considered something to be controlled and restrained in the interest of one's sanctification. Sarah Savage and Jane Turell, also from Calvinist sects, subscribed to similar perspectives regarding the physical body and the immortal soul. Providence, as demonstrated in Rowe's meditations as well as Savage and Turell's writings, becomes a conduit for divine mercy, showing compassion towards the sinful flesh and extending grace to unworthy sinners. Although it is primarily found in the pages of her

[103] Elizabeth Rowe, Preface to *Devout Exercises of the Heart*, xxviii.
[104] Whelan, *Other British Voices*, 13.
[105] Rachel Willie, "'All Scripture Is given by Inspiration of God,'" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, C. 1530-1700*, ed. Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith, and Rachel Willie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 287.

meditations, the connection between providence and Rowe's physical health also appears sporadically throughout some of her correspondence. In an undated letter to mother-in-law Sarah Rowe, she discusses her current battles with ill health and how all of her "wants have been hitherto plentifully supply'd by the divine providence", causing her to "turn [her] eyes from the whole creation, and direct all […] expectations to the God before whom my fathers have walk'd[.]"[106] Rowe's focus on Providence as a provider of both good and ill health is also seen in the spiritual diaries and letters of contemporary readers and fellow Dissenters Sarah Savage and Jane Turell, particularly as they experience similar trials and challenges to their own health or the health of their family members.

Sarah [née Henry] Savage (1664-1752), daughter of minister Philip Henry and sister of Dissenting minister and writer Matthew Henry, is known for keeping a fastidious spiritual diary throughout her life. Following her death, the manuscripts of her diaries remained unpublished and forgotten until 1845, when J.B. Williams compiled the majority of her letters and entries into a memoir. Until recently, there has been virtually no critical attention paid to the content of Savage's manuscripts and diary entries, with the exception of two articles that explore Savage's various trials with pregnancy and childbirth.[107] Williams's *Memoirs of the Life and Character of Mrs. Sarah Savage* not only includes a variety of personal anecdotes and direct transcripts of her diaries, but also features a lengthy biography. Williams records Savage as being greatly impacted by books designed to "quicken devotion", preferring spiritual collections and biographies of individuals with good moral character:

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[106] Elizabeth Rowe to Sarah Rowe, n.d., "Letter V", *MW,* 2:187.

[107] Patricia Crawford, 'Katharine and Philip Henry and their children: a case study in family ideology', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 134 (1984), 39–73; Patricia Crawford, 'Attitudes to pregnancy from a woman's spiritual diary, 1687–8', *Local Population Studies*, 21 (autumn 1978), 43–45.

> Mrs. Savage, however, thought otherwise, and without undervaluing the Bible, highly esteemed the pious labours of good men; especially such books as were best calculated to strengthen the understanding, to quicken devotion, and excite to holiness […] She delighted much in biography, and her diary manifests the interest with which she read […] the Lives of Mrs. Bury, Mrs. Rowe, Mrs. Walker, and Mr. Reynolds. She likewise transcribed several manuscript memoirs for the use of herself and her family. On retiring to rest she commonly placed good books near the bedside, to prevent an unprofitable employment of her waking thoughts.[108]

It is reasonable to assume that Savage read or was at least familiar with Rowe's *Devout Exercises*, given that the most complete and popular accounts of Rowe's life and works did not appear in circulation until 1739 with the publication of Theophilus Rowe's biography in *Miscellaneous Works*. As with the compilation of Rowe's poetry and letters in *Miscellaneous Works*, Williams takes advantage of Savage's pious reputation, constructing his *Memoir* as a way to preserve her godly character for following generations. In the preface to Williams's memoirs, William Jay records Savage's intentions towards keeping a diary and its intended impact upon her own spiritual life:

> It is in my thoughts to do something in the nature of a Diary, being encouraged by the advantage others have gained thereby, and the hope that I might be furthered by it in a godly life, and be more watchful over the frame of my heart, when it must be kept on record.[109]

Comparable to Rowe's insistence that her religious meditations were primarily penned "for [her] own improvement", Savage's diary served as a private

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[108] J.B. Williams, *Memoirs of the Life and Character of Mrs. Sarah Savage* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1845), 57-58.
[109] William Jay, Preface to *Memoirs of the Life and Character of Mrs. Sarah Savage*, ed. J.B. Williams (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1845), xii.

religious practice, a practical manifestation of her faith and a marker of her spiritual growth.[110]

Besides the shared recognition that writing their meditations and diaries would produce some spiritual benefit, both Savage and Rowe consider providence to be a vital component of their bodily preservation. Referencing the vulnerability of her "helpless infancy", Rowe marvels at the provision of the divine throughout her lifetime:

> I was thy early Care; thou didst support my helpless Infancy, and art the watchful Guide of my unsteady Youth. Which Way forever I turn, I meet thy Mercy, and trace thy Providence; and as long as I live I will record thy Benefits, and depend on thy Truth[.][111]

Here, Rowe vows to preserve and record the "Benefits" of divine mercy, offering up her own meditations as a way to "trace [the] Providence" of God. Similarly, Savage's conceptualisation of providence extends to her own childhood and adolescence. Quoting Psalm 51:5, Savage writes in an undated diary entry that she was "conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; yet a kind providence took care of me, and preserved me safe through the perils of infancy."[112] Savage emphasises original sin and the grace of God throughout her life, starting before her conversion. Here, both Savage and Rowe look back their own infancy and childhood as an affirmation of divine favour, seeing providence as a lifelong act of preservation and kindness. Towards the end of her life, in an entry dated April 15, 1742, Savage reflects on the benevolence of God in allowing her go through life "comfortably":

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[110] Elizabeth Rowe to Isaac Watts, n.d., *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), xxvii.
[111] Elizabeth Rowe, "Assurances of Salvation in Christ Jesus" in *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), 39.
[112] Williams, *Memoirs of the Life and Character of Mrs. Sarah Savage*, 29.

> I would be better, and do better. A kind providence has followed me all my days, particularly, in bringing me to this place to finish life so comfortably—where I have so many advantages both for soul and body.[113]

Beyond a belief that providence applies to a long and prosperous life, Savage's diary frequently mentions providence in relation to death and bodily harm. In an entry dated September 27, 1729, Savage recounts the death of her husband, a tragedy that she would often revisit in her diary for the rest of her life:

> A heavy stroke falls upon me, unexpectedly, by the sudden death of my dear yoke-fellow, with whom I have lived in great amity and affection, these forty-two years and six months. Lord, what is man? He seemed pretty well in the morning, but complaining of pain I persuaded him to go to bed, which he no sooner had done, but he expired without a sigh or groan. Alas ! what—what is this that God hath done unto us? O, for wisdom and grace to improve this sad providence! He had almost completed his seventy-eighth year.[114]

Although Savage considered providence to be a part of her self-preservation and an important component of her well-being, it also served as an important reminder that the will of the divine did not always coincide with her happiness. Rather, Savage sees this situation as a means to grow in "grace and wisdom".

Another writer who connected providence with physical wellbeing was Jane [née Coleman] Turell (1708-1735), the American daughter of minister Benjamin Coleman. Turell is particularly known for her poetry and compilations of religious meditations, with a majority of them modelled on Rowe's poetry.[115] Despite a lifetime of writing verse, none of it saw publication until after her death. Husband Ebenezer Turell posthumously compiled her poems, letters, and

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[113] Ibid., 158.
[114] Ibid., 107.
[115] Ebenezer Turell, Preface to *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Pious and Ingenious Mrs. Jane Turell*, ed. Ebenezer Turell (London: Printed for John Oswald, 1741), 5.

meditations, publishing *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Pious and Ingenious Mrs. Jane Turell* in 1741. Despite the little critical recognition given to the works of Sarah Savage, there remains a wholesale neglect of Turell's written work, with virtually no critical commentary or meaningful exploration of any of her poetry. When Turell is recognised, it is only through her connection to her father and her admiration for Rowe's writing.[116] The few bits of her poems that do remain are confined to obscure collections of biographies and compilations of poetry. In 1854, Caroline May published one of the few anthologies of poems and biographies to include a short account of Turell's life and limited excerpts from her work. May's biography also draws attention to Turell's connection to the "celebrated Mrs. Rowe".[117] Turell saw Rowe as an exemplar of a pious writer and poet, often writing in the style of her hero and dedicating poems in her honour. In the poem, "On reading the Warning by Mrs. Singer", Turell depicts Rowe as an Old Testament prophetic voice, giving a "grave Warning to the Sons of Men" through her poetry and religious writing.[118] Turell constructs Rowe's character in no uncertain terms, depicting the poet as a postlapsarian strike against Satan himself: "A Woman's Pen strikes the curs'd Serpent's Head/And lays the Monster gaping, if not dead".[119] Turell never read Rowe's *Devout Exercises*, having passed away before its publication. However, Rowe's influence on Turell's writing and poetry can be seen, particularly in Turell's use and depiction of providence.

Comparable to Savage and Rowe's recognition that divine providence manifested in a care and concern throughout an individual's lifetime, Turell's poem "The 8th Psalm Paraphrased" also explores the reach of providence to the

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[116] Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 89.
[117] Caroline May, *The American Female Poems with Biographical and Critical Works* (Philadelphia, PA: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1854), 21.
[118] Jane Turell, "On reading the Warning by Mrs. Singer" in *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Pious and Ingenious Mrs. Jane Turell*, ed. Ebenezer Turell (London: Printed for John Oswald, 1741), 19, line 2.
[119] Ibid, lines 13-4.

smallest and most vulnerable parts of creation. Referring to the "sucking Babes" and "feeble ones", Turell notes that "Providence defends" even the endangered and weakest.[120] In her meditation "The Glory of God in his Works of Creation, Providence and Redemption", Rowe also recognises providence's care from the simplest to most complex aspects of the natural world:

> Thy Providence reaches the least Insect, for thou art good, and thy Care extends to all thy Works. Thou feudist the Ravens, and dost provide the young Lions their Prey: Thou scatterest [sic] thy Blessings with a liberal Hand on the whole Creation; Man, ungrateful Man, largely partakes thy Bounty.[121]

Here, Rowe equates providence with divine blessings, specifically those given to creation with a "liberal hand". Although both Rowe and Turell connect providence with provision and plenty, Turell also associates it with mortality and the frailty of the physical body. In a diary entry dated June 12, 1729, Turell describes witnessing a "most awful Providence" and reflecting on her own temporal state:

> A Boy of about twelve Years old was kill'd in a Moment by a Cart oversetting and falling on him. I was the first that saw it; and earnestly pray it may be sanctified to me and my Household. May I never forget it, but as often as I look towards the Spot, remember the shortness and Uncertainty of Life; and how suddenly and unexpectedly Death may fall on us.[122]

Similar to Savage's description of a "Sad Providence" and a recognition that sorrow provided an opportunity to grow her faith, Turell considers this act of "awful Providence" to be a form of *memento mori*. Writing that she hopes to use

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[120] Jane Turell, "The 8th Psalm Paraphras'd" in *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Pious and Ingenious Mrs. Jane Turell*, ed. Ebenezer Turell (London: Printed for John Oswald, 1741), 19, lines 7-8.
[121] Elizabeth Rowe, "The Glory of God in his Works of Creation, Providence and Redemption" in *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), 60-61.
[122] Turell, *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Pious and Ingenious Mrs. Jane Turell*, 63.

this incident for personal sanctification, Turell vows to meditate on the "Uncertainty of Life" and the fact that death can occur at any moment. Dewey Wallace indicates that such a "grounding religious experience" signified a "very personal union with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit", emphasising the importance of "personal piety of individuals" throughout these types of writings and providing a model for other writers and readers.[123] Rowe's use of providence as a means to describe and fully understand her own physical state found resonance in many of her contemporaries, including writers who looked to her as a model of Christian piety and good character. The works of Jane Turell and Sarah Savage indicate not only the transfer of theological ideas, but also work to broaden the understanding of providence as it relates to the individual and their earthly experience.

Providence and the Act of Salvation

Rowe also refers to providence as a vital component of her own salvation. Throughout *Devout Exercises*, she perpetually returns to the theme of her own depravity and God's kindness in redemption. A contemporary writer who also connected providence with salvation was Anglican writer Elizabeth Burnet (1661-1709), known primarily for her religious writing and publication *A Method of Devotion: Or, Rules for Holy & Devout Living* (1708). Comparable to Rowe's circulation of manuscript, Burnet's *Method of Devotion* passed through a number of hands preceding publication, starting with her husband, Gilbert Burnet the Bishop of Salisbury, to John Norris and eventually reaching correspondent and friend John Locke.[124] It is unknown if Rowe ever read Burnet's writings but they deserve to be considered in parallel due to their shared use and understanding of providence, as well as their intersection with

[123] Dewey Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 185.
[124] Norma Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London: Pimlico, 2004), 214.

aspects of rational philosophy. Melinda Zook depicts Burnet's devotional writings as being "influenced by the blossoming culture of latitudinarianism within the Church of England and the Enlightenment within British and Northern European society as a whole".[125] Similar to Rowe's own familiarity with latitudinarianism and the works of John Norris, Burnet's *Method of Devotion* features an awareness of shifting perspectives on the ability of the individual to perceive the divine, reflecting her familiarity with the philosophy of John Locke. Burnet's writing, like Rowe's, appears within a context of considerable theological and philosophical change.

Anne Kelley describes Burnet's devotional writing as unusual due to its emphasis of spiritual life within a political context, describing an anti-Catholic bias in a large number of her writings.[126] The second edition of Burnet's devotional works saw the addition of a biography written by Timothy Goodwyn, Arch-Deacon of Oxford. Alongside a description of her Christian character, Goodwyn makes it very clear that Burnet was not only devoted to the Established Church as a *via media* but also considered William III and the Glorious Revolution to be a divinely ordained stroke against "Popery":

> She had so just a Sense of the Danger of Popery, that she often blessed God for the Revolution, and defended it with Zeal. […] She paid a just and grateful Duty to our GREAT DELIVERER, to whom she was a most Zealous and Faithful Subject; as she was after Him, to HER MAJESTY, who now fills that Throne so Gloriously, which He had so happily settled. And it is not to be denied, but that the Behaviour of some, whom she otherwise esteemed much, put her sometimes into some Emotion.[127]

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[125] Zook, *Protestantism, Politics, and Women in Britain,* 162.
[126] Anne Kelley, "'Her Zeal for the Publick Good': The Political Agenda in Elizabeth Burnet's A Method of Devotion (1708)," *Women's Writing* 13, no. 3 (2006): 448-9.
[127] T. Goodwyn, "An Account of the Life and Character of the Author" in *A Method of Devotion: Or, Rules for Holy & Devout Living, with Prayers on Several Occasions, and Advices & Devotions for the*

Like Rowe, Burnet considered the Glorious Revolution to be an escape from a national decay to "Popery".[128] As anti-Catholic Protestants, both Rowe and Burnet regard the Glorious Revolution and William III's reign as an important turning point in English identity, seeing the Protestant king as a "great deliverer" in the fight against idolatry.

Burnet's *Method of Devotion* gives a prescription for a daily routine that includes specific prayers, theological reading, and acts of charity. Karen O'Brien indicates that Burnet's work instructs readers about how to "develop both a self-appraising inner voice and a practical rationality."[129] Burnet herself describes her religious meditations as intended to "give a little Assistance to such young and ignorant Persons as are truly desirous to purifie their Hearts and Lives by the Duties of Religion".[130] In *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), biographer George Ballard details Burnet's penchant for composing "rules and directions" intended to guide her conduct:

> [Burnet] had early an inclination to employ her pen in several sorts of composition, which she was thought by her friends to do to so very good purpose, that it encouraged her to employ much of her time that way; and while she was a widow, she made a first draught of a book (afterwards published) entitled *A Method for Devotion*, for her own use only, consisting of such rules and directions as she resolved to conduct herself by, and which indeed had been all along the measure of her practice.[131]

Holy Sacrament, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for Joseph Downing in Bartholomew-Close, 1709), xxix-xxx. Original emphasis.

[128] For more on Burnet and Anti-Catholic Protestantism, see Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 69-71.

[129] Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52.

[130] Elizabeth Burnet, *A Method of Devotion: Or, Rules for Holy & Devout Living, with Prayers on Several Occasions, and Advices & Devotions for the Holy Sacrament* (London: Printed for Joseph Downing in Bartholomew-Close, 1708), xxxiv.

[131] George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, Who Have Been Celebrated for Their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages Arts and Sciences* (Oxford: Printed by W. Jackson, 1752), 402.

Burnet strongly believed that a "measure of her practice" included a belief that God's providence was the outworking of genuine faith. For a sincere conversion, the intersection of faith and a trust in divine promises became a matter of Christian duty:

> First you must pray with Faith, in the Steadfast Belief of the Being of God, of his Providence, His Promises, and whatever He has revealed in His Word, as a matter of Faith and Duty.[132]

For Burnet, salvation came through an act of faith and a "Steadfast Belief" that divine providence would work to ultimately benefit the believer, reflecting what had been "revealed in His Word". Writing that Christians should be ready to "receive all the dispensations of God's Providence with Love and Submission", Burnet insists that a marker of genuine belief is the willingness to "bear the Injuries of Men with Pity" and a exhibit a "Spirit of Charity ready to return Good for Evil, so far as is consistent with Justice, the Interest of Virtue, and Good of Society".[133] Furthermore, Burnet emphasises providence's hand in conversion, noting that it works through the "Influences of [the Holy] Spirit" and has the power to change the behaviour of the "Unbeliever and the Ungodly[.]"[134]

In her meditation "Confession of Sin, with Hope of Pardon", Rowe echoes these sentiments, considering providence to be a significant part of her saving faith. Rowe reflects on a youth marked by rebellion and sinful defiance:

> The God whose Goodness has run parallel with my Life; who has perserv'd me in a thousand Dangers, and kept me even from the Ruin I courted, and even while I repin'd at the Providence that saved me.[135]

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[132] Burnet, *A Method of Devotion*, 12.
[133] Ibid., 151.
[134] Ibid., 40-41.
[135] Elizabeth Rowe, "Confession of Sin, with Hope of Pardon" in *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), 46.

Recalling preservation from a "thousand Dangers" and a miraculous evasion of ultimate "Ruin", Rowe considers divine grace and kindness in spite of depravity to be a notable feature of providence. Burnet also reflects on the love of the God through the act of salvation, providing the reader with an appropriate response to their redemption. Rowe also reflects upon the role of providence in the act of conversion, looking over her own past with a note of sorrow:

> Why, when I knew thee not, didst thou sustain me? But oh! Why, when I knew thee, and rebell'd against thee, why didst thou so long suffer my Ingratitude? Why did thy watchful Providence perpetually surround me, crossing all the Methods I took to undo myself?[136]

Rowe emphasises the ability of Providence to "perpetually surround" and actively work against the actions undertaken to "undo" salvation.

Throughout Rowe's epic *History of Joseph* and *Devout Exercises of the Heart*, providence appears as a central and key theme in her understanding of and relationship to the divine. Far from a philosophical framework only made relevant through the Civil War, providence continues to present itself in a variety of forms throughout Rowe's writing and in a number of publications from contemporary authors. Appearing throughout Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the writings of Bunyan and Flavel, poetic interpretations by Rose, and extending into the private meditations of Burnet, Savage, and Turell, providence is ubiquitous in this period and exhibits an assortment of relevant traits. In this chapter, I have demonstrated not only the importance of providence as a theological doctrine, but also the ways that it intersects the genres of biblical paraphrase and devotional writing. In Rowe's *History of Joseph*, providence functions as an essential part of the plot, giving the reader an insight into the workings of

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[136] Elizabeth Rowe, "A Thank-offering for saving Grace" in *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, ed. Isaac Watts (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1738), 30.

heaven and Joseph's divine lineage. Here, we see Rowe's adoption of Milton and Sylvester's key thematic elements, with providence as an important stylistic tool. Additionally Rowe's use of providence in her religious meditations demonstrates its importance to the representation of personal faith, manifesting in multiple ways throughout her *Devout Exercises.* In *Devout Exercises,* providence appears as divine care and oversight over the physical body, providing safety and wellbeing. Providence also of course has oversight over death, providing an opportunity for reflection and further sanctification. But, significantly for Rowe one's salvation and redemption from depravity is the most important feature of providence, indicating true faith and a genuine relationship with God.

Conclusion

As mentioned in my introduction, the afterlife of Rowe's work has suffered a tremendous amount of neglect and stereotype. Far from conventional works of piety or simple religious sentiments, Rowe's poetry and meditations display an impressive and surprising amount of political and theological acumen. Despite Rowe's posthumous reputation as a "one-note, pious poet" amongst many contemporary scholars, this thesis considered her religious writing to be robust and innovative, eschewing many stereotypes associated with women's writing during the early eighteenth century.[1] Additionally, this thesis has sought to establish Rowe's work as thoughtful and complex interpretations of contemporary theological and political discourse. Both before and during Rowe's lifetime, the Restoration of Charles II, the Clarendon Code, the Glorious Revolution, and the reign of William III created a dynamic and capricious political climate that had considerable impact upon Rowe's immediate family and wider religious community. It was in this environment that Rowe first entered the world of print, and it was during these key moments in Dissenting history that she wrote her most popular pieces of biblical paraphrase, devotional writing, verse, and epic poetry. This thesis has widely explored these genres through the study of Cambridge Platonist philosophy, Dissenting perspectives on suffering, and the widespread understanding of Providence as an ecumenical Protestant doctrine.

My thesis has produced a number of original, and occasionally surprising, observations about the nature of Rowe's poetry that develop and occasionally contradict the limited scholarship devoted to the rich but widely neglected area of women's religious writing during the late seventeenth and

[1] Paula Backscheider, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 7.

early eighteenth centuries. This thesis has explored multiple aspects of Dissenting identity, culture, and theological beliefs, placing Rowe within a context that has previously been overlooked or misunderstood. In order to locate Rowe's work within this position, I have engaged in a study of many important influences on her conceptions of belief and key influences to her writing. Considering the works of John Calvin, John Milton, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Isaac Watts, John Norris, and other members of the Cambridge Platonists allowed me to give adequate context and depth to the religious and philosophical context embedded in her work.

Throughout my chapters, I have considered varying aspects of Rowe's religious poetry, putting them into their relevant political and philosophical contexts. My first chapter explored the impact of the Clarendon Code and subsequent toleration on wider Dissenting culture and Rowe's first foray into print. Within this framework, I discussed Rowe's usage of biblical meditations and reconfiguration of the epic as a means to convey important aspects of Dissenting thought. With a comparison to contemporaries John Milton, Lucy Hutchinson, Isaac Watts, and John Bunyan, Rowe's poetry appears robust and innovative. Additionally, considering Rowe's usage of the Christian Augustan and adherence to the Virgilian Progression throughout her early career further establishes her publications as thoughtful and purposeful pieces that held profound political and religious meaning.

In my second chapter, the intersection of Rowe's poetry with the theological particulars of Calvinism and the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists has proven particularly illuminating, as it explores Rowe's willingness to consider and challenge perspectives outside the remit of her own religious community and Calvinist beliefs. Here, we see a poet influenced and shaped by a variety of sources and writers, particularly John Norris and Henry More as they

consider the limits of human depravity and the ability of the mind to reason and perceive the divine. This chapter shows that Rowe's poetry shows similar strands of thought throughout some of her earliest publications, particularly in her characterisations of the Bride and Bridegroom in poem, "A Paraphrase on the Canticles". Using the themes of light and dark to illustrate complex aspects of Cambridge Platonist philosophy, as well as engaging with elements of traditional Calvinist theology, Rowe's "Canticles" appears as more than an exercise in biblical paraphrase, functioning as an ideal setting for discussions regarding the nature of human depravity and the relationship between the individual and the divine.

My third chapter engaged with Rowe's contemporary discussions of Dissenting discrimination and suffering, particularly within those communities affected by the Clarendon Code and Test Acts. This chapter places Rowe's writing at a crucial time in Dissenting history, noting the repercussions upon her immediate family. Here, I have engaged in a study of her characterisations of the Old Testament Job and Joseph within several poems and treatments of verse. By looking at these two iconic figures, widely found within Dissenting religious literature, sermons, and other creative verse, I have demonstrated Rowe's ability to represent and reinterpret the suffering and persecution of Dissenters during the years of the Clarendon Code and subsequent toleration.

Throughout my fourth chapter, I have demonstrated providence as a pivotal part of Rowe's devotional meditations and her conception of the epic. Additionally, this chapter has illuminated providence's role to a wider heterodox readership, indicating aspects of a shared theological language. I have discussed Rowe's epic *History of Joseph* and meditations from *Devout Exercises*, considering the role of providence as a major theme throughout these texts. In Rowe's *History of Joseph*, providence appears as a powerful example of divine favour and

blessing, mirroring contemporary texts by Bunyan and Flavel. With my exploration of providence in Rowe's *Devout Exercises*, providence appears as a powerful part of her religious self-expression and conception of personal faith. Additionally, this chapter demonstrates Rowe's influence on contemporaries Jane Turell, Sarah Savage, as well as discussing her contemporary Elizabeth Burnet.

It has been beyond the current scope of this thesis to trace the great amount of literary diversity found within the label of Dissent, but there is an opportunity for future literary scholars to explore Rowe's life and writing. There is a great deal more research to be done on Rowe's influence on later eighteenth-century writers, specifically those located on both sides of the Atlantic. Rowe's literary afterlife and the shift from an iconic and well-known ecumenical writer to an underestimated and unrecognised poet is also worthy of future consideration.

My relatively short exploration of Rowe's religious poetry has disclosed a diverse, yet far from exhaustive sample of social, political, and theological elements within her writing. The study also suggests that Rowe's political and theological world, and that of other Dissenters, was not limited to her immediate community or particular branch of ideology. Rather, Rowe's writing exhibits many dynamic and innovative traits that necessitate further study of Dissenting creative writing, particularly looking at aspects of religious identity, heterodox political environments, and aspects of tolerance throughout the early eighteenth century. Through an analysis of the Dissenting culture in which Rowe inhabited, as well as an exploration of philosophical and religious elements throughout her creative writing, I have shown Rowe to be a writer exhibiting a multitude of versatile traits that had previously been unrecognised or underrepresented.

Abbreviations

MW – *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe The Greater Part Now First Published, by Her Order, from Her Original Manuscripts, By Mr. Theophilus Rowe.* Ed. Theophilus Rowe. 2 vols. London, Printed for R. Hett at the Bible and Crown, 1739.

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