# Confessional Poetics:
# Confession and Repentance in Early Modern Devotional Verse

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of penitential theology and practice on early modern devotional verse. Taking shape as a series of case studies, it analyses poetic representations and performances of confession from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. The first chapter presents Petrarch's reception of Augustine's *Confessions* as the paradigmatic model of what I call 'confessional poetics': dramatisations of repentance in Petrarch aspire to rehabilitate a fallen subjectivity, but also risk deepening its fractures. The second chapter tracks the influence of a Calvinist understanding of repentance in Anne Lock's *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*, shifting the focus to the literature of the English Reformation, a period in which the contested status of the sacrament of penance brings to the fore the tensions in the language of confessional self-fashioning bequeathed by Petrarch to the European lyric tradition.

The third chapter discusses the poetry of Robert Southwell in terms of the penitential dynamics of 'sacred parody', arguing that the genre is caught between censure and repetition of courtly love. Next, I address the drive to purify the impure and 'abject' in John Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, and the impact of liturgical reform on George Herbert's negotiations between private and public speech in *The Temple*. The thesis draws to a close with an analysis of avowal and disavowal in the poetry of Richard Crashaw. The requirement to verbalise inwardness plays a vitally important role in the cultural history of the 'self'. What also emerges from this study of penitential verse, however, is the centrality of literature to such a history. Not only does 'confessional' poetry throw light on the theological controversy surrounding penance in the early modern period, but it also puts under intense scrutiny the ability of language to shape and transform its speakers – and its readers.

## Contents

## Abbreviations

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| BCP | *Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: OUP, 2011) |
| CJC | Corpus Juris Canonici |
| CSEL | Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum |
| CUP | Cambridge University Press |
| HUP | Harvard University Press |
| LW | *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-86) |
| OED | Oxford English Dictionary Online (Oxford: OUP, 2024) |
| OUP | Oxford University Press |
| PL | *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1844-62) |
| PUP | Princeton University Press |
| *Rvf* | *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta,* ed. Marco Santagata (Milano: Mondadori, 1996) |
| SUP | Stanford University Press |
| UCP | University of Chicago Press |
| WA | *Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930-85) |
| YUP | Yale University Press |

## A Note on Texts

Quotations from the Bible are taken from *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: OUP, 2008). The text of the Vulgate is quoted from the Stuttgart edition, *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

Quotations from Augustine are from J.-P. Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: Garnier, 1844-1903); all translations of the *Confessions* are by Frank J. Sheed, 2nd ed., ed. Michael P. Foley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006). Original spelling and punctuation are reproduced throughout. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

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## 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 a degree or other qualification at this university or elsewhere.

All sources are acknowledged as references.

## Introduction

Ici, nous allons conformément et tout d'un train, mon livre et moi.[1]

*Du repentir*, Michel de Montaigne

Montaigne begins his essay 'On repenting' with a disavowal that doubles as a vindication: 'les autres forment l'homme; je le récite'.[2] Writing cannot 'shape' man; at best it can try to keep pace with the shifting tides of identity and consciousness, constantly staggering in the wake of the world's 'natural drunkenness'.[3] Yet the inner life of the most ordinary and most universal of men, Michel de Montaigne, is plumbed with the utmost sincerity and exactitude, we are quickly assured: the instability of world and word may preclude a definitive, but not a truthful representation of the self. The language of confession suffuses Montaigne's claims of absolute fidelity in setting forth man's contradictions, as the essay 'On some lines of Virgil' acknowledges in an allusion to the controversy which continued to surround the sacrament of penance at the end of the sixteenth century: 'En faveur des Huguenots, qui accusent notre confession privée et auriculaire, je me confesse en public, religieusement et purement'.[4] Montaigne's 'confession' is offered up as an ironic tribute to an alien devotional habit, a metaphor for authorial sincerity in part belied by a hint of posturing, rather than a rehearsal of a religious ritual. If the *Essays* amount to a confession, indeed, it is one that is imagined as coextensive with essay writing: a religious and pure commitment to trialling and tracing the vagaries of thought, rather than a means of achieving a final resolution, let alone a conversion. Montaigne's bold claim that he 'rarely repents' poses a radical challenge to the necessity for a confession of sin. When sins are inseparable from one's nature, 'inborn, of one substance with us, and visceral', how can we ever truly repudiate them, and by extension, ourselves?[5] Yet only this impossible, total revolution of one's being is worthy of being called 'repentance': 'Il faut qu'elle me touche de toutes parts avant que je la nomme ainsi, et qu'elle pince mes entrailles et les afflige autant profondément que Dieu me voit, et autant universellement'.[6] Confession sheds its religious vestments in this extraordinary essay, at the cost, however, of abandoning the prospect that the speaker will be 'deeply' and 'universally' altered in God's sight as a result of his utterance. When 'confessing' the self

[1] Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, III, 2, ed. Pierre Michel (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 46; 'Here, my book and I go harmoniously forward at the same pace.' Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, tr. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 822.
[2] Montaigne, *Essais*, p. 44; 'Others form Man; I give an account of Man […]'. *Essays*, p. 821.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Montaigne, *Essais*, III, 5, p. 93; 'As a courtesy to the Huguenots who damn our private auricular confession, I make my confession here in public, sincerely and scrupulously.' *Essays*, p. 862.
[5] 'naturels, consubstantiels, et intestins', *Essais*, p. 52; *Essays*, p. 827.
[6] Montaigne, *Essais*, p. 55. 'Before I call it repentance it must touch me everywhere, grip my bowels and make them yearn – as deeply and as universally as God does see me.' *Essays*, p. 829.

is framed as a way of retracing the inalterable course of an unfixed identity, writing by the same token is no longer able, as Montaigne recognises, to 'form' its writer, or 'transform' its readers.

The poets examined by this thesis resemble Montaigne in representing confession as an unfinished process: the language of the self is 'essayed' and put on trial more often than it is able to effect a final conversion. Nonetheless, it is by trusting speech to instantiate a profound and 'universal' transformation of the self that they are able to test the limits and potentialities of a 'confessional poetics', a praxis of 'self-poesis' conceived as a way not only of documenting a contingent and impermanent condition truthfully, but also of bringing a transcendent and eternal truth to light. As Augustine indicates, confession is an operative 'act': 'ecce enim veritatem dilexisti, quoniam qui facit eam venit ad lucem. Volo eam facere in corde meo coram te in confessione; in stilo autem meo coram multis testibus' ('For behold Thou lovest the truth, and *he that does the truth comes to the light*. I wish to do it in confession, in my heart before Thee, in my writing before many witnesses') (X, 1, 1).[7] To recognise confession as a 'speech act' which is also a 'truth act' is to render an opposition between ethics and aesthetics untenable, even and perhaps especially in the domain of confessional writing. Rhetorically, confession strenuously re-asserts the incompatibility between sincerity and 'fiction': the sinner's speech must be plain and unassuming, humbling itself into an artlessness commensurate to his self-abasement. Two objections arise in response to this requirement: first, the mortified tongue of a penitential *sermo humilis* is itself a degree, rather than a rejection of style. Second, and more significantly, the dichotomy between truth and rhetoric disguises the ways in which confession invariably exerts a shaping (we might say a 'stylistic') influence on the subjectivity to which it gives voice. An implicit acknowledgment of this influence, indeed, is contained in the confessant's anxious awareness that his utterance is liable to be adulterated at any moment by a rhetoric that is more than merely expressive. Confession fundamentally interrogates the conditions under which the subject is able to put himself into words, to render himself communicable, and to be radically altered in the sometimes exalting, often vexed attempt to do so. Examining a literary language of confession thus sheds light not only on the intersection between art's ethical and aesthetic commitments, but also on the very nature of the speaking subject as it has been construed in the long history of confessional practice in the Christian West.

Speaking Sin: From the Church Fathers to the Reformation

Repentance is a teaching so central to the New Testament that it cannot be separated from the very activity of evangelisation, from Christ's injunction 'repent ye, and believe the gospel' (Mark 1:15) to Luke 24:47's instruction that 'repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his

[7] Augustine, *Confessionum libri XIII*, ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 32, 779 (Paris, 1841); *Confessions*, tr. Frank J. Sheed, 2nd ed., ed. Michael P. Foley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006). All further references from these editions.

name among all nations'.[8] In addition to the sign of repentance and rebirth offered by baptism, the Didache inscribes an act of repentance in the earliest forms of eucharistic liturgy, calling for a confession of sin before the fraction of the bread.[9] The possibility of further repentance after baptism and the extent of the power to remit sins granted to the apostles (Matthew 16:19's reference to the power to 'bind and loose'), however, were far from settled questions among the fathers of the Church. Tertullian's views on the permissibility of the penitent sinner's 'reconciliation with the altar' diverge considerably between his tract *De paenitentia* and his later work of Montanist inspiration, *De pudicitia*, which does not countenance a readmission of repentant adulterers to the church.[10] This internal conflict between a conciliatory and a rigorist position, which was soon to become a constant in the history of the Church, was brought to a head by the controversy over the 'lapsed' during the third century. Whether the baptised guilty of apostasy should be welcomed back into the fold gave considerable impetus to the institution of a solemn rite of penance (*paenitentia solemnis*), the precursor of sacramental confession. This consisted of a confession of sins, entry into the *ordo paenitentium*, and a ceremony of readmission before the assembled congregation, culminating in the imposition of hands by the bishop. Cyprian's *De lapsis* calls *confessio* or *exomologesis* the manifestation of conscience to God's priests (ch. 28), undertaken as part of the harsh and protracted exercises of self-humiliation entailed by the rite.[11] This was the 'second plank' after baptism (*secunda post naufragium miseris tabula*), according to Jerome's well-known formula, only available to the sinner once in a lifetime (Ep. 80, 9).[12] Ambrose too speaks of 'one penance' following baptism (*sicut unum baptisma, ita una paenitentia*).[13]

The dramatic rituals of self-mortification described by Tertullian and Cyprian were not, however, the only form of confessional practice to take shape in the early centuries of the Church. Augustine teaches that minor sins can be cleansed through a daily labour of self-examination and prayer, and is the first to articulate the principle according to which confession of 'private' sins should take place in private, while sins which give scandal to the community should be expiated in public

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[8] For this brief history of confession, I am indebted to Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lea, 1896); Bernhard Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, tr. Francis Courtney (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964); and Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, N.J.: PUP, 1977). See also Jean Morin's foundational *Commentarius historicus de disciplina in administratione sacramenti* (Paris: Gaspari Meturas, 1651).

[9] *The Didache*, ed. and tr. James A. Kleist (New York: Paulist Press, 1948), ch. 14.

[10] Tertullian, *Treatises on Penance*, tr. William P. Le Saint (New York: Newman Press, 1959). See *Poschmann, Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, pp. 38-44.

[11] 'quanto et fides majores et timore meliores sunt qui […] hoc ipsum apud sacerdotes Dei dolenter et simpliciter confitentes, exomologesin conscientiae faciunt', Cyprian, *De Lapsis*, PL 4, 488. 'How much greater is the faith and salutary the fear of those who […] confess even this to the priests of God simply and contritely, and manifest their conscience to them.' '*De Lapsis' and 'De ecclesiae catholicae unitate'*, ed. and tr. Maurice Bévenot (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 35.

[12] Jerome, *Epistulae 71-120*, ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL 55 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Terreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996).

[13] Ambrose, 'De paenitentia', ed. O. Faller, CSEL 73 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Terreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1955), II, 10, 95.

(*Sermones* 82, 7, 10).[14] Cyprian's use of *exomologesis* to indicate a verbal 'manifestation' of sins to the priest, indeed, does not support a picture of early Christian penance solely as a public spectacle. As early as the fifth century, Leo I reserves harsh words for the practice of reading out a list of the penitent's sins reportedly practised in the dioceses of Campania, Samnium and Picenum, advocating instead for the benefits of a *confessio secreta* (Ep. 168, 2).[15] In monastic life, more discursive and introspective forms of confession are attested early on, alongside the public ordeals demanded from the 'renunciants'. Cassian describes the practice of perennial vigilance and self-examination required of the monk as a hunt for the spiritual 'beasts' haunting the peripheries of the soul: 'All the secret places of our heart, therefore, must be constantly scrutinized and the prints of whatever enters them must be investigated in the most careful way […]' (Conference 1, 22).[16] Yet, as abba Pinufius warns, dwelling too much on the 'putrid' desires of the past holds its own dangers, attesting at worst to a latent inclination towards sin, at best to a fear of punishment which should give way to love of God (Conference 20, 9, 1). This was to become a salient point of the scholastic debate on the proper spiritual attitude required to attain the 'ends' of repentance.[17]

The emergence of a vast casuistic literature in the Middle Ages owes much to the Celtic model of tariff penance, attested in Ireland from the sixth century: the often astonishingly rigorous punishments (*poena*) levied for each category of spiritual offence (*culpa*) included prayer, abstinence and, above all, fasting. These works of satisfaction could in some cases add up to more than a lifetime of penance, short of which they could be converted into alms and pilgrimages, setting the scene for the development of the system of indulgences. A text mistakenly attributed to Augustine, *De vera et falsa poenitentia*, circulated widely during the Middle Ages and was eventually incorporated into Gratian's *Decretum*. Its emphasis on the expiatory function of the confessant's shame is noteworthy: under the uncontroversial aspect of this teaching, we begin to see a convergence of the act of disclosure with that of remission which would become central to the 'sacramentalisation' of private penance.[18] Verbalising sin comes to coincide (at least in part) with absolution, a tendency to consolidate the stages of confession into a single act counterbalanced by the concurrent formalisation of the tripartite structure of contrition, confession and satisfaction first laid down by Peter Lombard. The legalistic overtones of tariff penance were only accentuated once confession entered the age of universities, as scholastic thinkers set about defining the precise sacramental nature of confession. While regularising a practice which was already widespread, the Lateran council's decree *Omnis*

[14] 'Ergo ipsa corripienda sunt coram omnibus quae peccantur coram omnibus: ipsa corripienda sunt secretius, quae peccantur secretius' ('Therfore sins that are committed before all are to be reproached in front of all; those that are committed secretly, are to be reproached in secret'). Augustine, PL 38, 511.
[15] Leo I, *Epistolae*, PL 54, 1211.
[16] 'Omnes igitur cordis nostris recessus jugiter perscrutandi sunt, et ascendentium in eos vestigia indagatione sagacissima retractanda.' Cassian, *Collationes*, PL 49, 519-20; *The Conferences*, tr. Boniface Ramsay (New York: Newman Press, 1997), p. 63.
[17] Cassian, *Conferences*, p. 701.
[18] Gratian, *Decretum*, ed. Emil Friedberd, CJC 1 (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1879).

*utriusque sexus* of 1215, requiring an annual confession of sins, made essential the development of a clearer theological doctrine to justify the priest's role in managing repentance.

Anticipating Thomas Aquinas, Lombard defines penance simultaneously as a virtue and as a sacrament.[19] The conception of internal contrition as *sacramentum et res* proposed by the *Sentences* – 'something' which both signifies and causes forgiveness – goes some way towards addressing one of the main difficulties involved in the attempt to develop a sacramental theory of penance: the ambiguity of the intangible sacramental 'matter' of contrition, tellingly designated by Aquinas as *quasi materia*.[20] But while Lombard, following Abelard, holds that contrition without ecclesiastic mediation is sufficient to procure forgiveness, Aquinas proposes that an imperfect contrition (*confessio informis*) motivated by fear rather than love of God, can be brought to fruition through recourse to the sacrament.[21] An even stronger position on the imperfect disposition of 'attrition' as sufficient for absolution is endorsed by Duns Scotus. By the end of the thirteenth century, as Thomas Tentler observes, 'the absolution of the priest had become a mysterious offering of grace that could counterbalance weakness and doubt', a change reflected by the substitution of the original deprecatory formula 'May God forgive you' with the more operative sense denoted by the indicative 'I absolve you'.[22] The Thomistic definition of penance outlined in *De fidei articulis et de septis sacramentis* was the doctrinal position which prevailed, forming the basis of Eugenius IV's *Decretum pro Armenis* of 1439. In practice, confession remained primarily a social ritual until the advent of the Reformation, according to John Bossy: the recital of sins required before Easter consisted in 'an annual settlement of social accounts' facilitated by the parish priest.[23] Only among the clerical and aristocratic elites was confession practised with any greater frequency.

The evidence from confessional manuals gathered by Bossy compellingly attests to the increasing emphasis on 'private' sins (notably sexual impurity) in the early modern period, although Tentler shows that sins of the flesh were a grave concern in academic and monastic communities even prior to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Debora Shuger, likewise, argues for a fundamental continuity between medieval and post-Reformation practices of confession and

[19] Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, tr. Giulio Silano, vol. 4 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), book 4, dist. 14-22; cf. Joseph Goering, 'The Scholastic Turn (1100-1500): Penitential Theology and Law in the Schools', in *A New History of Penance*, ed. Abigail Firey (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 219-237.
[20] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. John Fearon, 60 vols. (London: Blackfriars, 1964-75), *Suppl*. q.5. a.1.
[21] Aquinas, *Suppl.* q.9, a.1. As Poschmann observes, the advantage of simplicity in Aquinas' teaching on penance is dearly bought, for it turns confession into 'a substitute for the perfect contrition which the penitent has failed to provide.' *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, p. 190.
[22] Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, pp. 280-1.
[23] John Bossy, 'The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (1975), 21-38, p. 25.

satisfaction.[24] It is clear that the Reformers' attack on auricular confession, however, responded to widespread anticlerical sentiment, motivated in no small part by the abuses of confession (in particular by the mendicant orders), and by the practice of indulgences. When Luther burnt Leo X's bull of excommunication *Exsurge Domine* in 1520, he also cast into the flames Angelus de Clavasio's *Summa Angelica*, a popular confessors' manual, in a symbolic rejection of the ecclesiastical authority which the sacrament of penance represented and enforced. As Erasmus writes in a tract on the merits and abuses of confession published in 1524, *Exomologesis, sive modus confidendi*, a strong case can be made for the incompatibility between Christian freedom and the mastery over the sinner afforded by the priest's knowledge of one's secrets.[25] The political implications of the reformation of penance would emerge forcefully in Protestant England, where the confessor's hold over a believer's conscience was frequently portrayed as a threat to political unity.[26] But the theological break underlying the Reformers' criticism of sacramental penance ran much deeper. Central to Luther's ninety-five theses was an understanding of repentance as a disposition which should orient 'the entire life of the believer'.[27] The sacrament of penance, according to Luther, exerted a pernicious influence on faith, breeding a false trust in the works of man and a corresponding mistrust in God's mercy.

Even a 'correctly' performed confession, Luther insists, was all too liable to produce scrupulosity at one extreme, and excessive confidence in good works at the other: 'what has the art of correct confession [*ars confitendi*] done but to destroy the art and practice of trusting [*artem et usum confidendi*], so that we have learned to confess much, but to trust not at all?'[28] That the integrity of one's contrition can never be known is a point which finds Aquinas and Luther in agreement, but which leads to two radically different solutions: trust in the sacramental efficacy of confession in the former; trust in the promise of forgiveness already granted by faith in the latter. The 'work' or 'action' of penance is substituted by a repentant disposition, a shift encapsulated by Erasmus' translation of the verb *metanoite* in Matthew 4:17 ('Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand') as *resipiscite* (to 'change one's mind') instead of the Vulgate's *poenitentiam agite* (to 'do penance') in the 1527

[24] Debora Shuger, 'The Reformation of Penance', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 71.4 (2008), 557-571. Cf. David W. Myers, '*Poor, Sinning Folk': Confession and Conscience in Counter-Reformation Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), ch. 2.
[25] Desiderius Erasmus, 'The Manner of Confessing', tr. Michael J. Heath, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 67, ed. Frederick J. McGinness (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 1-76, p. 39.
[26] Peter Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), pp. 25-28.
[27] 'When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance' ('Dominus et magister noster Iesus Christus dicendo 'Penitentiam agite &c. omnem vitam fidelium penitentiam esse voluit'). Martin Luther, 'Ninety-Five Theses', ed. Harold J. Grimm, tr. C. M. Jacobs, LW 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), pp. 17-34, p. 25; WA 1, p. 233.
[28] Martin Luther, 'A Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made', ed. Eric W. Gritsch, tr. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch, LW 39 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), pp. 23-47, p. 41. 'Quid enim fecit ars confitendi, nisi quod abolevit artem et usum confidendi, ut multum confiteri, nihil confidere discernemus?' *Confitendi Ratio*, WA 6, 157-169, p. 166.

Annotations to the New Testament.[29] Luther, nonetheless, was not opposed to retaining a form of confession in the Reformed Church, calling it 'a cure without equal for distressed consciences' ('afflictis conscientiis unicum remedium').[30] Indeed, he admits that 'I would have been strangled by the devil long ago if confession had not sustained me'.[31] The *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* presents an ambivalent position on the sacrament of penance which, as Ronald K. Rittgers suggests, resulted in a change in confessional practice of greater magnitude than Luther probably envisaged.[32] Calvin in particular is stark in his pronouncements against penance, denouncing auricular confession as a torture and 'butchery' (*carnificina*) of the conscience (III, 4, 17).[33]

Rome's response to the Reformers' criticism of penance consisted in reiterating the sacramental efficacy of confession and Innocent III's requirement of an annual account of sins. The importance ascribed to penance by the Counter-Reformation can be measured by the Tridentine Catechism's description of the second part of the sacrament (confession) as a 'bulwark' of Christan virtue destined to attract (and to help withstand) the heaviest blows of the enemy: 'all holy persons are firmly persuaded that whatever holiness, piety, and religiousness has been preserved in the Church in our age, through God's benefit, is due in large part to confession.'[34] Arguing that the coercive tendency of the sacrament became more pronounced as the Church saw itself threatened by schism, Adriano Prosperi observes an intriguing shift in the interpretation of the 'disciplinary' function of confession in the deliberations of the Council of Trent's fourteenth session (1551).[35] While Johannes Eck's definition of confession as 'nervus religionis nostrae, et Christiani populi disciplina' referred primarily to self-discipline, for the Fathers of Trent the prevailing sense of the term *disciplina* was the latent one of social control.[36] The re-affirmation of the sacramentality of penance entailed a consolidation of

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[29] A. L. Jarrott, 'Erasmus' Biblical Humanism', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 17 (1970), 119-52, pp. 125-8; Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), p. 126.

[30] Martin Luther, 'The Babylonian Captivity of the Church', ed. Abdel Ross Wentz, tr. A. T. Steinhäuser, LW 36 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), pp. 3-126, p. 86; WA 6, 497-573, p. 546.

[31] Martin Luther, WA 10.3, p. 62, ll. 1-2, quoted by Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of the Keys: Confession, Conscience, and Authority in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 2004), p. 82. See also David Bagchi, 'Luther and the Sacramentality of Penance', *Studies in Church History*, 40 (2004), 119-27.

[32] Rittgers, *The Reformation of the Keys*, pp. 215-9.

[33] 'Ibi saevi isti carnefices, ut vulnera sanarent quae fecerant'. John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, ed. W. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, *Corpus Reformatorum* 29 (Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetschke, 1863), p. 159. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), pp. 641-2.

[34] 'omnibus fere piis persuasum est, quidquid hoc tempore sanctitatis, pietatis, & religionis in Ecclesia, summo Dei beneficio, conservatum est, id magna ex parte confessioni tribuendum esse; ut nulli mirandum sit, humani generis hostem, cum fidem catholicam evertere cogitat, per ministros impietatis suae, & satellites, hanc veluti Christianae virtutis arcem totis viribus oppugnare conatum esse'. *Catechismus ex decreto concilii Tridentini ad Parochos* (Rome: Manutius, 1566), p. 311.

[35] Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della Coscienza: Inquisitori, Confessori, Missionari* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009), pp. 266-7.

[36] Johannes Eck, *De poenitentia et confessione secreta semper in Ecclesia Dei obseruata, contra Lutherum* (Rome: Mazochium, 1523), c. P Ir.

confession's judicial connotations, reflected in Carlo Borromeo's instructions to confessors and in the development of the confessional box: a seat of judgment, but also a means for increasing privacy and stemming clerical abuses.[37]

Alongside the notion of penance as a judicial procedure, the other side of the Counter-Reformation response moved, much as in the Protestant world, towards internalising and 'psychologising' the sacrament. Meditative practices such as the spiritual exercises developed by François de Sales and Ignatius Loyola encouraged frequent confession and reflection on one's sins. And while Luther excluded the possibility of making an exhaustive confession of sins, the injunction that the entire life of believers should be devoted to repentance bears a striking resemblance to the continual vigilance over the motions of the soul fostered by forms of Counter-Reformation piety. Moshe Sluhovsky remarks that the popularisation of practices normally reserved to monastic circles allows us justifiably to identify in the early modern period 'a new stage in the history of Christian methods of self-formation and subjectivation'.[38] This historical juncture, indeed, saw an intensification of confessional practice facilitated both by Catholic and by Protestant reform, even as the habits of 'subjectivation' which had become sedimented over the centuries underwent a radical dislocation. If Lutheranism characterised repentance as a never-finished process – a theological principle which, according to Charles Taylor, became the basis for 'sacralising' ordinary life – it also fundamentally destabilised the sacramentality, and thus the sacrality of the institutions charged with dispensing forgiveness.[39] The fate of penance in the post-Reformation follows, in such a way, the same trajectory plotted by the sacrament itself: a deconstruction and destabilisation which acts as the basis for the subject's renewal. By destabilising the discourse tasked with performing the mortification and revivification of the sinner, the Reformation thus precipitated a seismic shift, both in Protestant and Catholic spirituality, in Christian practices of repentance: from a 'religion of penance', Christianity is turned into a 'penitential religion', in which the subject comes into being as a pre-eminently discursive entity.

'Beasts of Avowal'

Erasmus writes in his *Exomologesis* that the only sin which cannot be confessed is the sin of unbelief.[40] Beneath this pragmatic stipulation lies a fundamental question raised by confessional discourse, one which would later be taken up by Michel Foucault: what silent profession of faith is contained in the confession of self? The obligation to tell the truth about oneself under which we are

[37] Bossy, 'The Social History of Confession', p. 30. See also Wietse de Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul: Confession, Discipline, and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).
[38] Moshe Sluhovsky, *Becoming a New Self: Practices of Belief in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: UCP, 2017), p. 13.
[39] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1989), ch. 13.
[40] Erasmus, 'The Manner of Confessing', p. 55.

still labouring in the modern day, according to Foucault, invariably encodes a set of ideological allegiances. In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault sketches a picture of Western man as a 'beast of avowal', identifying confession as the quintessential expression of power's relationship with the individual, and as the primary instrument deployed by its discursive structures in the production of truth and in the 'subjectification' of the individual. The subjectivity crafted by confession is the 'effect of a power that constrains us' concealed under the apparently innate demand for the truth to come to the surface.[41] The critique of confession as an internalised disciplinary instrument implicates institutions such as the prison, the clinic and the school, but also extends to the systems of knowledge derived from a penitential culture: confession is a mode of thought, Foucault reveals, as much as an 'instrumental element' or 'technology of the self'.[42] The paradigmatic example of this 'way of philosophizing' is the movement of the Cartesian self which ties self-consciousness to the search for truth.[43] In his later work, Foucault retraces the history of avowal back to early Christian rituals, delineating the emergence of a confessional 'hermeneutics of the self' from the co-penetration of two forms of penance: the symbolic martyrdom of *exomologesis*, and the 'analytical and continuous verbalization' of thoughts which emerged from monastic practices of *exagoreusis*.[44]

Christianity is for Foucault 'essentially, at bottom, the religion of confession'.[45] Avowal is the hinge which connects and pulls apart the two driving 'alethurgies', or 'regimes of truth' of Christian orthodoxy: the confession of self and the confession of faith. Foucault excavates the origins of avowal through a genealogy of confessional practice which at times starts to look like a confessional exercise. The account of the inescapability of power proposed by *The History of Sexuality* comes remarkably close to a Pauline notion of the slavery of sin, or to Augustine's sense of an original fault warping the capacities of the human will to determine itself. Foucault's shift in his later work to considering avowal as a way of fashioning the self through the act of speaking, in addition to an instrument of subjectivation, tries to overcome this difficulty. The possibility of formulating the relation of the self to its historical correlatives without adopting that regime's language of selfhood is held out by the lectures on the *Government of the Living,* in their attempt to investigate the 'force that we accord truth', instead of conceding that 'truth, by right and without question, has a power of obligation and constraint over us'.[46] Foucault's method thus involves relinquishing a fundamental epistemological

[41] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction,* tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1990), p. 60.
[42] Michel Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, ed. Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt, tr. Stephen W. Sawyer (Chicago: UCP, 2014), p. 256; cf. Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther M. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: Massachusetts Press, 1988).
[43] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, p. 60; *La Volonté de Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 80.
[44] Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, p. 112.
[45] Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France 1979-1980*, ed. Michael Senellart, tr. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 84.
[46] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, pp. 100-1.

premise, at the risk, however, of instantiating a discursive model which reproduces a confessional logic, one in which the attempt to discern the potential source of 'illusion' (or sin) behind every position is a never-ending task, and where truth may be destabilised to the point of coinciding with self-representation. If the early practices of Christian self-manifestation exemplify an alternative form of 'care of the self' distinct from the modern confessional discourses critiqued by the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault hints at the limits both of self-renunciation and of the 'permanent anthropologism' of secular forms of avowal, anticipating the 'confessional' character of identitarian politics:

> But the moment, maybe, is coming for us to ask, do we need, really, this hermeneutics of the self? Maybe the problem of the self is not to discover what it is in positivity, maybe the problem is not to discover a positive self or the positive foundation of the self. Maybe our problem is now to discover that the self is nothing else than the historical correlation of the technology built in our history.[47]

The alignment of Christian sacrifice and identitarian 'anthropologism' underlines the difficulty of constructing a 'politics of ourselves' outside a given regime of truth. The discovery of the self as nothing more than 'the historical correlation of the technology built in our history' risks, indeed, re-creating a subject condemned to keep confessing his own contingency in the attempt to transcend it, subjecting the genealogist to an even more radical renunciation than that demanded by confession: the suppression of identity itself as a category tied to oppressive frameworks of power. Even when it comes to the 'saying all' of Cynic *parrhesia* or 'free speech', which in Foucault's account resembles the self-dramatisation of *exomologesis*, it would seem that only in relation to dominance does the subject come to tell the truth about himself.

Thus, Judith Butler pertinently asks of the account the deviant subject is able to give of himself: 'Can the truth he tells about himself tell the truth about dominance, or does the ethical sphere, when considered separately from the operation of power, always engage in a disavowal of power, and, in this sense, in a kind of concealment?'[48] This disavowal amounts to the suspension of a critical relation to the contingency of selfhood, a concealment of the historical and ideological determination of the identity that is always and necessarily avowed. In this sense, just by speaking, we are always confessing. The work of genealogy is precisely that of overcoming the dynamic of disavowal which folds back into avowal. It achieves this, however, by dissolving any kind of fixed basis for the speaking subject's identity. Foucault's insight on the nature of genealogy is as penetrating as it is chilling in its implications: 'Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men'.[49] Montaigne's sense of the impermanence

[47] Michel Foucault, 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth', *Political Theory*, 21.2 (May 1993), 198-227, pp. 222-223.
[48] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 124.
[49] Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 153.

of life-writing faintly rings through these words, but, unlike the *Essays*, this denial of a stable identity is radicalised to the point of undermining the very grounds of genealogy's epistemological endeavour, and even of its basic communicability. It is questionable whether this approach does in fact keep to its promises, or operates another disavowal of the 'confessional' determination of its own discourse. Though the ultimate value of a 'genealogy' of penance lies in its alertness to the impossibility of fixing the object of investigation into shape – the very opposite of the acquisitive and truth-oriented epistemology bequeathed by a confessional culture – the discourse of confession is perhaps not so deterministic as Foucault tends to assume. The compulsive force of a language which coaxes the self into being, a force coincident with authority itself, is shadowed by the strangely fluid and self-unravelling nature of a discourse which at its core signifies and performs the revolutionary possibilities of change.

The tension outlined by Foucault between the 'regime of faith' and the regime of 'confession of faith' accounts for this inherent slipperiness in confessional language: the processes of mortifying and disowning the self paradoxically lend themselves to query (if not directly to undermine) the very dogma professed by the confessant's avowal. Does confession's disavowal of the self thus paradoxically facilitate, contra Erasmus, a disavowal of belief? Far from being solely an epistemological instrument allied to institutional power, confession, indeed, can also amount to a recognition of the self's ultimate unknowability. This destabilisation of the self is experienced most acutely at the juncture between confession of sin and confession of faith which turns the truth of the individual into an expression of the mysterious truths of grace. The rift of consciousness and of language thus opened up, however, is not uniquely a religious phenomenon: indeed, its closest correlative is a psychoanalytic model of the unconscious, the obscure coil of intentionality in need of being brought to light through an 'abreactive' process of narrativising the self.[50] Peter Brown accordingly draws an analogy between Augustine's explanation of the subject's primal determination by the Fall and Freud's theory of the psyche: 'both men [...] assume that the proliferation of images is due to some precise event, to the development of some geological fault across a hitherto undivided consciousness: for Freud, it is the creation of an unconscious by repression; for Augustine, it is the outcome of the Fall.'[51] Chloe Taylor speculates that Foucault's neglect of Augustine's *Confessions* may be due to the habitual conflation of the two meanings of *confessio* which quintessentially defines Augustine's approach and which is alien to Foucault's theory of avowal (in addition to Foucault's general preference for lesser-known sources).[52] Indeed, the conflict between avowal of self and avowal of faith Foucault describes schematically as shaping the history of Christianity and its great

[50] Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, tr. James Strachey, vol. 2 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 8-9.
[51] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber, 2000), p. 261. Cf. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Oxford: OUP, 1972), p. 157.
[52] Chloe Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2008), pp. 45-6.

disputes, including the Reformation, moves from the premise that the search for the truth about the self is primarily a means of constituting subjectivity in relation to authority, rather than of articulating a relationship with the deity through prayer. An alternative way of framing the 'subjectivation' of the individual by power that characterises the relationship between confessant and confessor, perhaps, is in terms of a 'subjectivation' by love.

The principle which, as confessors' manuals insist, obliges the priest to believe the truth of the confessant's revelations and repentance implicitly (*credere tenetur*) is thus interpreted by Foucault as the expression of a power which constrains its own enforcers. But it could equally be described as a rehearsal of Augustine's trust that his readers will believe his confessions because, as Paul writes in the first letter to the Corinthians (13:7), 'charity believeth all things' (*Confessions*, X, 3, 4).[53] In Virgina Burrus' words, 'to receive a confession and thus to claim to know another – to risk *acknowledging* another – is a hopeful extension of love in the face of the unverifiability of *veritas*'.[54] This acknowledgment of confession's unverifiability is all the more necessary because the confessant must acknowledge himself as ultimately knowable only in God's sight. What happens, however, when this divine assurance of truth is threatened, or falls away entirely? This is not only a consequence of a 'secular' age which renders confession outside the devotional sphere a fractious endeavour, but it is also the fundamental question facing the believer. By its very nature self-consciousness seems to turn upon itself in an abyssal gesture, or, as J. M. Coetzee's puts it, 'because the basic movement of self-reflexiveness is a doubting and questioning movement, it is in the nature of the truth that the reflecting self tells itself not to be final.'[55] Truth thus becomes provisional and coloured by doubt as a result of the procedures used to extract it. Coetzee's analysis of confession in Rousseau, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky traces this dynamic of continual regression and disillusionment, suggesting that it is in the absence of a religious framework of absolution that the truth of confession comes to be fraught with difficulties. Secular confessions in these works create a veritable 'textual machine' suited to the production of an exhausting and never exhausted narrative, divorced from the realm of truth-seeking and authenticity. The expression 'textual machine' is Paul De Man's, who in *Allegories of Reading* judges the revelations of Rousseau's autobiographical narrative as antithetical to genuine confession. Rousseau, De Man argues, joins self-accusation with self-exoneration: because the asseveration of guilt cannot be verified, the accuser gains the power to excuse himself in the name of the same truth by which he swears his guilt. Rousseau's *Confessions* thereby reveal the peculiar pleasures of

[53] Jean Delumeau, *L'Aveu et le Pardon: Les Difficultés de la Confession, XIIIème-XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), pp. 95-6.
[54] Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 115.
[55] J. M. Coetzee, 'Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky', *Comparative Literature*, 37.3 (Summer 1985), 193-232, p. 204.

revelation, where 'guilt is forgiven because it allows for the pleasure of revealing its repression'.[56] The 'shameful, damnable sweetness' of 'eating away' at oneself, in the words of Dostoyevsky's Underground man, or the 'double pleasure' of sin joined with 'the charm of repentance' of Camus' penitent-judge Clamence appear intrinsic to the circularity of the confessing self-consciousness.[57] De Man's account of Rousseau's *Confessions* comes close to Coetzee's diagnosis of Dostoyevsky: 'each new stage in the unveiling suggests a deeper shame, a greater impossibility to reveal, and a greater satisfaction in outwitting this impossibility.'[58] When the confessional discourse is not extinguished by a final divine truth coinciding with the truth about the subject, it would seem, confession unveils itself yet again as a *mise-en-abîme* of apology and of selfhood.

While the pleasures of revelation are tightly controlled in a religious framework, the Christian penitential tradition's acknowledgment of the self as unknowable complicates Coetzee's distinction between religious and secular confession. Jacques Derrida, responding to De Man's analysis of Rousseau, observes that all confessions contain an element of apology, as the object of confession is not to reveal or make known, particularly in a religious rite which assumes divine omniscience: '*To make* known does not come down to knowing and, above all, to make known a *fault* does not come down to making known anything whatsoever; it is *already* to accuse oneself and to enter into a performative process of excuse and forgiveness.'[59] The 'truth' of confession is never verifiable, since 'in my address to another, I must always ask for faith or confidence, beg to be believed at my word, there where equivocation is ineffaceable and perjury always possible, precisely unverifiable.'[60] If the fact that confession hinges on the individual's unverifiable sincerity leads Derrida to consider all confessions apologetic, the presence of a divine truth verifying the faith and intentions of the sinner is what prevents confession from unravelling in self-referentiality, even as it makes the confessant all the more inaccessible to himself. The depths of the soul, as Augustine writes, are only accessible to God: 'multum timeo occulta mea, quae norunt oculi tui, mei autem non' ('I am in great fear of my secret sins – sins that Your eyes see, though mine do not') (*Confessions*, X, 37, 60).[61] In Derrida's reworking of Augustine in *Circonfession*, the citational and periphrastic construction of the work reflects this

[56] Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: YUP, 1979), p. 286.
[57] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, tr. Ronald Wilks (Penguin, 2009), p. 7; Albert Camus, *The Fall*, tr. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1963), p. 104.
[58] De Man, *Allegories of Reading,* p. 286.
[59] Jacques Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)', in *Without Alibi*, ed. and tr. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: SUP, 2002), pp. 71-160, p. 108. '*Faire* savoir ne se réduit pas à savoir mais, surtout, faire savoir une *faute* ne se réduit pas à faire savoir n'importe quoi; c'est *déjà* s'accuser et s'engager dans un processus performatif d'excuse ou de pardon.' Jacques Derrida, *Papier Machine: Le Ruban de Machine à Écrire et Autres Réponses* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), p. 79.
[60] Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon', p. 111. 'Dans mon adresse à l'autre, je dois toujours demander la foi ou la confiance, prier d'être cru sur parole, là où l'équivoque est ineffaçable et la parjure toujours possible, justement invérifiable.' *Papier Machine*, p. 82.
[61] PL 32, 804.

central insight, while vindicating the aporetic, 'deconstructive' dynamic of a confession which removes itself from the religious and even from the ethical sphere:

> An avowal without 'hymn' (hymnology) and without 'virtue' (aretalogy), without managing to close itself on its possibility, unsealing abandoning the circle open, wandering on the periphery, taking the pulse of an encircling phrase, the pulsion of the paragraph which never circumpletes itself, as long as the blood, what I call thus and thus call, continues its venue in its vein.[62]

This redoubling of consciousness is no longer the source of gratifying torment that it represents in the *Notes from the Underground*, but is intended to flow unimpaired, in the image of the circumvented subject Derrida strives to articulate. The 'open circle' of this confession leaves us free to distrust its content ('You would have every right to distrust it, as you would with any confession'), but *Circonfession* nonetheless suggestively draws together the paradigms of Augustine's *confessio* and those of 'deconstruction': the 'othering' of the self accomplished by confession, Derrida suggests, bears an affinity to the destabilisation of self and narrative which renders the 'deconstructive' (or 'deconstructed') subject inherently alien to himself.[63]

In Jean-Luc Marion's reading of Augustine we find an even clearer articulation of the *Confessions* as a form of 'heterobiograpy': 'a praise confessed by the gifted, who is decentered toward God by being ex-centered from himself, a praise that comes to me from elsewhere (from a word given to me in advance) and that leads me back there (by the repetition carried out by my responsal).'[64] The quality of 'responsal' and the use of citations characteristic both of Augustine and Derrida is revised by Marion to signify not the textual fashioning of the self-as-other we witness in *Circonfession*, but the way in which the self is spoken into being by speaking out the word of God. The union of confession of sin and profession of faith overcomes the dispersal of meaning on which Derrida's confession rests, without, however, adumbrating the workings of the Cartesian 'cogito'. A return to Augustine enables a conceptualisation of confession as the very condition of discourse:

> Even the refusal to confess constrains me to a confession despite myself, and if I have the choice to orient my confession, I do not have the option of dispensing with it […] *Confessio* is therefore not reducible to a language game or just one speech act among others; it defines, in

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[62] 'Un aveu sans vérité qui tourne autour de lui-même, [un] aveu sans 'hymne' (hymnologie) et sans 'vertu' (arétalogie), sans arriver à se fermer sur sa possibilité, descellant délaissant le cercle ouvert, errant à la périphérie, prenant le pouls d'une phrase contournante, la pulsion du paragraphe qui ne se circomplète jamais, aussi longtemps que le sang, ce que j'appelle ainsi et ce que ainsi j'appelle, continue de venir en sa veine.' Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, tr. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: UCP, 1991), pp. 14-15; 'Circonfession', in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), pp. 20-1.

[63] Jacques Derrida, 'History of the Lie', in *Without Alibi*, ed. and tr. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: SUP, 2002), pp. 28-70, p. 38.

[64] 'Une louange confessée par l'adonné, qui se décentre vers Dieu en s'excentrant de soi, une louange qui me vient d'ailleurs (d'une parole à moi donnée par avance) et qui m'y ramène (par la répétition qu'en accomplit mon répons).' Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, tr. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: SUP, 2012), p. 45; *Au Lieu de Soi: L'Approche de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), p. 76.

> the end, the activity of every word, when it is a question of saying myself as such, that is to say before God.[65]

The correlative of Augustine's 'cogito' – *si enim fallor, sum* (*De civitate Dei*, XI, 26) – is arguably *sine confessione tamen non simus*: 'without confession we would not be'.[66] While Foucauldian accounts of the history of confession such as Jeremy Tambling's propose that the Christian demand for a unified subject condemns him to a position of 'loss, of need, as a result of that interpellation', Marion suggests that the Augustinian self is constituted altogether differently from a subject.[67] The confessant is woven into a 'chiasmus' of call and response, initiative and predetermination, the intersection of which is revealed by confession. Marion delineates a form of subjectivation where confession does not amount either to self-objectification or to a reification of the subject position: the triangulation of subject, object, and God enables it to become a deeply relational form of self-fashioning.

The centrality of citation to confession constitutes the self as a textual (even as a literary) entity. As Mikhail Bakhtin suggests in his early work on *Art and Answerability*, confession can only be 'aesthetically' consummated when the self becomes 'another-to-myself', that is, when ordinary life finds itself perfected by an authorial perspective: 'The more the moment of trust and the tones of faith and hope gain immediate actuality, the more certain aesthetic moments begin to penetrate into self-accounting.'[68] The potentially infinite spirals of confession are inevitable as long as the life of the speaker remains a 'circle left open', an idea shadowed by Derrida's conceptualisation of the pulsion of the self-unravelling text as the pulsion of man's blood. If the relation of the author to himself can constitute an aesthetic event only when mediated by the 'authorial' perspective of a divine entity, however, it is difficult to imagine how the artistic consummation of confession as a kind of death to oneself can be reconciled with the experience of human time. This complicates Marion's account of confession as a means of constituting the self in relation to alterity. The symbolic death of the self, the cutting off from the umbilical cord of self-consciousness (the 'circumcision', perhaps) required to 'consummate' the narrative of a life according to Bakhtin speaks to the component of violence that underlies confessional discourse, alongside the picture of loving relationality. The 'dark twin' of confession, as Foucault reminds us, is torture.[69]

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[65] Marion, *In the Self's Place,* pp. 31-2; *Au Lieu de Soi*, pp. 57-9.
[66] *De civitate Dei*, PL 41, 340; 'Confessio gemina est, aut peccati, aut laudis. Quando nobis male est, in tribulationibus confiteamur peccata nostra; quando nobis bene est, in exsultatione iustitiae confiteamur laudem Deo: sine confessione tamen non simus.' Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 29.2, 19, PL 36, 225.
[67] Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sin, Sexuality and the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 18.
[68] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, tr. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 145.
[69] Foucault, *La Volonté de Savoir*, pp. 78-79.

Julia Kristeva adopts a dialectic model reminiscent of Bakhtin's in her account of confessional subjectivity, but inverts the terms of the equation: it is not the divine which mediates the aesthetic elaboration of confession, but artistic experience which 'appears as the essential component of religiosity'.[70] Both are underwritten by the experience of the 'abject' which constitutes the subject position at the same time as it threatens its cohesiveness. Confession in the Christian tradition is similarly based on the encounter with the repulsed yet indefinite entity of the abject. Kristeva's notion of abjection describes not only divine alterity, but also the encounter with a more sinister 'other' located within the self and intimately tied to the discovery of certain unspeakable folds of memory and consciousness. The coalescence of confession of faith and confession of sin which sees the sinner praising God's glory in the very act of mortifying himself, in fact, rests on the paradoxical interdependence of the 'abject' and the divine. Confession's 'subjectified abjection' (*abjection subjectivée*) therefore fashions sin and beauty as 'the lining and the cloth of one and the same economy'.[71] As in Bakhtin, there is no contradiction between the aesthetic and the ethical dimensions of confession – on the contrary, it is in literature and art that the consummation of the confessional subjectivity is fully realised. In Kristeva, however, literature continues to hold out this possibility even when the divine perspective charged with perfecting confession founders:

> In a world in which the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task – a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct – amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless 'primacy' constituted by primal repression [*de cette 'origine' sans fond qu'est le refoulement dit originaire*]. Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, 'subject' and 'object' push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again – inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.[72]

The substitution of the divine 'Other' for the abject 'Other' emphasises the contradictory affects invoked by confession in burnishing truth from lived or artistic experience. Kristeva's approach to the confessional abject captures the role played by confession alternately as a form of self-estrangement which almost seems to prefigure a Derridean postmodern subject, and as a paradigm of the self-possessed and unified Cartesian subjectivity from which Marion attempts to detach Augustine's *Confessions*. This has the potential to redefine the critical effort to dispense with the 'subject' on the basis that the 'self' is a cypher either of social superstructures or of divine authentication. The troubling proximity of sincerity and fiction outlined by critics ranging from De Man to Coetzee in their description of the confessant's demand to be 'taken at his word' is in fact what enables the self to acquire a 'figural' (perhaps fictive) cohesiveness, the truth of

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[70] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, tr. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 17.
[71] 'l'envers et l'endroit d'une seule économie.' Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 123; *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 146.
[72] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* p. 18; *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, p. 25.

which risks being dispersed by a critical approach which dismisses the 'figural understanding of selfhood' offered by confession.[73]

This thesis will accordingly be guided by Paul De Man's sense that 'literature as well as criticism – the difference between them being delusive – is condemned (or privileged) to be forever the most rigorous and, consequently, the most unreliable language in terms of which man names and transforms himself.'[74] The first chapter proposes an analysis of Petrarch's reception of Augustine's *Confessions* as the paradigmatic model for a 'confessional poetics' defined by an ambivalence in its treatment of poetic language, alternately connoted as sinful and redemptive. The second chapter argues that, in Anne Lock's *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*, this ambivalent dynamic is inflected by the Calvinist orientation of Lock's understanding of repentance. Justification by faith provides the basis for the poetic 'justification' of the sequence, yet these theological premises paradoxically heighten the risk of self-referentiality, rendering confession dangerously akin to self-exculpation. The analysis of the relation between poetic and theological 'justification' continues through a re-examination of 'sacred parody' in the poetry of Robert Southwell. The processes of mortification and rehabilitation of the self characteristic of confession shape Southwell's expurgation of love poetry, though the trajectory of travel from sinful to divine love is not a linear one. Sacred parody is thus shown to rely on a fundamental permeability between earthly and spiritual registers, as well as between censure and repetition.

The fourth chapter utilises Julia Kristeva's account of confession as a form of 'subjectified abjection' to examine the poetic subjectivity of John Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, taking the cue from Donne's description of confession, in a sermon on the penitential psalms, as an 'art' which remains mired in sin until it is perfected by grace. The fifth chapter addresses the affinity between Herbert's *The Temple* and the Book of Common Prayer in light of the shift from private, sacramental confession to the public act of general confession brought about by Thomas Cranmer's liturgical reform. This exacerbates a division between public and private mapped upon a dichotomy between a 'liturgical' (or 'vocalised') and a 'textualised' (or 'spatialised') self, two models of subjectivation which exist in tension in *The Temple* and determine its characteristic alternation between a poetry of self-affirmation and one of self-abasement. The thesis draws to a close with a discussion of apophatic language in Richard Crashaw's poetry as the characteristic mode of the penitent-lover's address.

[73] The phrase is Tambling's, in *Confession: Sin, Sexuality and the Subject*, p. 21.
[74] De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p. 19.

## **Chapter One:** Confession and the Divided Will in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*

'Altro lagrimar': Augustine versus Ovid?

Beginning with the 1359-62 version of the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* (or *Canzoniere*), the second part of Francesco Petrarca's vernacular lyric sequence opens, in a specular image of the first, with a poem of repentance. While the story of the poet's love sung by the *Fragmenta* is soon to be ruptured by the beloved Laura's death, the first canzone of the lyrics *in morte*, 'I' vo pensando' (*Rvf* 264), mourns the wasted years which have irretrievably carried the speaker towards his own death. In its watchful presence ('co la morte a lato', 134), he desperately yearns for a new counsel to guide his life ('cerco del viver mio novo consiglio', 135).[1] Even before re-orienting his love towards Laura's soul in heaven, Petrarch thus turns his verse to forsake the 'false flame' ('ardor fallace', 45) of an earthly passion which in a letter to his brother Gherardo he will describe as 'a mortal love, nay indeed a fatal love' ('amorem mortalem imo vero mortiferum').[2] The poem's indictment of love reprises the penitential motif of the prefatory 'Voi ch' ascoltate in rime sparse', which famously inscribes the sighs that are to nourish the lover's passion and his pages in a narrative beginning and ending with the 'clear awareness' of error (13). Burdened from the outset with shame yet insubstantial as a dream, love is self-consciously relinquished to the readers' pity, leaving the despair of entreaties sung in vain to fade into sorrow for the vanity of earthly attachment. This pre-emptive recantation anticipates the circular rhythms of the *Canzoniere*'s temporality and of its lover's repentance: unable to disavow himself completely ('when I / in part was not the man I am today', 3-4), the poet allows the sonnet to function as a prelude to his confessions of love at the same time as rewriting them as a confession of sin. Which confession is finally forsworn? Petrarch tests the limits of the palinode's unsaying of what it says 'again', at the risk of renewing the song it means to abjure.[3] This chapter will argue that a 'confessional' poetics is integral to the form and meaning of the *Canzoniere* and to the lyric tradition which springs from it.

'I' vo pensando' epitomises a drama of self-division which, much like the prefatory sonnet, works against the linear progression of the sequence, bringing the lover to the brink of renunciation before he is subjugated once again by his 'fatal' desires: 'un piacer per usanza in me sì forte / ch'a patteggiar n'ardisce co la morte' ('pleasure which through time has grown so strong / that it dares bargain now with Death itself', 125-6). The poem rehearses and develops many of the thematic cruxes which shape the persona of the *Canzoniere* as well as the account of himself Petrarch offers in the

[1] Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milano: Mondadori, 1996); *Canzoniere*, ed. and tr. Mark Musa (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1996).
[2] Francesco Petrarca, *Familiarum Rerum Libri*, vol. 2, ed. Ugo Dotti (Torino: Aragno, 2005), X, 3, 23, p. 1382; *Letters on Familiar Matters (Rerum Familiarium Libri)*, vol. 2, tr. Aldo S. Bernardo (New York: Italica Press, 2005), p. 61. All further references from these editions.
[3] On Petrarch's use of the palinode, see Patricia Berrahou Philippy, *Love's Remedies: Recantation and Renaissance Lyric Poetry* (Lewisburg: Bucknell, 1995), pp. 61-91.

prose works, from his correspondence to the introspective dialogue of the *Secretum*: the certainty of death growing closer, the neglect of the 'inner man', the image of the shipwrecked soul and of the will enslaved by the two great ties of love and glory, the fateful influence of habit, and the consciousness of an ill-directed passion all painfully unfold before the poet's exacting gaze.[4] In the dialogue between his scattered thoughts, the light of self-understanding only seems to intensify his anguish in perceiving the soul in danger, creating a spiral in which shame for an unworthy love is answered by shame for not being able to overcome it:

> Quel ch'i' fo veggio, et non m'inganna il vero
> mal conosciuto, anzi mi sforza Amore
> che la strada d'onore
> mai nol lassa seguir chi troppo il crede.
>
> I know myself, and I am not deceived
> by a mistaken truth; I'm forced by Love
> who blocks the path of honor
> for anyone who trusts too much in him. (91-4)

In opposition to a Thomistic definition of sin as a misapprehension of the good, which Aquinas draws from the Aristotelian maxim that 'omnes virtutes esse scientias, et omnia peccata esse ignorantias' ('all the virtues are sciences, and all the sins are ignorance'), the poet represents the state of sinning despite himself – culminating in a capitulation which encompasses the introspective anguish of the poem and of the *Canzoniere* as a whole: 'Veggio 'l meglio, e al peggior m'appiglio' ('I see the best, but still cling to the worst', 136).[5] The double allusion in this line to the Medea myth and to the New Testament condenses the tragic *furor* of Ovidian love with Paul's description of the Christian's slavery to the sinful nature of the flesh.[6] That the exile from the self caused by *amor mortalis* should paradoxically reveal an innermost and inveterate essence colours Medea's passion with a Christian register of sin. But it also troubles the biblical subtext by raising the question of whether sin, like love, is an external force which disfigures the self ('mi sforza Amore'), or something which bears witness to an innate disfigurement. These latent tensions militate against a resolution of the contest between the irresistible 'rein' of love ('mi ritien come un freno / contro chui nullo ingegno o forza valme', 79-80), and the 'rein' of reason (33) which shifts the weight of responsibility for sin upon the speaker – for Love only blocks the path of honour to 'chi troppo il crede'. The lover, in Augustinian fashion, admits that it is he who wages war against himself.[7] The *Canzoniere*'s account of love thus depends

[4] Cf. Enrico Fenzi, 'Introduzione', in *Secretum* (Milano: Mursia, 1992), pp. 69-74.
[5] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-I, q.77. a.2.
[6] 'video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor' (VII, 20-21). Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. 1, ed. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1916); 'non enim quod volo bonum, hoc facio sed quod nolo malum, hoc ago' (Rom 7:19). In *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), Risto Saarinen documents the use of the Medea fable in discussions of the will, though he does not refer to the *Canzoniere*. On the Ovidian and devotional subtexts of the work, see Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses: Text and Subtext in the Rime Sparse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985).
[7] 'l'aspra guerra / che 'ncontra me medesmo seppi ordire' (111-112). Cf. with Augustine's 'ardentem litem quam mecum aggressus eram' (*Confessions*, VIII, 8, 19, PL 757-8).

on a profound engagement with a theology of repentance, and of the process, often fraught with ambivalence, by which sin is brought to light.

On a structural level, the penitential subtext splits the voice of the sequence into two types of 'weeping'. The 'weeping for a different kind of grief' ('altro lagrimar ch'io non soleva', 4) evoked by the canzone 'I' vo pensando' runs through the sequence, intermittently submerged before painfully re-emerging to reveal itself intertwined with the lover's guilty cadence. The fractured self of the poet's voice and psyche has often been read as a symptom of the transition from a religious to a secular world view, emergent at the dawn of Renaissance humanism. Petrarch's rediscovery of Cicero's *Epistulae ad Atticum* and the choice of a *vita activa* despite the monastic leanings which transpire from works such as the *De vita solitaria* and the *De otio religioso* have done much to support this interpretation, compounded by the allure of the worldly represented by Laura and by her identification with the poetic 'laurel'. Ugo Dotti, for example, attributes to Petrarch the discovery of 'modern consciousness', defined by internal conflict and by an increasing disillusionment with the belief in a providential design of human destiny. Even Petrarch's well-known Augustinianism is described by Dotti as a fascination with internal struggle and crisis rather than with the final harbour of conversion.[8] Whether the *Confessions*' journey of redemption can, in fact, be regarded as conclusive is open to question in light of Augustine's account of spiritual disquiet in book X. In a passage which could be mistaken for a Petrarchan lament, Augustine writes:

> Contendunt laetitiae meae flendae cum laetandis maeroribus, et ex qua parte stet victoria nescio. Contendunt maerores mei mali cum gaudiis bonis, et ex qua parte stet victoria nescio. Ei mihi! Domine, miserere mei! Ei mihi! Ecce vulnera mea non abscondo.
>
> The pleasures of this life for which I should weep are in conflict with the sorrows of this life in which I should rejoice, and I know not on which side stands the victory. Woe is me, Lord, have pity on me! For I have likewise sorrows which are evil and these are in conflict with joys that are good, and I know not on which side stands the victory. Woe is me, Lord have mercy upon me! Woe is me! See, I do not hide my wounds. (X, 28, 39)[9]

Petrarch echoes this passage in a sonnet for Orso dell'Anguillara (*Rvf* 68) which depicts the recurring battle of the speaker's thoughts, torn between the sights of Rome inviting him to higher contemplations and the desire to return to Avignon, where Laura is: 'qual vincerà, non so, ma 'n fino ad ora / combattuto ànno, et non pur una volta' ('I know not which will win, but up till now / they've

[8] Ugo Dotti, *Petrarca e la Scoperta della Coscienza Moderna* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978), pp. 20-1. Ernst Cassirer argues that, in Petrarch, 'the lyrical genius of individuality takes fire at the religious genius of individuality', in *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, tr. Mario Domandi (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963), p. 129. Cf. Aurelia Cannarsa, ''Versum Efficit Ipsa Relatio Contrariorum': Il Modello Agostinano del Dissidio in Petrarca', *Italica*, 83.2 (2006), 147-69; and Giulio Goletti, ''Volentes Unum Iiud Agimus': La Questione del Dissidio Interiore e il Cristianesimo Petrarchesco', *Quaderni Petrarcheschi*, 7 (1990), 65-108. On the fragmented self, see also Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), and Adelia Noferi, *Frammenti per i Fragmenta di Petrarca* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2001).

[9] PL 32, 795.

battled and on more than one occasion', 13-14). A number of studies on Petrarch's debts to Augustine and to the religious culture of his age have challenged the assumption that the conflicted will pertains exclusively to a modern sensibility.[10] An alternative genealogy of the fragmented self can be traced back to the practices of self-examination and repentance at the root of early and medieval Christianity. The problem of the recalcitrant will raised by the *Canzoniere*'s narrative of wavering, from this perspective, owes less to the conflict between medieval asceticism and a new world view luring the poet towards the *saeculum* than to a well-established theology of temptation, sin, and redemption. The reading of Augustine as a key precursor of modernity, in the same way as Petrarch's portrayal as the father of humanism, thus needs to be measured against the penitential culture in which they were both immersed.[11] Such a genealogy would not relegate Augustine or Petrarch to a pre-modern universe – which risks replicating an understanding of historicism as a secular endeavour – but would instead facilitate a critical history of the 'self' capable of recognising that the 'modern subject', as well as the interpretive methods which emanate from it, may not fully be absolved from their debts to religion.

The problem of the divided will is the leitmotif of Petrarch's *Secretum,* a work which fittingly takes the form of a dialogue between the erring Franciscus and his alter ego Augustinus. Before the eyes of Truth, the beloved spiritual master embarks for three days on the task of 'conscientiam excutere' ('sounding the conscience', I, 16), relentlessly puncturing the illusions which obscure Franciscus' faults from himself.[12] The verdict at the end of the first day is implacable:

> mira fluctuatione volvaris [...] ex quo fit ut tam salutare propositum nimia mobilitate fatiscat, oriturque illa intestina discordia de qua multa iam diximus, illaque anime sibi irascentis anxietas, dum horret sordes suas ipsa nec diluit, vias tortuosas agnoscit nec deserit, impendensque periculum metuit nec declinat.
>
> You are engulfed in strange fluctuations [...] this is the reason why such a salutary resolution fails through excessive changeability, and that internal discord of which we have said so much appears; hence the apprehension of a mind enraged with itself, that while it abhors its stains

[10] Notably Pietro Paolo Gerosa, *Umanesimo Cristiano del Petrarca: Influenza Agostiniana, Attinenze Medievali* (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1966). See also Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Petrarch's Genius: Pentimento and Prophecy* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1991); Silvia Chessa, *Il Profumo Del Sacro Nel 'Canzoniere' Di Petrarca* (Firenze: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2005); Alexander Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine: Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology, and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Demetrio S. Yocum, *Petrarch's Humanist Writing and Carthusian Monasticism: The Secret Language of the Self* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Thomas E. Peterson, *Petrarch's Fragmenta: The Narrative and Theological Unity of the 'Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

[11] 'No wonder Augustine sounds like the birth of the modern since we have recreated him in the light of modernity.' Brian Cummings, 'Autobiography and the History of Reading', in *Cultural Reformations*, ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: OUP, 2010), pp. 636-57, p. 638.

[12] Francesco Petrarca, *Secretum*, ed. Ugo Dotti (Milano: BUR, 2000), p. 72. All further references from this edition. On the confessional shape of the *Secretum*, see Yocum, *Petrarch's Humanist Writing and Carthusian Monasticism*, pp. 190-204; and T. C. Price Zimmerman, 'Confession and Autobiography in the Early Renaissance', in *Renaissance Studies in Honour of Hans Baron*, ed. Anthony Molho and John A. Tedeschi (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), pp. 119-40.

> does not cleanse them, that recognises the twisting paths but does not abandon them, that fears the impending danger but does not evade it. (I, 38)[13]

Though Petrarch's Augustinus frequently diverges from the doctrine of the historical Augustine, a comparison with the eighth book of the *Confessions* immediately presents itself, and is invoked by Franciscus as a model of his own suffering (I, 14).[14] As Brian Stock observes, Petrarch makes the *Confessions* more about Augustine's internal struggle than about any of its other major themes of time, memory, or incarnation, a reading which conforms with a modern tendency to view the crisis of conversion as the centrepiece of the work.[15] The modern feel of Augustine's *fluctuationes* may rest in part on the experiential identification encouraged by the *Confessions* themselves (if only through the staging of the conversion as the last in a series of fortuitous acts of reading, which calls for Augustine's readers to emulate him in turn). But the powerful appeal of the story of Augustine the man, as Alexander Lee has shown, can overshadow an appraisal of the influence exerted on subsequent readers by the moral theology which the experience of the fragmented will helps formalise.[16] It is in the context of an overarching polemic against Manichean cosmology that Augustine construes self-conflict as a malady of the will. Volition is not fractured by an outside influence, or a 'second mind' – rather, it is the source of its own self-division: 'Ego eram, qui volebam, ego, qui nolebam; ego eram. Nec plene volebam nec plene nolebam' ('It was I who willed to do it, I who was unwilling. It was I. I did not wholly will, I was not wholly unwilling', VIII, 10, 22).[17] For Augustine, conflicting desires reveal the fallen soul's infirmity, but also determine the sinner's answerability as a moral subject. Foucault lucidly summarises the originality of Augustine's conception of the will in the following terms:

> Augustine's analysis doesn't make concupiscence a specific disposition in the soul, or a passivity that limits the soul's power, but the very form of the will, which is to say, of that which makes the soul a subject. For him, it is not the involuntary as against the voluntary, but the involuntariness of volition itself: that without which the will cannot will, except precisely with the assistance of grace, which alone can liberate it from that 'infirmity' which is the very form of its willing.[18]

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[13] Petrarca, *Secretum*, p. 108.
[14] On Petrarch's 'invention' of Augustine, see Carol E. Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 182-216. Cf. with Alexander Lee's account in *Petrarch and St. Augustine*, which instead identifies a clear theological line of descent from Augustine to Petrarch.
[15] Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 79.
[16] Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine*, ch. 1.
[17] PL 32, 759.
[18] Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh*, ed. Frédéric Gros, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Penguin, 2021), p. 271; *Les Aveux de la Chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), p. 344.

As a result, even in its sickness (perhaps especially in its sickness), the divided will becomes the cornerstone of subjectivity, fracturing the 'subject' into being.[19] Petrarch's *Secretum* is highly attuned to the difficulties attendant on the idea of a will which must will itself as other than it is. Despite readily acknowledging his affliction as *aegritudo* or *acedia* ('lacerantibus animus morbis', II, 14), Franciscus resists the doctrine expounded by Augustinus that his suffering is of his own making. And it is ultimately the obstacle of the will, almost impossible to experience and to conceptualise as united, which foils his conversion at the end of the three days: 'in antiquam litem relabimur, voluntatem impotentiam vocas' ('we return to the old dispute: you call the will impotence', III, 105). The debate over the 'impotence' of the will almost seems to anticipate Montaigne's doubt, in 'Du repentir', about the possibility of turning away from sins which are 'inborn, of one substance with us, and visceral' ('naturels, constubstantiels, et intestins').[20] Unlike in Montaigne, however, the connatural infirmity of the will does not absolve Franciscus from the need for repentance; indeed, a penitential reconfiguration of the self becomes all the more urgent as a result of the relapse into the 'old dispute'.

The *Fragmenta*'s sonnet 118, another markedly penitential lyric, voices this standstill by staging the failure of the lover's will to 'will more'. As the desire to change quickly curtails itself from straining any further, the speaker's effort to free his soul from sinful habit collapses within the space of a few lines:

> Or qui son, lasso, et voglio esser altrove;
> et vorrei più volere, et più non voglio;
> et per più non poter fo quant'io posso;
>
> I'm here, alas, and wish that I were elsewhere,
> and wish that I wished more but wish no more,
> and unable to do more, do all I can; (9-11)

The syntactical redoubling captures the paradox of Augustine's unwilling will and seems to remain mired there, reiterating the disjuncture between *voluntas* and *potentia* which leads to the *Secretum*'s inconclusiveness. In his restless desire to be 'elsewhere', Petrarch also echoes Augustine's sense of entrapment in the flesh: 'Hic esse valeo nec volo, illic volo nec valeo, miser utrubique' ('I can remain in my ordinary state though unwilling, I would remain in that other state but am not able; in both states I know my misery', X, 40, 65). A will that is not in contradiction with itself perhaps belongs exclusively to the 'life to come' evoked here by Augustine, casting a first shadow of uncertainty upon the lover's search for spiritual rest. However, as in 'I' vo pensando', the equivocal nexus 'per' ('unable to do more', or 'so as not to do more'?) begs the question of whether the will is defeating

[19] 'Hanc pugnam non experiuntur in se ipsis nisi bellatores virtutum debellatoresque vitiorum' ('None but those who fight to gain virtue and to repress vices experience in themselves this battle'). Augustine, *De continentia liber unus*, 3, 7, PL 40, 353.
[20] Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, III, 2, ed. Pierre Michel (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 52; *The Complete Essays*, tr. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 827.

itself or resigning itself to a forced state of impotence.[21] Not merely a witty or disingenuous play on words abdicating the speaker's responsibility for his struggle, the sonnet adumbrates instead the sinner's unrealised *potentia.*[22] Likewise, *Rvf* 141 figures the speaker's soul as a butterfly lured by the fatal light of Laura's eyes, but ends with the admission that 'cieca al suo morir l'alma consente' ('my soul, blind, consents to its own death', 14).[23] The anguished doubt that he has no right to lament his ill fortune, since it is within his power to change it, recurs in sonnet 132:

> O viva morte, o dilectoso male,
> come puoi tanto in me, s'io nol consento?
> Et s'io 'l consento, a gran torto mi doglio.
>
> O living death, O pleasurable harm,
> how can you rule me if I not consent?
> And if I do consent, it's wrong to grieve. (7-9)

The hypothetical construction here introduces a second element of doubt, which risks placing self-amendment definitively out of reach: how can I know whether I consent to sin or not? In this too Petrarch follows Augustine's lead even as he seems to turn away from the promised destination of the *Confessions*. In the saint's plea that the sins which remain unknown to him should be forgiven (X, 5, 7), as well as in the *City of God*'s disquisition on Lucretia's guilt (I, 19), Augustine delineates a model of confession poised between affirming the self and denying the possibility of self-knowledge, an ambivalence which according to Stock reaches back to the Neo-Platonic origins of Augustine's thought.[24] Pushing the ambivalence of this slippery form of subjectivity to breaking point, Petrarch's sequence pivots uneasily between displacing or deferring the profession of sin and constantly invoking a penitential register of shame.

What emerges is an aporetic confessional dynamic which sees the lover repent for his inability to repent, permanently caught somewhere between confession and a resolution to make his

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[21] The ambiguity is reflected in the inconsistency between renditions of this line in English and in the major critical editions of recent decades, which gloss 'per più non poter' as purposive rather than in the causal sense preferred by Musa (which relies on Modigliani's 1904 edition of Vat. Lat. 3195), e.g. Santagata's 'faccio ogni sforzo per ridurmi all'impotenza' ('I make every effort to reduce myself to impotence'); Bettarini's 'fo' quanto po' per non potere nulla più' ('I do what I can in order to do no more'), in *Canzoniere*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini, vol. 1 (Torino: Einaudi, 2005); and Stroppa's 'faccio tutto ciò che posso al fine di non essere più nella condizione di potere' ('I do all I can not to be in the condition of doing'), in *Canzoniere*, ed. Sabrina Stroppa (Torino: Einaudi, 2011). In a similar vein to Musa, David Young translates 'since I can't do more, do what I can', in *The Poetry of Petrarch* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005). Likewise, J. G. Nichols, *Canzoniere* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2012): 'since I can no more, do all I'm able'.

[22] Cf. Richard Strier's interpretation of these lines, in *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton* (Chicago: UCP, 2011), p. 163.

[23] Petrarch's first penitential psalm also laments his consent to sin: 'Sed multum timeo, quia libertas mea meis manibus labrefacta est. Iuste crucior: consensi. Labore torqueor dignissimo' ('I fear much, because my freedom has been destroyed by my own hands. I suffer justly: I gave my consent. I am tortured by a most worthy punishment', 15-6). Francesco Petrarca, *Salmi Penitenziali*, ed. Roberto Gigliucci (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1997).

[24] Stock, *After Augustine*, p. 22. On Augustine's 'trial' of Lucretia, see also Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 125-33.

contrition lasting. After lucidly unmasking layer upon layer of self-deception, only the picture of an unwilling irremovability seems to take a fixed shape. Petrarch's account of his spiritual condition in the celebrated letter relating the ascent of Mont Ventoux to Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro (who had gifted Petrarch his prized copy of the *Confessions*), while presenting itself as a painful extraction of truth, is prefaced by an assertion of the impossibility of confession.[25] Unlike Augustine, Petrarch cannot yet recount 'all my past foulness and the carnal corruption of my soul', because he is not certain that he is not still attached to them:

> Quod amare solebam, iam non amo; mentior: amo, sed parcius; iterum ecce mentitus sum: amo, sed verecundius, sed tristius; iantandem verum dixi. Sic est enim; amo, sed quod non amare amem, quod odisse cupiam; amo tamen, sed invitus, sed coactus, sed mestus et lugens. Et in me ipso versiculi illius famosissimi sententiam miser experior: Odero, si potero; si non, invitus amabo.
>
> What I used to love I no longer love. I am wrong, I do love it but too little. There, I am wrong again. I love it but I am too ashamed of it and too sad over it. Now indeed I have said it right. For that is the way it is; I love, but something I would like not to love, and would like to hate. Nevertheless I love, but unwillingly, constrainedly, sorrowfully and mournfully. And in myself I miserably experience the meaning of that very famous verse, 'I shall hate if I can; if not I shall love unwillingly.' (IV, 1, 21)[26]

That 'fixity in restlessness', which, as Kenelm Foster observes, is one of the most characteristic features of the *Canzoniere*, becomes the eternal point of departure and return of Petrarch's confessions.[27] The Mount Ventoux letter, nevertheless, offers the spiritual 'father' Dionigi a minute and truthful rendition of the 'inner man', emulating a confessional discourse based on scrupulous self-examination, on the unveiling of the 'true' self, and on the admission of the speaker's inability to free himself from sin without God's assistance. If Petrarch falls short of repentance, the very account of a confession pushed to the point of failure, which must in turn confess itself as yet another failing, shares in the potential inexhaustibility of confession, continually uncovering a subject severed from himself as a result of his alienation from the divine. To borrow Paul De Man's phrase, the 'textual machine' of confession can be endlessly generative.[28] Despite professing himself unable or unworthy to follow Augustine's example, in the *Canzoniere* Petrarch will, like his model, construct a veritable literary monument devoted to immortalising a confessional narrative of the self. The conflicted will is the paradoxical matrix of such a narrative: the sinner's confession keeps unfolding not only due to his lingering entrenchment in error, but also because he resents loving what he would prefer to hate. The

[25] On the framing of the letter as a confession to a spiritual director, see Carolyn Chiapelli, 'The Motif of Confession in Petrarch's 'Mt. Ventoux'', *MLN*, 93.1 (1978), 131-36.
[26] Petrarca, *Familiares*, vol. 1, p. 478; *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 176-7. The reference is to Ovid, *Amores,* III, 11b, 35. The letter is dated 26th April 1336, though it may have been composed as late as 1353 according to Giuseppe Billanovich, *Petrarca e il Primo Umanesimo* (Padova: Antenore, 1996), p. 182.
[27] Kenelm Foster, *Petrarch: Poet and Humanist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), p. 65.
[28] Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: YUP, 1979*),* p. 298.

ostensible unwillingness to love on which Petrarch lands at the end of this passage mimics the resistance which meets each successive unveiling of the 'truth', a resistance which guarantees the confessant's veracity at the same time as threatening to belie him, should it overstep into reluctance to change. As authenticity spills into inauthenticity, love and repentance alike are adulterated by a conflicted conscience, hinting in their tergiversations at the missing element of grace which enables Augustine to unify the dangerously aporetic dispersal of the self.

The citation from Ovid's *Amores,* 'I shall hate if I can; if not I shall love unwillingly,' acts as a sharp reminder of the affective requirements of confession: sin must be abhorred in equal measure to the love for God. The irresistible yoke of concupiscence, associated in 'I' vo pensando' with original sin, finds its redemptive counterpart in the role of grace as a force which renders the sinner captive to God's love. Augustine's voluntarism – the doctrine that 'liberum voluntatis arbitrium causam esse ut male faceremus' ('our free will is the cause of our doing evil', VII, 3, 5) – is conciliated in the *Confessions* with the intervention of grace which turns *voluntas* into *potentia*. Freeing the will from its malady, it is God who enables not only Augustine's conversion, but also the act of *confessio* itself. As such, the *Confessions* are a simultaneous manifestation of the self and of God's glory. By constituting confession as a speech act which affirms individual guilt at the same time as it responds to the call of grace, Augustine establishes an autonomous moral agent whose declaration of sin also declares him dependent on God: 'neque enim dico recti aliquid hominibus quod non a me tu prius audieris, aut etiam tu illiquid tale audis a me quod non mihi tu prius dixeris' ('For whatever good I utter to men, You have heard from me before I utter it; and whatever good You hear from me, You have first spoken to me', X, 2, 2).[29] As Carol Quillen remarks, the absence of grace in the *Secretum* represents a striking divergence from this conception of the will, which, given the careful annotations on the subject which appear in the extant anti-Pelagian works of Petrarch's library, can scarcely be attributed to a misunderstanding.[30] To explain this theological 'oversight', Quillen suggests that the figure of Augustinus is created mainly to authorise a humanistic project of redeeming classical literature. Yet the deeply personal and, more significantly, private nature of the *Secretum* does not necessarily favour an interpretation of the text as a manifesto for a new literary culture, at the exclusion of the spiritual and psychological struggle it thematises.

A clue to the puzzling absence of grace in the *Secretum* may perhaps be glimpsed in its fleeting appearances in the *Canzoniere*. Sonnet 81, 'Io son sì stanco sotto 'l fascio antico', evokes the descent of Christ on earth to deliver the speaker from sin. The 'courteous' friend, however, soon flies beyond his sight, leaving the mere echo of a call to be followed, in vain, by the speaker:

Qual gratia, qual amore, o qual destino

[29] PL 32, 780.
[30] Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance*, pp. 182-216.

mi darà penne in guisa di colomba,
ch'i' mi riposi, et levimi da terra?

What grace, what love, and what predestination
Will give me wings to fly, like those of doves,
That I may rest and raise myself from earth? (12-4)

The scriptural citation ('quis dabit mihi pennas sicut columbae, et volabo, et requiescam?', Ps. 54:7), one of the clearest references to the Psalter in the *Canzoniere*, is frequently deployed by Petrarch in texts which evoke an insoluble crisis, such as the metrical epistle 'Ad seipsum'.[31] In Petrarch's formulation, the question may reveal an underlying theological doubt, if 'grace', 'love' and 'fortune' are taken to denote three separate paths of redemption available to man, as Castelvetro's early commentary indicates and Santagata's gloss endorses: respectively, the gift of grace; individual 'study' to dispose the soul for its reception; and election among the number of the saved. The term 'studio' used by Castelvetro to gloss 'love', it could be objected, does not quite do justice to the idea of a force capable of redeeming the sinner from the 'fascio antico', which enfolds individual habit into original sin: flanked by 'grace' and 'destiny, 'love' is coloured by necessity. The question which haunts the *Secretum* and the epistle 'ad seipsum'– 'quid ergo me retinet?' ('what is it, then, that holds me back?') – seems to be replaced by a petition which, instead of looking for a latent obstacle in the conscience, gestures beyond the self: 'quis dabit?'

Yet an ambiguity between 'gift' and 'study', between being the object of love's captivity and a self-willed subject, ultimately persists. The reversal of the terms of the citation emphasises the uncertainty voiced by the tercet: the *hysteron proteron* 'that I may rest and raise myself' in the place of 'that I may fly and rest' suggests a return to the logic of the *Secretum*, where the attainment of spiritual peace is a necessary condition for the spirit to be elevated, rather than the consequence of a mind enraptured by love. It is this, perhaps, which forms the 'latens obstaculum' of the *Secretum* (I, 59). The problem of the will dramatised by the text could in fact be rephrased as a problem of love. At the beginning of his examination, Augustinus reproaches Franciscus for not desiring redemption with sufficient ardour, citing the Ovidian maxim 'velle parum est; cupias, ut re potiaris, oportet' ('to wish is not enough; thou shouldst have a passion to win thy end', I, 44).[32] Franciscus is accused of loving 'tepidius' and 'remissius' the object of love which Augustine, in the *Confessions* and in a passage of the *City of God* which Petrarch here seems to have in mind, strives to attain with a 'burning passion' ('cuius adipiscendae amore flagramus'). This second allusion, which goes unnoticed in Dotti's and

[31] 'Et si carne premor, mea me si crimina tardant, / quis dabit ut pennas posita gravitate columbe / induar alta petens, et post tot dura quiescam?' ('And if the flesh presses, if my crimes delay me, / who will allow that, laying down my weight, I may wear the wings of a dove and, / heading high above, after such struggles, rest?', 136-8). Francesco Petrarca, 'Epistole Metriche', in *Rime, Trionfi e Poesie Latine*, ed. Ferdinando Neri, Guido Martellotti, Natalino Sapegno and Enrico Bianchi (Milano: Ricciardi, 1951), pp. 706-807; cf. *Familiares*, vol. 2, X, 3, 58, p. 1402.
[32] The reference is to Ovid, 'Ex ponto', III, 1, 35 in *Tristia; Ex Ponto*, tr. A. L. Wheeler (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1924).

Fenzi's editions, is to Augustine's criticism of the doctrine of reincarnation: 'Nam quis non remissius et tepidius amet eum quem se cogitat necessario deserturum [...]?' ('who indeed would not be more careless and lukewarm in his love for someone when he imagines that he will perforce leave him [...]?', XII, 21).[33] In the *Canzoniere* the thirst for transcendent grace normally denotes the love for Laura, as in the citation of Psalm 41:2 in the canzone 'Amor, se vuo' ch'i' torni al giogo antico' (*Rvf* 270).[34]

> e non si vide mai cervo né damma
> con tal disio cercar fonte né fiume,
> qual io il dolce costume
> onde ò già molto amaro
>
> One never saw a doe or stag in search
> of spring or river with so much desire
> as I seek those sweet ways
> which gave me so much pain (20-21)

The Ovidian allusion of the *Secretum* condenses the paradox of a phenomenon experienced as a dispossession of the will by the inexorable power of grace, at the same time as it restores the will to coincide with itself: the sinner must give up his volition in order for it to be redressed.[35] The commixture of 'sacred' and 'profane' in this poem represents the experience of conversion as a transport of love which repairs the will by giving it up. If the *Canzoniere*'s amatory theme is both troubled by and reliant on a devotional subtext, the narrative of the lover's repentance thus also depends on the language of love, which inflames the spiritual register with the ardour of the flesh in illuminating, if often jarring ways.

A salient example is Petrarch's use of the myth of Byblis to describe both the deliquescent lover in the canzone 'of metamorphosis' ('Nel dolce tempo de la prime etade', *Rvf* 23) and Augustine's conversion in a 1354 letter to Gherardo. Enclosed with a copy of the *Confessions* which Petrarch has had made for his brother, the letter compares 'our' *auctor* to the fountain of tears into which Byblis is transformed by an incestuous passion for her brother:

> Perlege et insiste; accensum liber hic animum inflammabit, qui algentes accenderet. Videbis, quod de Biblide habetur in fabulis, Augustinum nostrum in fontem devotissimarum lacrimarum esse conversum, quem peccare, oro te, up ipse comunem Dominum pro me roget. Quid multa? et tibi inter legendum fluent lacrime et legendo flebis et flendo letaberis dicesque te in his literis vere ignitum eloqium et 'sagittas potentis acutas cum carbonibus desolatoriis' invenisse.

[33] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, PL 41, 370 (cf. CSEL 40.1, 603); *City of God*, vol. 4, tr. Philip Levine (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1966).
[34] 'quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus'.
[35] In Augustine's terse formulation: 'Aut enim a iustitia libera est, quando servit peccato, et tunc est mala; aut a peccato libera est, quando servit iustitiae, et tunc est bona' ('Either [volition] is free from the bonds of justice, when it serves sin, and therefore is bad; or it is free from sin, when it serves justice, and therefore is good'). *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, 15, 31, PL 44, 899.

> Peruse it with care and persistence; this book, which can enkindle lukewarm readers, will enflame your spirit. You will see, as happens in the fables about Byblis, Augustine transformed into a fountain of devout tears. I beg you to ask his intercession on my behalf with our common God. What more need be said? Let yourself weep as you read; in weeping you will rejoice, saying that you have found in his words a truly fiery eloquence and 'the sharp arrows of a warrior with consuming coals of brushwood.' (XXII, 5, 8)[36]

It is Augustine rather than Laura who here mediates between man and God, fanning a burning desire in his readers not only by acting as a mirror of the divine, but also by striking the fatal 'darts' of love, a task which the *Canzoniere* usually assigns to the poet's nemesis, *Amor*. The strangeness of the analogy conveys some sense of the violent dislocation effected by grace, rhetorically and metaphorically. Transfiguring Augustine into Byblis, moreover, re-creates him as a subject who loses the contours of his identity as a result of love, assuming the shape of the repentant grief which God inspires in him. Compounding the identification of Petrarch and Augustine through Byblis, the *Canzoniere*'s allusion to the fable reprises the scene of conversion in book VIII of the *Confessions*:

> Ivi accusando il fugitivo raggio,
> a le lagrime triste allargai 'l freno,
> et lasciaile cader come a lor parve;
> né già mai neve sotto al sol disparve
> com'io sentì' me tutto venir meno,
> et farmi una fontana a pie' d'un faggio.
>
> And there, accusing her fugitive ray,
> to desperate tears of mine I gave free rein
> and let them fall whenever they decided.
> Snow never disappeared beneath the sun,
> as I felt myself melt entirely
> and turn to fountain where the beech tree grows. (112-8)

The parallels with the tears unleashed by Augustine under a fig tree ('dimisi habenas lacrimis, et prorupuerunt flumina oculorum meorum', 'I […] no longer tried to check my tears, which poured forth from my eyes in a flood', VIII, 12, 28) are reinforced by the language of penance, forgiveness, and mercy which pervades this passage.[37] Though his weeping does not spring from a long-awaited conversion but from the fruitless pursuit of a 'fugitive ray', the following stanza hinges on the analogy of the lover as a sinner petitioning God for forgiveness. Laura dispenses punishment, pardon, and grace, imitating the Maker of whom she is a reflection (121-3, 128), while the lover repents and humbles himself before her. The idolatrous implications of this kind of veneration are denounced in the narrative of the sequence by poems such as 'I' vo pensando' and 'Quell'antiquo mio dolce empio signore' (*Rvf* 360), which redescribe the poet's early weeping in terms of a sacrilegious (if 'sweet') devotion: 'mortal cosa amar con tanta fede / quanta a Dio sol per debito convensi, / più si disdice a chi

[36] Petrarca, *Familiares*, vol. 4, p. 2518; *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 51. Cf. *Confessions*, VIII, 12, 28. The scriptural reference is Ps. 119:4 and the story of Byblis appears in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IX, 454-665.
[37] PL 32, 762.

più pregio brama' ('To love a mortal thing with such great faith, / the kind that should be placed in God alone, / is less becoming the more one looks for worth', *Rvf* 264, 99-101).[38] Yet a structural affinity between the two forms of lament is adumbrated even in the idolatrous borrowings from the language of repentance in 'Nel dolce tempo de la prima etade'. Turning the speaker into the fugitive 'laurel' he covets (42-9), the canzone depicts him as both pursuer and pursued, in a slippage between subject and object positions which plays into the ambiguity of the lover-sinner's agency thematised by the encounter between Ovid and Augustine in Petrarch's work. To complete the blurring of the amatory into the penitential, it is the linguistic infraction represented by the confession of love, the poem suggests, from which the speaker's punishment proceeds (he contravenes Laura's prohibition 'Di ciò non far parola', 'Say not a word about this', 74): sin is not merely love's persecuting shadow; rather, it is written into the utterance of the poet's love even in the overtly 'profane' (and very nearly 'profanating') lyrics of the sequence. In such a way, the two forms of 'weeping' in the *Canzoniere* echo each other in a convergence of sin with the conscience of error which re-vivifies the dormant religious metaphors of troubadour and *stil novo* love while exposing their deficiency.

The formal principle of antithesis characteristic of the *Canzoniere* comes to describe, in addition to an affective state, a moral subject simultaneously split and unified by the mirror of introspection the confessant holds up to the conflicted will.[39] It is this introjection of the warring elements of the conscience into an internal drama which forms the continuity between the two types of 'weeping', joining them in the consciousness of shame: 'et del mio vaneggiar vergogna è il frutto' ('shame is the fruit of all my clever ravings', in Young's translation of *Rvf* 1, 12). 'What does confession effect?', if not, as Virginia Burrus writes, 'a continuous turning within shame – a sustained state of contrition, repentance, conversion. Not a catharsis but an ongoing responsiveness – a painfully unrelieved openness'.[40] As the emotion which best figures the 'mysterious and uncontainable depths of our culpability', shame is an apt expression of the inexhaustibility of a confession constantly and agonisingly hovering on the threshold of conversion.[41] At the same time, the memory of the lost innocence which confession aspires to restore reveals the close connection between shame and pride.[42] The paradoxical juxtaposition, in Petrarch's opening palinode, of the most acute self-consciousness ('di me medesmo meco mi vergogno', 11) with the resigned, almost detached contemplation of the vanity of earthly life is thus explained by the mechanics of simultaneous avowal and disavowal, of self-recognition and self-alienation, which belong to the operation of shame.

[38] 'Questi m'à fatto men amare Dio / ch'i' non deveva' ('And this one here has made me love my God / less than I should […]', *Rvf* 360, 31-2).
[39] See Arnaud Tripet, *Pétrarque ou la Connaissance de Soi* (Geneva: Droz, 1967), pp. 62ff.
[40] Burrus, *Saving Shame*, pp. 115-6.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 80-1.

By binding the thematic threads of love and repentance so closely together, the *Canzoniere* seems to forgo the possibility of a final recantation. Even so, Petrarch's 'wavering between ethical retraction and aesthetic repetition', Patricia Berrahou Philippy suggests, may be intrinsic to the genre of the palinode. The literariness of the *Retractationes*' 'textual biography' of Augustine exemplifies this duality early on in the history of the genre.[43] The *Canzoniere* instigates a dynamic of simultaneous rejection and redemption of its own 'song' which will prove extremely valuable to Petrarch's inheritors, of a Petrarchan and of an anti-Petrarchan bent alike: the seeds of Petrarchism's iterability, of its re-fashioning into 'another' song, are already present in the sequence. Petrarch creates in this sense a poetic idiom which may be called 'confessional', holding out the promise of redeeming the fragmented self it embodies and creates. It is an idiom of failure which might seem to extend the represented failings of the poet to his representational medium – or conversely, to showcase the triumph of the aesthetic over the ethical (an approach which colours the more secularising interpretations of Petrarch's verse, such as Dotti's). The duality of the palinode, however, runs more deeply than a pernicious literariness derailing the forward motion of conversion. The palinode must contend not only with the ambiguity of aesthetic repetition, but also with the ethical demands confession places on language. A discourse at once transformative and chastening, confession carries a deep ambivalence about the power of its own words: the demand for self-abasement implies a recognition of the confessant's limitations as a speaker as well as a moral subject, yet it is also by means of language that confession sets out to renew the self. Taking the palinode as a paradigm for Petrarch's fraught 'confessions' thus exposes the difficulties of representing and performing confession through poetry, at the same time as the considerable literary potential held by this form of speech.

In a similar way, the rift in the self evoked by Petrarch is both the effect and the means of redemption offered by confession. The conflict between the 'aesthetic' and 'ethical' domains which Philippy draws from Mikahil Bakhtin's account of autobiographical writing can be pushed further. If, according to Bakhtin, the difficulty of autobiography lies precisely in turning the depths of the self into a finite object of representation, the self-transcendence (or 'transgredience') occasioned by confession may be fertile ground for aesthetic production: not coinciding with oneself is what sets the conditions for the re-creation of the self as an 'aesthetically consummated phenomenon'.[44] Reading the *Canzoniere*'s songs of love and sin in such a way allows us to interpret their structural unity in a new light: far from falsifying them, invalidating the poet's confessions of love and his confessions of sin, the convergence of the two thematic threads animates the poetry aesthetically as well as theologically. It is possible to map the duality between the palinode's personal, 'ethical' narrative and

[43] Berrahou Philippy, *Love's Remedies*, p. 66.
[44] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, tr. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 17.

its ‘aesthetic’ iterability on Roland Greene’s model of the lyric as ‘a dialectical play of ritual and fictional phenomena’, a productive tension which, Greene suggests, has ensured the lyric sequence’s continued appeal and longevity.[45] Such a conflict, however, is qualified by the discovery of the ‘ethical’ as the very grounds for the creation of a literary self. In Bakhtin’s analysis, confession approaches the status of an aesthetic phenomenon most effectively when it is able to ‘consummate’ the self-regarding subject into an object standing before the eyes of God, or of its readers – that is, through the establishment of a relationship with another.[46] It is this underlying ethical dimension which makes art ‘answerable’ to life. To reprise Bakhtin’s luminous insight, ‘the poet must remember that it is his poetry which bears the guilt for the vulgar prose of life, whereas the man of everyday life ought to know that the fruitlessness of art is due to his willingness to be unexacting and to the unseriousness of the concerns in his life.’[47] If we are to become ‘exacting’ readers, we must in other words be prepared to accept that art is only as ineffectual as the limitations of the ‘everyday’ make it, including perhaps the limitations of everyday ethical parameters (the notion, for example, of what constitutes a ‘true’ and final conversion). Yet in revealing these cramped horizons, art too must bear some of the guilt accruing on contingency. The fruitlessness of Petrarch’s ‘wild and wandering cries’ denounced by the first sonnet ultimately yields, indeed, to ‘the knowledge out of doubt / that all this world loves is a fleeting dream’ (*Rvf* 1, 13-4).[48]

‘Sotto ‘l velame’: Allegory and Sincerity

The affinity between Petrarch’s two styles of ‘weeping’ did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries. Petrarch’s response to a letter from his friend Giacomo Colonna, who had ironically cast doubt on the sincerity of the poet’s professions of love not only for Augustine, but also for Laura, anticipates a strand of criticism which sees in the *Canzoniere* little more than what Petrarch terms the ‘theatricality of my achievement’ (‘ingenii mei scenam’, II, 9, 21).[49] Prefacing his answer with an admission that deceit is inherent to a mortal life so chimerical as to make Petrarch unsure of whether he is awake or asleep, the letter quips that no one would be so mad as to toil so that others may consider him mad. As much as he might wish that he is in fact deceiving the world, Petrarch calls on his unfeigned pallor and heaven itself to contradict Giacomo’s suggestion that ‘against this fictitious Laura as you call it, that other fiction of mine, Augustine, will perhaps be of help’ (‘adversus hanc simulatam, ut tu vocas Lauream, simulatus ille michi etiam Augustinus forte profuerit’).[50] In a similar vein to Giacomo Colonna, critics such as Carol Quillen and John Freccero have tended to regard the

[45] Roland Greene, *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* (Princeton, N.J.: PUP, 1991), p. 5.
[46] Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, pp. 145-7.
[47] Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, p. 2.
[48] ‘‘l conoscer chiaramente / che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.’ I quote from Nichols’ translation.
[49] Petrarca, *Familiares*, vol. 1, p. 268; *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 103. The letter is dated 21 December, and was probably composed in 1336.
[50] Petrarca, *Familiares*, vol. 1, p. 268; *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 102.

autobiographical element in the *Secretum* and in the *Canzoniere* as a pretext for an exercise in form, whether that is humanist reading practices, in Quillen's view, or poetic self-creation, according to Freccero. In a seminal article, Freccero contrasts the *Canzoniere* with Augustine's *Confessions*, arguing that while the latter depends on an allegorical mode of signification underwritten by an anterior *logos*, Petrarch fashions instead 'a poetry whose real subject matter is its own act and whose creation is its own author'.[51] As if taking the cue from Petrarch's baffled sense that Giacomo has turned him into a Zoroastrian magician able to conjure reality out of mere words, Freccero writes that 'critics given to psychologizing have repeatedly tried to reconstruct Petrarch's spiritual torment from his verses; where language is the only reality, however, it would be more prudent to see the spiritual torment simply as the reflection, the thematic translation, of his autoreflexive poetics.'[52] The idea that Petrarch's idolatry is of a linguistic kind acutely dissects the *Canzoniere*'s foundational allegory of Laura as the poetic 'laurel', yet ultimately accounts for the difference in the 'poetics' of the self articulated by Petrarch through the familiar terms of a misplaced passion for a mortal, rather than transcendent object.

Such an account proves insufficient if we consider that the status of Laura/laurel as a 'pure signifier' on which the poet leans to construct his subjectivity is, arguably, not so far removed from Augustine's revelation of his life as a 'tautological' narrative of redemption beginning and ending with God (Freccero does not help matters by affirming that 'from a naturalistic standpoint, it is impossible to say whether human discourse is a reflection of the Word or whether the idea of God is simply a metaphoric application of linguistic theory').[53] Interpretations of the sequence as a formal artefact and of the penitent lover as a carefully crafted literary persona follow criticism's tendency to avoid that 'breach of literary decorum' of imputing a 'personal existence' to the poet, a tendency which, as Lionel Trilling reminds us, is encouraged by a conscious extirpation of the self from the artist's work.[54] Trilling attributes this trend to the twentieth century in particular, and indeed the 'modern' concern with a dislocated and fictive self betrays itself in the assumed fictitiousness of the 'personal' element in artistic expression. Petrarch's exemplary narrative of conversion, which coincides with a symbolic chronology spanning the length of the liturgical year, seems to preclude a psychological interpretation of the *Canzoniere*, pointing instead towards an allegorical constitution of the text and of the self. Yet the *Canzoniere* (much like the Divine Comedy) demands to be read as a 'true' story of the poet's life. Allegory clashes with the emphasis placed on the poet's psychological struggle, and is complicated by the ambivalent allegorisation of Laura at times as mortal lure, at others as figural ideal. The sequence itself thematises the question of sincerity through its examination of the reluctant will: indeed, if the spirals of Petrarch's self-reflexivity trouble an allegorical

[51] John Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics', *Diacritics*, 5.1 (1975), 34-40, p. 34.
[52] Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel', p. 38.
[53] Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel', p. 35.
[54] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Oxford: OUP, 1972), p. 8.

interpretation, they also seem to cast doubt on the speaker's sincerity. Are we then to take Petrarch seriously when he asks that we do not 'feign that I have feigned'?[55]

In his analysis of the function of allegory in the Mount Ventoux letter, Robert Durling delineates a tension between the representation of the literal ascent of the mount and the figural interpretation ascribed to it. How, he asks, is a figural interpretation of existence possible without falsehood? ('è possibile senza menzogna un'interpretazione figurale, un'allegoria, della propria esistenza?').[56] The letter speaks of a crisis in the language of allegory, according to Durling, because its self-consciousness no longer measures the degree of identification between the historical event of the ascent and its allegorical meaning, but instead exposes an ironic gap between them.[57] Irony becomes the Petrarchan version of Augustine's *regio dissimilitudinis,* the gulf separating the celestial and the terrestrial spheres of existence and signification.[58] The language of signs, and the divergence between matter and words they bespeak, springs from this gulf. Durling attributes to allegory an almost incarnational coincidence of object and sign, but in the exiled world of dissimilitude, the veiling of meaning in allegory is, perhaps, already a function of difference and multiplicity. Only the intervention of grace can illuminate the true meaning among the various available interpretations of historical events and textual signs, a concept echoed by Petrarch in the letter to Giacomo Colonna to justify his continued devotion to classical letters: 'Rare is the reading free from danger unless the light of divine truth shines upon the reader teaching him what is to be pursued and what is to be avoided.' ('rara lectio est que periculo vacet, nisi legenti lux divine veritatis affulserit, quid sequendum declinandum ve sit docens').[59]

The *Secretum* too avails itself of this understanding of literary invention to defend its use of classical citations in the service of theological discussion: 'sic nempe poeticis inest veritas figmentis, tenuissimis rimulis adeunda' ('there is in poetic fictions a truth which has to be gleaned by the smallest openings', II, 104).[60] The simultaneous veiling and unveiling of truth is for Petrarch the characteristic mode of poetry. The clearest exposition of this 'poetics' of revelation is found in the *Africa*, the unfinished epic to which Petrarch consigned his chief poetic ambitions. In the ninth book, Scipio, whose deeds in the Second Punic War the epic sets out to celebrate, asks the singer Ennius

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[55] 'hoc saltem oro, ne finxisse me fingas.' *Familiares*, II, 9, 31, vol. 1, p. 274.
[56] Robert M. Durling, 'Il Petrarca, il Ventoso e la Possibilità dell'Allegoria', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 23.3 (1977), 304-23, p. 309.
[57] 'La vera coscienza di sé è sempre quella dell'inautenticità. Il linguaggio dell'allegoria è ormai in crisi, e forse il paradosso più profondo del Petrarca è quello di una eloquenza che si vorrebbe religiosa e perfino penitenziale, ma che – perché insiste a parlare – si sposta fatalmente verso l'ironica – e magari compiaciuta – accettazione del momento della mancanza, del naturale.' Durling, 'Il Petrarca, il Ventoso e la Possibilità dell'Allegoria', p. 323.
[58] 'et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei, radians in me vehementer, et contremui amore et horrore. Et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis' ('And Thou didst beat back the weakness of my gaze, blazing upon me too strongly, and I was shaken with love and with dread. And I knew that I was far from Thee in the region of unlikeness [...]'). Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, 10, 16, PL 32, 742. Cf. *Confessions*, II, 6, 14.
[59] Petrarca, *Familiares*, vol. 1, p. 264; *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 100-1.
[60] Petrarca, *Secretum*, p. 162.

why poets are honoured with the crown of laurel. Ennius, in his response, describes the poetic method as a weaving of the truth under an iridescent cover:

> Scripturum iecisse prius firmissima veri
> fundamenta decet, quibus inde innixus amena
> et varia sub nube potest abscondere se se,
> lectori longum cumulans placidumque laborem,
> quesitu asperior quo sit sententia, verum
> dulcior inventu. [...] (92-7)[61]
>
> Before writing it is fitting for him to have laid the firmest foundations of truth, in which he can then hide himself, with their support, in an alluring and colourful cloud, preparing the long and mild labour of the reader, so that the poet's thought might be harder to seek, but sweeter once found.

Truth alternately shrouds and shows itself in between the veils of fiction ('tenui frustrentur lumina velo, / interdumque palam veniant fugiantque vicissim', 101-2), seducing the reader into unravelling its secret.[62] The 'laurel' becomes the emblem of the fugitive and hidden. Ennius here echoes Augustine's explanation of the *obscuritas* of scripture, which insists on the need for conceiving of the divine with an ardent and passionate desire:

> The presentation of truth through signs has great power to feed and fan that ardent love [*ignem amoris*], by which, as under some law of gravitation, we flicker upwards, or inwards, to our place of rest. Things presented in this way move and kindle our affection far more than if they were set forth in bold statements […] Why this should be, it is hard to say: […] I believe that the emotions are less easily set alight while the soul is wholly absorbed in material things; but when it is brought to material signs of spiritual realities, and moves from them to the things they represent, it gathers strength just by this very act of passing from the one to the other, like the flame of a torch, that burns all the more brightly as it moves. (Ep. 55, 11, 21)[63]

Petrarch and Augustine invoke the hermeneutics of what Dante might call 'la dottrina che s'asconde / sotto 'l velame de li versi strani', 'the teaching that is hidden beneath the veil of the strange verses', *Inferno* IX, 62-3).[64] Conceptualising composition and interpretation in terms of concealment, however, poses a difficulty for the literary representation of confession, understood as a revelation of the full and unobstructed truth about the self. A way to overcome this difficulty, and to conciliate confessional sincerity with allegory is held out by the register of love deployed by Augustine, both in this passage and in the *Confessions*: the wish that his confessions should flare his readers' love towards God ('affectum meum excito in te, et eorum qui haec legunt', XI, 1, 1) presents the confessant's account of his life as an allegorical cypher of truth capable of stoking the flames of

[61] Petrarca, 'Africa', ed. Guido Martellotti, in *Rime*, pp. 626-705.
[62] See the discussion of Augustine's reticence in the *Confessions* as a rhetorical strategy of 'seduction' in Virigina Burrus, Mark D. Jordan and Karmen McKendrick, *Seducing Augustine: Bodies, Desire, Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).
[63] Augustine, PL 33, 214. I quote Peter Brown's translation of this passage in *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber, 2000), p. 263.
[64] Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy*, vol. 1, tr. Robert Durling (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

desire. If an irreducible ambiguity between fiction and sincerity remains intrinsic to literary 'veilings' of the confessional 'unveiling', the truth of the divine can be glimpsed through the allegorisation of the individual's life into an exemplary trajectory of penitence and regeneration. The friction between the material sign and the spiritual reality it signifies – 'this very act of passing from one to the other' – is precisely what keeps the love that is necessary to achieve an understanding of the scriptures burning. Autobiography converges with hermeneutics in the superimposition of a symbolic meaning upon life: far from requiring a perfect identification between sign and reality to be efficacious (as Durling suggests), allegory kindles love for God in the space of separation between them.

Laura's depiction in the *Canzoniere* as an entity half-revealed and half-concealed thus determines the process by which the truth of the self can emerge. The poet is 'governed by the veil' ('mi governa il velo') the lady casts over herself, both the consequence of the poet's desire and what sets it blazing, as the ballad 'Lassare il velo o per sole o per ombra' (*Rvf* 11) sings:

> Quel ch'i' piú desiava in voi m'è tolto:
> sì mi governa il velo
> che per mia morte, et al caldo et al gielo,
> de' be' vostr'occhi il dolce lume adombra.
>
> What I most longed for in you I have lost;
> it is the veil that rules me,
> which to my death, in warmth or cooler weather,
> covers the sweet light of your lovely eyes. (11-4)

The lyric sketches the beginnings of the *Canzoniere*'s sublimation of the lady into an image, fixed in the poet's memory and in his verse, yet perennially out of reach. As Rosanna Bettarini points out, the allusion to the naked figure of wisdom in Augustine's *Soliloquies*, which the seeker strives to possess 'nullo interposito velamento' (I, 13, 22), adds *Sapientia* to the manifold allegorical connotations of Laura.[65] The search for the vestiges of the beloved is also likened to the search for the *visio beatifica* of God. Sonnet 191 makes the analogy explicit:

> Sì come eterna vita è veder Dio,
> né più si brama, né bramar più lice,
> così me, donna, il voi veder, felice
> fa in questo breve e fraile viver mio.
>
> Just as eternal life is seeing God,
> no greater wish is there nor wish more right,
> so, lady, to behold you makes me happy
> during this short and fragile life of mine. (1-4)

[65] Rosanna Bettarini, '*Fluctuationes* Agostiniane nel 'Canzoniere'', in *Petrarca e Agostino*, ed. Roberto Cardini and Donatella Coppini (Roma: Bulzoni, 2004), pp. 95-107, pp. 100-2.

Just as the eternal life conferred by the sight of God cannot be sustained in the region of unlikeness in which the speaker is trapped, the salvific image of Laura vanishes as quickly as it appears ('se non fusse il suo fuggir sí ratto / più non demandereri', 'were it not so quick to run away,
I would not ask for more', 9-10). Another term of comparison for the mystical rapture of gazing upon Laura is the revelation of Christ, suggested by the image of the rent veil of the temple (2 Cor. 3:13) invoked by sonnet 362: here the speaker 'almost' leaves the 'rendered veil' of the flesh on earth ('lasciando in terra lo squarciato velo', 4), flying with his thoughts to heaven in search of his beloved, and going so far as to conflate the bliss of seeing Laura with that of seeing God, in his desire to 'look upon both of their faces' ('l'uno e l'altro volto', 11).[66] The pointed qualification 'almost', however, emphasises his separation from the coveted images. This dynamic of simultaneous revelation and concealment re-emerges in Petrarch's depiction of the incarnation in the final hymn to the Virgin, which brings the penitential subtext of the *Canzoniere* to a culmination. The embodiment of Christ which rips the 'veil' is significantly conceptualised as a form of hiding: ''n te Sua luce ascose' ('inside you He chose to hide his light', *Rvf* 366, 3).

It is Laura's role as a shrouded image which lends her the quality of *figmentum* Giacomo Colonna accuses her of resembling. Yet her rarefied presence springs from the *Canzoniere*'s self-reflexive commentary on its own literariness, as well as on a phenomenology of love based on the idealisation of the beloved. The veiling of Laura in fact grants the speaker a more capacious (if torturous) ability to imagine her presence as an all-pervasive effulgence:

> Ovunque gli occhi volgo
> trovo un dolce sereno
> pensando: Qui percosse il vago lume. [...]
> Così nulla se 'n perde,
> et più certezza averne fôra il peggio.
>
> Wherever my eyes turn
> I find sweet brightness there
> and think: 'That lovely light once struck right here.' [...]
> This way no part is lost,
> and knowing more exactly would be worse. (*Rvf* 125, 66-8; 75-6)

Laura is not the less present for being dispersed, contrary to what is often assumed by interpretations of the love story which ascribe the disintegration of Petrarch's lady to the projection of a self-absorbed subjectivity. Nancy Vickers, for example, builds on Freccero's argument to suggest that the 'scattered' woman represented by Petrarch and his poetic inheritors is a form of violent dismemberment of the female in the service of reconstituting a unified male subjectivity.[67] Much as it

[66] Silvia Chessa discusses the Christological connotations of Laura in *Il Profumo del Sacro*, pp. 329-37.
[67] Nancy J. Vickers, 'Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme', *Critical Inquiry*, 8.2 (1981), 265-79.

might go against the grain of Freccero's argument, in his aversion to psychological construals of the *Canzoniere*, suggesting that Petrarch is solely concerned with crafting a self-reflexive literary persona is indeed a short step from diagnosing him as the epitome (and progenitor) of poetic narcissism. Yet like worldly reality itself in the *Canzoniere*, Laura is constitutionally fugitive, and the self which follows her is similarly shadowed by dissimilitude. *Rvf* 125's concern with the difficulty of conveying the poet's torment into words reinforces the identification of the lady with a poetic language no more perspicuous, and no less effulgent than the indefinable traces left by Laura's presence (or indeed, by the 'aura' of her absence) on the banks of the Sorgue. The lyric's evocation of the vestigial 'aura' of poetry introduces the celebration of memory, darkened by the prophecy of the speaker's death, famously evoked by the next canzone in the sequence, 'Chiare fresche et dolci acque': 'date udienza insieme / a le dolenti mie parole estreme' ('listen all of you together, / to these my mournful, my last words', 12-3).

The 'veil' which shields Laura from the poet's sight, as the ballad 'Lassar il velo' intimates, stands as a premonition of the death which will eventually separate her from the lover, and which will rule the lover himself 'to [his] death'. Death is also dispensed, however, by the unimpeded sight of Laura's eyes. In the final lyric of the sequence, the lady is compared to Medusa.[68]

> Medusa et l'error mio m'àn fatto un sasso
> d'umor vano stillante
>
> Medusa and my sin turned me to stone
> dripping useless moisture (*Rvf* 366, 111-2)

The ambivalence of Laura's representation as a fatal Medusa and as 'scala al Fattor' ('ladder to our Maker', *Rvf* 360, 139) figures the ambiguity of figural interpretation itself, the region of 'unlikeness' inhabited by allegory. As Peter Brown indicates, the fracturing of signification through the Fall, in Augustinian terms, is what gives us language as a semiotic system in need of interpretation.[69] Both writing and reading are then constituted, perhaps, by the guilty consciousness of a gulf of 'dissimilitude', which can only be filled by the light of the divine pouring into the self to unify it into one final song:

> Vergine, tu di sante
> lagrime et pie adempi 'l meo cor lasso,
> ch'almeno l'ultimo pianto sia devoto,
> senza terrestro limo,
> come fu 'l primo  non d'insania vòto.

[68] Other references to Laura as Medusa occur in *Rvf* 23, 138; *Rvf* 179, 10; *Rvf* 197, 6. See Kenelm Foster, 'Beatrice or Medusa: The Penitential Element in Petrarch's 'Canzoniere'', in *Italian Studies Presented to E.R. Vincent*, ed. Charles Peter Brand, Kenelm Foster and Uberto Limentani (Cambridge: CUP, 1962), pp. 41-56; and John Freccero, 'Dante's Medusa: Allegory and Autobiography', in *Things Seen: Reference and Recognition in Medieval Thought*, ed. David Jeffrey (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), pp. 33-46.
[69] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo,* p. 261.

> Virgin, now with repentant
> and holy tears fill up my weary heart;
> at least let my last weeping be devout,
> without the mud of earth,
> as was the first and insane vow of mine. (113-7)

The *figuration exilée* of linguistic signs is paralleled by a conceptualisation of the confessional subject as a manifestation of the divine trying to break through the 'mud of earth'.[70] The 'thoughts and wit and style' ('pensieri e 'ngegno et stile', 127) spent on Laura, indeed, can only be purified *if* the Virgin grants that the poet may rise from his 'state so wretched and vile' ('dal mio stato assai misero et vile', 124). The hypothetical is significant, rendering confession's aspiration to renew and reconstitute the poet's speech dependent on divine sanctification. Likewise, the love which prompts him to write is conditional upon an anterior love without which he cannot hope to begin his song: 'ma non so 'ncominciar senza tu' aita' ('but I cannot begin without your help', 5). Yet by addressing itself to the intercessory figure of the Virgin, in whose mortal flesh the divine is both 'hidden' and revealed, the power of the figurative is re-affirmed: even the incarnation is 'governed by the veil', mysteriously figuring forth the divine, rather than embodying it in a perspicuous convergence of the spiritual and the material. If the language of poetry is a kind of 'sinning' in Petrarch, in the sense of being a language in exile, it also reaches for conversion in a process of revelation constantly yearning to seize a hidden truth 'nullo interposito velamento'.

The 'mud of earth' is redeemed, in the hymn to the Virgin, by the figural 'veiling' of the divine in the flesh. Petrarch's seventh penitential psalm, similarly, conceptualises God's presence in the world as a 'shadow', an intangible presence which stands in contrast with the speaker's dissipation into shadows:

> Limus et umbra tenuis sum, et fumus ante impetum ventorum, ita michi videor videri.
> Ita michi videar semper, et in hac opinione permaneam sobrie ac salubriter, sub umbra tua. (16-7)

> Mud and a faint shadow am I, and smoke before the force of the winds, thus to me it seems that I seem.
> May I seem so always, and remain firm in this judgment in prudence and health, under your shadow.

The polyptoton extends the insubstantiality of life to the speaker's perception (*videor videri*), which only under the wing of God is solidified into a clear judgment of the self. Rather than searching for a wing to give him flight, the sinner is now enfolded 'sub umbra alarum tuarum' (Ps. 16:18), recalling

[70] Margaret W. Ferguson, 'Saint Augustine's Region of Unlikeness: The Crossing of Exile and Language', *The Georgia Review*, 29.4 (1975), 842-64. The phrase is Jacques Derrida's, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), p. 51.

in turn Psalm 62:8: 'in velamento alarum tuarum exultabo'. The Biblical citations condensed in these two lines are numerous, but as Roberto Gigliucci comments, the most notable is perhaps the union of Horace's 'pulvis et umbra sumus' (*Odes*, IV, 7, 16) with the 'limus' and 'pulvis' of Genesis (Gn. 2:7 and 3:19), an emblematic synthesis of classical and Christian culture.[71] The most overtly 'confessional' of Petrarch's works, the *Psalmi* have until recently received limited critical attention, despite their widespread popularity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[72] The insight they yield into Petrarch's approach to a literary language of confession brings to a close this chapter's reflection on the paradigms of introspection and self-revelation embedded in Petrarch's poetics. Petrarch's 'personal' psalms, as Ann Matter terms them, are not a work of translation or paraphrase, but original prose compositions written in imitation of the style of the Vulgate and built on a dense web of intertextual references. Petrarch writes his own prayer into the mould of the seven-psalm grouping first designated as 'penitential' by Cassiodorus, and institutionalised into liturgical and devotional practices of penance from the early history of the Church.

Studying to imitate the 'hoarseness' which the shepherd Silvius attributes to the Psalmist in the first eclogue of the *Bucolicum Carmen*, Petrarch dismisses the *Psalmi* as the unembellished outcome of half a day's work, as he claims in a letter to his lifelong friend Sagremors de Pommiers (*Seniles,* X, 1, 132).[73] Setting aside the conventional affectation of modesty, the studied 'roughness' serves to underline the penitential character of prayers imagined as immediate outpourings of the heart, their hoarseness testimony to the speaker's sincerity. The eloquence and erudition which characterise Petrarch's rendition of the Psalmist's 'raucedo', however, place the *Psalmi Penitentiales* firmly in the camp of the 'literata devotio' ('learned devotion') defended elsewhere by Petrarch against 'devota rusticitas' ('devout rusticity').[74] Part of this devotion at once 'learned' and 'literary' involves turning the liturgical song of the psalms into the expression of an individual experience: through the *Psalmi*'s echoes of the *Secretum* and of the *Canzoniere*, the poet's own work becomes another major

[71] Petrarca, *Salmi Penitenziali*, p. 79. Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. and tr. Niall Rudd (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 2004).
[72] Marino Casali, 'Petrarca 'Penitenziale': Dai 'Salmi' alle 'Rime'', *Lettere Italiane*, 20.3 (1968), 366-82; Donatella Coppini, 'Petrarca, i Salmi e il Codice Parigino Latino 1994 delle 'Enarrationes' di Agostino', in *Petrarca e Agostino*, ed. Roberto Cardini, Donatella Coppini (Roma: Bulzoni, 2004), pp. 19-38; and ibid., ''Luce una nec integra': Sulla Composizione dei 'Salmi penitenziali' del Petrarca', in *Margarita Amicorum: Studi di Cultura Europea per Agostino Sottili*, vol. 1, ed. Fabio Forner, Carla Maria Monti and Paul Gerhard Schmidt (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2005), pp. 221-232; E. Ann Matter, 'Petrarch's Personal Psalms', in *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. Victoria Kirkham and Armando Maggi (Chicago: UCP, 2009), pp. 219-227; Ester Pietrobon, ''Tam efficaciter utinam quam inculte': Modelli Liturgici e Stile Monastico nei 'Psalmi penitentiales'', *Petrarchesca,* 7 (2019), 61-62; and Mattia Boccuti, 'L'Umile Salmista e il Poeta Laureato: Davide, Petrarca e i 'Psalmi penitentiales'', *Italica,* 98.2 (2021), 254-266.
[73] Francesco Petrarca, *Res Seniles*, vol. 3, ed. Silvia Rizzo (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2014), p. 140; Cf. Francesco Petrarca, 'Egloghe', ed. Guido Martellotti, in *Rime*, pp. 808-35: 'semper habet lacrimas et pectore raucus anelat' ('always he has tears with him, and sighs with a hoarse chest'), I, 74.
[74] Sen. I, 5, 130, to Giovanni da Certaldo (1362), in *Res Seniles*, vol. 1, ed. Silvia Rizzo (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2014), p. 82. Cf. Erminia Ardissino, *Poesia in Forma di Preghiera: Svelamenti dell'Essere da Francesco d'Assisi ad Alda Merini* (Roma: Carocci, 2023), p. 152.

intertextual reference. Ester Pietrobon calls this process of conversion of the collective voice into the individual word an 'autobiographical liturgy', which gives the *Psalmi* the shape of compendium, a kind of breviary or *libellus precum* of the wider 'penitential project' developed by the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*.[75] By reading and re-writing his struggle into the canonical texts of the psalms, Petrarch makes confession an activity of literary re-elaboration; the acts of reading and interpreting, equally, become a constitutive part of confessional self-examination. Brian Cummings finds the traits of this 'literary' form of subjectivity already adumbrated in the Mount Ventoux letter: Petrarch 'reveals the life of the mind as coterminous with the reading of a book'.[76] Indeed, in Brian Stock's words, he makes it possible for the individual to become 'his own book': placing the self at the foreground of the text involves fashioning the self into a text to be read and to be written.[77] In so doing, Petrarch makes confession not merely a verbal, but also a literary affair. This is not without its problems, for as Stock adds, 'the reading and writing in which he is engaged can be looked on ambivalently: positively, as a pathway to inner reflection, or negatively, as a concentration on outer forms of expression.'[78] We return, then, to the ambivalence of the poetic 'laurel', to the representation of the literary craft of which Laura is a figure alternately as a temptation away from spiritual cultivation, or as a matchless path towards God. If the divine appears in the form of a distant call, a shade, a fugitive 'aura' cast upon the world, the shadows which pervade the region of dissimilitude of man's fallen language are not thereby banished – perhaps, indeed, they are thrown into even greater relief.

Almost three centuries later, in the first English verse translation of the *Psalmi Penitentiales,* George Chapman will draw out this latent ambivalence towards poetic invention, diverging from Petrarch's original compositions to censure those dissemblers who employ their 'art' and 'skill' to falsify devotion, 'learning but termes to iangle in'.[79] That Chapman aims this stricture at the abuses of poetry is suggested by the next stanza of his verse translation, for what God's shadow redeems is the sinner's poetic voice: 'My poore Muse still shall sit, and sing, / In that sweete shadow of thy wing'. Petrarch is here ventriloquised – it is tempting to conjecture – in order to rebuke his past literary persona and that of his many imitators decidedly not placing their art under God's wing. The exemplary lover is transfigured into the exemplary penitent, a work begun by Petrarch in his most celebrated lyric sequence, and which is itself not exempt from the suspicion of 'feigned' devotion first

[75] Pietrobon, ''Tam efficaciter utinam quam inculte'', p. 61.
[76] Cummings, 'Autobiography and the History of Reading', p. 645
[77] Stock, *After Augustine*, p. 76. Cf. Yocum, *Petrarch's Humanist Writing and Carthusian Monasticism*, p. 195.
[78] Stock, *After Augustine*, p. 82.
[79] George Chapman, *Petrarchs seuen penitentiall psalmes paraphrastically translated: with other philosophicall poems, and a hymne to Christ vpon the crosse* (London: Matthew Selman, 1612), p. 25.

entertained by Giacomo Colonna.[80] The *Canzoniere*'s disparate images of the poetic laurel as the instigator of a language either sinful or redemptive give rise to a process of reading in between the lines which partakes in the poetics of self-revelation typical of the sequence – an eternal striving to reach the truth of the inner man half-hidden, half-revealed by the veils of fiction. The life of dissimilitude thus invariably seems to tilt into dissimulation. If we are to assume that there is no truth to the 'theatre' of Petrarch's wit, we might conclude by attributing the seductiveness of Petrarchism to its generative elusiveness, its aptitude to be ventriloquised to an inherent performativity: in the process of parsing the shadows cast by the cypher of Petrarch's allegorised life, his successors turn his language of 'unveiling' back into a veil adapted to cast new shadows over and beyond themselves. Yet this does not necessarily entail a conflictual separation of the 'personal' from the fictive 'persona'. Despite the ease with which devotion can be dissembled, Chapman ultimately insists on the value of the exemplary life in shadowing grace: 'Good life is truths most learn'd expounder'. More than this, Petrarch's 'literata devotio' challenges the confessional demands readers place upon him, whether they regard him as 'sincere' or not. Trilling observes that the effort to achieve authenticity, as that of uncovering inauthenticity, comes with its own set of 'conventions, its generalities, its commonplaces, its maxims': we certainly do risk 'feigning' that the poet has feigned when we assume or attempt to evince the truth about the false self, 'as must anyone who undertakes to satisfy our modern demand for reminders of our fallen state and for reasons why we are to be ashamed of our lives'.[81] What fault in the state of the modern critical subject, then, does dismissing the possibility of a truthful account of the 'self' bespeak, or seek to remedy?

The first section of this chapter argued that confessional self-examination shapes the literary form of Petrarch's verse; the second showed that, by the same token, self-revelation is for Petrarch a typically literary phenomenon. Indeed, the confessional tenor of Petrarch's poetics sees the aesthetic emerging from the ethical posture of the subject, even as the conduit of 'ethical' self-accounting becomes the aesthetic medium of the poet. Petrarch thus provides a model for a literary form of confessional subjectivity which bears a deeper affinity to the poets with which the following chapters are concerned than their adoption of the patterns and tropes of European Petrarchism as a matter of rhetorical convention might at first indicate. The next chapter considers the first sonnet sequence to appear in English, authored by Anne Lock, as a form of 'literata devotio' which employs literary activity as a conduit for penitential devotion and for confessional self-fashioning in ways redolent of Petrarch's 'confessional poetics'.

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[80] In his survey of versification of the penitential psalms in early modern England, Hannibal Hamlin also questions the sincerity of Petrarch's original psalms, contrasting them to what appears to be a 'genuine' devotional intent on Chapman's part. See 'Sobs for Sorrowful Souls: Versions of the Penitential Psalms for Domestic Devotion', in *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Jessica Martin and Alec Ryrie (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 211-35.
[81] Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p. 105.

## Chapter Two: A Reformed *Miserere*: Anne Lock's *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*

### 'A cloven tongue': Psalm Versification and Lock's *Meditation*

Petrarch's *Psalmi Penitentiales* sit at the intersection of what Roland Greene has called the two 'master-texts' of the European literary Renaissance: the *Canzoniere* and the Psalter.[1] While they are not composed in the vernacular, nor are they versified, Petrarch's psalms condense the penitential themes of the *Canzoniere* in the shape of a personal prayer, anticipating the confluence of the language of lyric inwardness with that of scriptural paraphrase in a literary culture which owed much to Petrarch's brand of Christian humanism. Versification of the penitential psalms was already a thriving literary genre across Europe: a terza rima paraphrase attributed to Dante was widely popular in Italy from the fourteenth century; in the early fifteenth century, Charles V commissioned Christine de Pizan's *Sept psaumes allegorisés*, and at around the same time Richard Maidstone and Thomas Brampton produced versifications of the penitential psalms in English, conceivably as aids to private devotion. With the advent of the Reformation, vernacular translations of the Psalter naturally became a contentious matter: a translation and commentary of the penitential psalms, which appeared in print in 1517, was among Luther's earliest works.[2] Subsequent translations such as Antonio Brucioli's paraphrase (1534), published in the same year as Pietro Aretino's *Sette Salmi de la Penitentia di David*, would eventually be indexed by Paul IV. In 1554, it was an English *Miserere* that Lady Jane Grey uttered as she was led to execution, a plea for forgiveness of sins as much as a profession of Protestant faith in her choice of the vernacular.[3] In literary terms, the Psalter was frequently adduced as scriptural justification for the uses and virtues of poetry – a repository of lyric forms to rival that of classical literature, and therefore a useful instrument for turning readers away from the snares of lascivious verse.[4] In the 'épître aux dames' which prefaces Clément Marot's 1543 collection of *Cinquante Pseaumes*, the poet thus invites readers to abandon love songs in favour of David's

[1] Roland Greene, 'Sir Philip Sidney's Psalms, the Sixteenth-Century Psalter, and the Nature of Lyric', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 30.1 (1990), 19-40, p. 19.
[2] Martin Luther, *Die sieben Bußpsalmen*, WA 1, 158-220.
[3] On the role of the vernacular *Miserere* in the Book of Martyrs, see Lydia Whitehead, ''A poena et culpa': Penitence, Confidence and the 'Miserere' in Foxe's 'Actes and Monuments'', *Renaissance Studies,* 4.3 (September 1990), 287-299.
[4] Cf. Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: PUP, 1979), p. 39; for the contradictory uses of the Davidic model in Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*, see Anne Lake Prescott, 'King David as a 'Right Poet': Sidney and the Psalmist', *English Literary Renaissance*, 19.2 (1989), 131-51.

'sainctes chansonnetes', a sentiment endorsed by Calvin in his preface to the complete Geneva Psalter, comprised of Marot's and Theodore Beza's verse translations.[5]

The Marot-Beza Psalter is the work to which John Donne alludes when, in his poem 'Upon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sydney, and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister', he contrasts the psalms 'so well attired abroad' (38) with the state in which, up until the Sidneys, English psalm versification had languished. Among the chief English versifications of the psalms in the sixteenth century were Robert Crowley's (1549), Matthew Parker's (1557), and the ubiquitous Sternhold-Hopkins version (1562), 'very mete to be used of all sortes of people privately for their solace and comfort: laying apart all ungodly Songes and Ballades'.[6] Donne celebrates the new translation as a work of divine inspiration: the holy spirit is 'cleft' in twain by the dual authorship of brother and sister, as it had once descended upon the psalms' first Author David 'in a cloven tongue / (for 'twas a double power by which he sung / The highest matter in the noblest forme)' (9-11).[7] The evangelising function of the Pentecostal gift of 'tongues' is activated by this unity of divine matter and human form – one which, however, is as liable to be 're-reveale[d]' (34) by an inspired translator as of being sundered by a bad one. Donne's poem appears simultaneously to celebrate and resist the revelatory power of translation, in a tribute to the Sidneys' achievement which begins by declaring that to 'seeke new expressions' (2) for God is like trying to square a circle, and ends by contrasting the prayer of the faithful with the incommensurable songs of heaven.[8] There is a chasm between the unfolding of language in history (the scansion of human finitude described by Augustine in *Confessions,* XI, 26) and the 'Extemporall' (51), unmediated access to God which takes place 'outside' of time. Yet even as translation and rhetorical re-elaborations of the Word expose language's alienation from heaven, they manifest God in the shape most apt to 'translate' their readers into his promised kingdom (Col. 1:13). The evangelising role of the vernacular here dovetails with an aesthetic mission: when Donne decries that the reformation of the Church can scarcely be called complete without a commensurate reformation of the psalms (40-1), the renewal of belief and worship is imagined to include, and indeed to result from literary activity.

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[5] Clément Marot, *Cinquante pseaumes en francois* (Genève: Jean Gérard, 1543), fol. i$^{v}$; 'seulement que le monde soit si bien aduisé, que au lieu de chansons en partie vaines & friuoles, en partie sottes & lourdes, en partie sales et vilaines, & par consequent mauvaises, dont il a vsé par ci devant, il s'accoustume ci apres à chanter ces diuins & celestes cantiques avec le bon Roy Dauid', in *Les psaumes mis en rime françoise par Clement Marot, & Theodore de Beze* (Geneva: Jean Bonnefoy, 1563), fol. v$^{r}$. Calvin's epistle is dated 10th June 1543.

[6] *The whole book of psalmes, collected into Englysh metre by T. Starnhold, I. Hopkins, & others* (London: John Day, 1562).

[7] John Donne, *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, 2$^{nd}$ ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1978).

[8] Cf. Jamie H. Ferguson, *Reformation Hermeneutics and Literary Language in Early Modern England: Faith in the Language* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022). 'Donne's poem both asserts and doubts the adequacy of artful language as mediator of the Word of God', p. 10.

An early precursor to the Sidneys' experiments in psalm versification is the *Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*, a sonnet sequence attributed to Anne Vaughan Lock and appended to a translation of four sermons by John Calvin published by John Day in 1560 (and reprinted twice in 1569 and 1574). The work is a poetic paraphrase of the *Miserere* (Psalm 50/51) comprised of twenty-six sonnets: five act as a preface 'expressing the passioned minde of the penitent sinner' and a further twenty-one paraphrase the psalm line by line. Although authorship is disowned by the translator 'A. L.', it has generally been ascribed to Lock on the grounds of its numerous verbal parallels with her translation of the sermons, and with the work's eloquent dedicatory epistle to the Duchess of Suffolk, Katharine Brandon Bertie.[9] The first sonnet sequence in the language, Lock's paraphrase is both an exegesis and performance of the psalmist's prayer, re-presenting it in a poetic garb designed to model and promulgate a reformed understanding of repentance. While a Protestant emphasis on unmediated confession before God moves the devotional practice of penance away from the sacramental economy of grace associated with the *Miserere*'s ritual uses, Lock manages to conciliate an internalisation of the forum of confession not only with aspects of communal prayer, but also with the 'arte of Rhetorick' denounced by Calvin in the sermons on Hezekiah with which the poems are enclosed. Yet, as this chapter will argue, the paraphrase also rehearses some of Donne's doubts about the mediatory potential of human language in representing the divine: in a characteristic knot of linguistic and soteriological concerns, the ambivalence tacitly connoted by the image of the psalmist's 'cloven tongue' resurfaces under the guise of the speaker's misgivings about her ability to petition God, as she grapples with the central theological question of the sinner's justification – a question ultimately revealed to be inseparable from that of poetic justifiability.

The most significant English precedent for Lock's paraphrase was Sir Thomas Wyatt's sequence of seven *Penitentiall Psalmes*, a translation of Pietro Aretino's prose paraphrase of the *Sette Salmi* (with echoes of Luigi Alamanni's metrical version), which represents the first use of terza rima

[9] See Felch's discussion, in *Works*, pp. liii-liv. Micheline White regards the evidence as inconclusive, in 'Dismantling Catholic Primers and Reforming Private Prayer: Anne Lock, Hezekiah's Song, and Psalm 51', in *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Alec Ryrie and Jessica Martin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 93-113. Lewis Lupton speculates that the *Meditation* may have been written by Lock's friend John Knox, in *History of the Geneva Bible*, vol. 8 (London: Olive Tree, 1966), p. 9, as does Patrick Collinson in *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 280. Another contender is Christopher Goodman, who later had the first lyric of the paraphrase set to music by Andrew Kemp, as it appears in the Wode Psalter (BL MUS Add. 33933). See Jane E. A. Dawson, 'Goodman, Christopher (1521/2-1603)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison (Oxford, OUP: 2004). Steven W. May makes the most compelling case for an alternative ascription, using stylistic evidence to argue that the likely author is Thomas Norton, in 'Anne Lock and Thomas Norton's 'Meditation of a Penitent Sinner'', *Modern Philology*, 114.4 (2017), 793-819. There are, however, no known biographical links to prove what would have had to be a close collaboration between the two writers. Most recently, May has argued that Norton is the author 'beyond reasonable doubt' in response to Jake Arthur's 'Anne Lock or Thomas Norton? A Response to the Reattribution of the First Sonnet Sequence in English', *Early Modern Women*, 16 (2022), 213-36. See Steven W. May, 'Thomas Norton's 'Meditation of a Penitent Sinner'', *Reformation*, 28.2 (2023), 144-163.

in English.[10] From the image of the trap set by Love in Bathsheba's eyes, to the characterisation of David's plaint as 'frawtyd with disese / off stormy syghes' (69-9), the Italianate vein of Wyatt's compositions is not only Dantean, but also Petrarchan in nature, though perhaps a style of Petrarchism tempered, as Robin Kirkpatrick observes, by narrative and visual conceits which seem to foreshadow the 'histrionic richness of Baroque spirituality'.[11] David's ubiquitous representation as lover and sinner contributed to identifying the psalmist's persona with the lyrical subjectivity of a Petrarchan lover: the exegesis and surrounding iconography of Psalm 51 in particular foregrounded the story of David's guilt for the seduction of Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah.[12] The courtly language of Petrarchism is also enlisted by Wyatt for political ends: in David's tale, Surrey writes in a prefatory sonnet to the manuscript work, 'Rewlers may se in a myrrour clere / the bitter frewte of false concupicense'. Written in 1541 while Wyatt was awaiting indictment for treason, the *Penitentiall Psalmes* act as a political statement which alternates 'between scandalous outspokenness and guarded prohibition.'[13] The speaker, indeed, pivots between assuming the plangent tones of David and the admonitory role of the prophet Nathan, urging the ruler to repent the sins of adultery and murder, an ambivalence which extends to the contentious theological resonance that the penitential psalms had by that time assumed.[14]

The *Miserere*, central among the seven penitential psalms, came to hold a special significance for the early Reformers, despite the psalm's longstanding association with intercessory prayer and penitential satisfaction in the Catholic tradition. In his extended 1532 lecture on the *Miserere*, Luther considers that it 'contains instruction about the chief parts of our religion, about repentance, sin, grace, and justification.'[15] Along with Psalm 32:1-2, it is the fourth verse of Psalm 51 quoted by Paul in Rom. 4:7 which represents 'the other locus classicus of Luther's sola fides': 'Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci, ut justificeris in sermonibus tuis, et vincas cum judicaris.'[16] Brian Cummings has tracked the development of Luther's notion of *iustitia passiva* in a history of reading spanning from the early *Dictata super Psalterium* and lectures on Romans to the autobiographical preface of the *Opera Omnia*. An interpretation of *iustitia Dei* in the passive sense enables the believer to recognise himself as already justified by God's mercy: it is by unravelling the grammar of the

[10] Thomas Wyatt, 'Penitential Psalms', in *Collected Poems*, ed. Joost Daalder (Oxford: OUP, 1975). All further references from this edition.
[11] Robin Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature from Dante to Shakespeare: A Study of Source, Analogue and Divergence* (London: Longman, 1995), p. 138.
[12] Clare Costley King'oo, *Miserere Mei: The Penitential Psalms in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), pp. 25-62.
[13] Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 224.
[14] Cf. Greg Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 351-76.
[15] 'Continet enim doctrina de praecipius nostrae Religionis capitibus, de Poenitentia, de Peccato, de Gratia et Iustificatione', WA 40.2, 315-470, p. 315. Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms I*, ed. and tr. Jaroslav Pelikan, LW 12 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955), pp. 301-410, p. 303.
[16] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, p. 230.

scriptural Word that redemption can be seized, the 'gates of heaven' opened.[17] Luther's exegesis of Psalm 51's 'ut justificeris' in the 1515 lectures on Romans 3:1-8 emphasises a subtler interplay of the passive and active senses of *iustitia* than will appear in the later preface: man's justification by grace goes hand in hand with God's 'justification' in his 'sayings', a paradoxical reciprocity encapsulated by the discrepancy between the active form of the Hebrew verb signifying 'thou wilt justify', and the passive translation 'that thou mayest be just'.[18]

Wyatt's rendition of the *Miserere* accentuates the obscurity of Lutheran paradox, rather than basking in the radiance of the 'gates of heaven' that it opened for the reformer. Indeed, the unfathomable mysteries of justification seem to lead to silence rather than to the sacrifice of praise which the psalm calls the sinner to raise, as David falls back upon himself, after his paraphrase of Psalm 51, to ponder the 'diepe secretes' that have sprung to his lips, as if unbidden: 'who myght say who hath exprest this thing?' (512). The trope for divine inspiration leads the psalmist to doubt himself, even to rue his boldness in voicing the nature of God's mercy. As the speaker of the narrative frame recounts, the psalm is inwardly repeated by David at the close of his song, 'but not exprest by word':

> But in his hert he tornith and paysith
> Ech word that erst his lypps might forth aford.
> He poyntes, he pawsith, he wonders, he praysyth
> The marcy that hydes off justice the swourd (517-21)

Initially terrified by the mysteries of justification, David, like Luther, ultimately finds his hope 'revivid' by an activity of close reading. As well as demonstrating the importance of an inward meditation on the word – which must not only be sung, but 'ponderd well and tryd' (533) – David's retreat into silence aligns with a reformed understanding of penitence as a purely internal matter. The poem dramatises this by interrupting the vocative address of the psalmist's song and directing its readers to converse with the echoes that David's words leave ringing in the soul. Lock's sonnet sequence, similarly, stages a distinctly Protestant performance of repentance, one designed to proffer the doctrine of justification by faith as a balm against the 'unholsome stuffe' of 'papisticall soulesleaeres'.[19] As Micheline White shows, the prominence of the story of Hezekiah's illness and of Psalm 51 in the Office for the Dead lends a polemical charge to Lock's efforts to correct a set of practices which still exerted a strong hold on private and communal devotion.[20] The *Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* also inherits the political edge of Wyatt's translation (if not the singular edginess of his speaker) in the context of Elizabeth's ascent to the throne. The story of Hezekiah's sickness

[17] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, pp. 79-101.
[18] Ibid., pp. 92-5.
[19] Anne Vaughan Lock, *The Collected Works of Anne Vaughan Lock*, ed. Susan Felch (Tempe, Ar.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), p. 6. I follow Felch's spelling of Anne Lock's name. All further references from this edition.
[20] White, 'Dismantling Catholic Primers and Reforming Private Prayer'.

expounded by Calvin's sermons with which the sonnets are enclosed may lay an implicit injunction on the new monarch to defend the true creed against idolatry, in imitation of Hezekiah's destruction of Moses' bronze serpent, a biblical exemplum cited by Calvin to this end in the Geneva Bible's dedicatory epistle to the queen.[21] As a girl, Elizabeth had translated Marguerite d'Angoluême's *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (1531) as a gift for Catherine Parr, who had herself penned the well-known *Lamentation of a Sinner* (1547). Marguerite's *Miroir*, along with Marot's translation of Psalm 6 with which it was printed in 1533, was initially censored before her brother François I intervened to lift the ban: though suspected of being a 'poetic manifesto of reformed doctrine', it had proved immensely popular in the years to come.[22] Elizabeth's own youthful 'meditation' on the subject of repentance – it is possible to speculate – may have suggested that Lock's translation and sonnet sequence would find the queen receptive to Protestant arguments for the reformation of penitential doctrine and practice.

That Lock was likely familiar with Wyatt's *Psalms* is suggested by the fact that the sonnet form she adopts follows the pattern of Surrey's dedicatory lyric, set at the head of the work in manuscript copies and later included in Tottell's *Songs and Sonnetes*, though it is difficult to concede to Michael Spiller's hypothesis that the only sonnet Anne Lock might have known was this single encomiastic lyric.[23] An educated woman reportedly 'of rare learning', Lock was well-versed in French and Latin and may well have known Italian, given her contribution of a few (Latin) verses to a manuscript copy of Bartholo Sylva's *Giardino cosmographico coltivato*, an encyclopaedia presented to the Earl of Leicester, Robert Dudley, by Lock's second husband, the puritan preacher Edward Dering.[24] Part of the reason for the close scrutiny under which Lock's choice of sonnet form has come lies in the primacy of the *Meditation* as the first known sonnet sequence to appear in the English language, as Thomas P. Roche first suggested. That this privilege could belong to a Calvinist poet writing about spiritual matters, as Roche notes, challenges the conventional account of Petrarchism's amatory vagaries across Europe.[25] The genre of the spiritual sonnet sequence, however, was at this point well-

[21] *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison, Mil.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). All further references from this edition. See Rosalind Smith, ''In a Mirrour Clere': Protestantism and Politics in Anne Lok's 'Miserere Mei Deus'', in *This Double Voice: Gendered Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. Danielle Clarke and Elizabeth Clarke (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 41-60; and Christopher Warley, *Sonnet Sequences and Social Distinction in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), p. 62.
[22] Rouben Cholakian, 'Introduction', in Marguerite de Navarre, *Selected Writings*, ed. and tr. Rouben Cholakian and Mary Skemp (Chicago: UCP, 2008), p. 18.
[23] Michael Spiller, 'A Literary 'First': The Sonnet Sequence of Anne Locke (1560)', *Renaissance Studies*, 11.1 (1997), 41-55, p. 49.
[24] Cf. Felch, in *Works*, pp. lviii-lix. Lock is described by Richard Carew as 'a Gentlewoman suppressing her rare learning, with a rarer modesty', in *Survey of Cornwall* (London, 1602), pp. 109$^{v}$-110$^{r}$, quoted by Micheline White in 'Women Writers and Literary-Religious Circles in the Elizabethan West Country: Anne Dowriche, Anne Lock Prowse, Anne Lock Moyle, Ursula Fulford, and Elizabeth Rous', *Modern Philology*, 103.2 (2005), 187-214, p. 202. Cf. Susan Felch, ''Noble Gentlewomen famous for their learning': The London Circle of Anne Vaughan Lock', *ANQ,* 16 (2003), 14-19.
[25] Thomas P. Roche, *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), p. 154.

established in Italy, not least through the work of female poets, notably Vittoria Colonna.[26] Colonna was writing in the wake of an explosion of Petrarchist verse abetted by the designation of Petrarch as the foremost model for Italian versification in Pietro Bembo's *Prose sulla volgar lingua* (1525). The spiritual lyric worked within this paradigm at the same time as challenging it: Bembo's canonisation of Petrarch is accompanied by numerous attempts to 'convert' his distinct amatory idiolect in order to draw readers towards God.[27] This dynamic of reception at once adversarial and tributary, as the first chapter suggested, owes much to the double thread of love and repentance woven by Petrarch's sequence, which gives his successors latitude to complete the sequence's project of moral emendation while distancing themselves from the pre-eminent *auctor* (an instance of the 'anxiety of influence', perhaps, inflected by Petrarch's confessional poetics).[28] The fact that repentance should be the theme of the first English sonnet sequence (and that its author may be a woman) appears altogether natural in this context, even though the *Meditation* does not directly engage with Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.

Rather than having to be expurgated of its amatory connotations, the sonnet yields itself ready-made for spiritual disquisition, proving particularly adept at articulating theological paradox, the lacerations of an afflicted spirit, and the blend of the epideictic and the introspective characteristic of prayers of penitence and lovers' laments alike.[29] In line with Petrarch's use of the form to articulate the twists and turns of an agonised conscience, the sonnet becomes an ideal vehicle for expressing repentance. As Deirde Serjeantson demonstrates, an 'unproblematic' association exists between the sonnet sequence and psalmody, due not only to the conception of the psalter as a treasury of poetic forms, but also to the sonnet's 'connotations of interiority and self-scrutiny'.[30] Kimberly Anne Coles notes that between 1558 and 1590 only two works of English metrical translation without musical accompaniment appeared in print: George Gascoigne's translation of the *De Profundis* (Psalm 130) and Lock's paraphrase of the *Miserere*. It is in part thanks to the previously unacknowledged work of female writers such as Lock, Coles argues, that by the end of the century the religious lyric sequence was ripe to be trialled in England.[31] Although the *Meditation*'s influence must be qualified by its unobtrusive publication in the guise of an envoi to a volume of sermons, the sequence is indeed a remarkably early exemplar of psalm versification in English and of the devotional sonnet sequence,

[26] Much recent work has been devoted to uncovering the significance of Colonna's work and her role in the literary and spiritual circles of sixteenth century Italy. See Abigail Brundin, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); and Ramie Targoff, *Renaissance Woman: The Life of Vittoria Colonna* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).
[27] Cf. Pietro Giulio Riga, 'Esegesi e Teoria della Lirica Spirituale nel Rinascimento', in *Lirica e Sacro tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. Lorenzo Geri and Ester Pietrobon (Roma: Aracne, 2020), pp. 249-279, pp. 272-3.
[28] See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 1973).
[29] Cf. Helen Wilcox, 'Sacred Desire, Forms of Belief: The Religious Sonnet in Early Modern Britain', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet*, ed. A. D. Cousins and Peter Howarth (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), pp. 145-65.
[30] Deirdre Serjeantson, 'The Book of Psalms and the Early Modern Sonnet', *Renaissance Studies*, 29.4 (2015), 632-49, p. 646.
[31] Kimberly Anne Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), pp. 147-8.

even by the standards of the Genevan literary culture with which Lock was conversant, where the vogue for the religious lyric begins almost two decades before its popularisation in England in the 1590s.[32] If Lock's choice of the sonnet for devotional ends follows a trend already well underway in Italy, her idiosyncratic take on the form is not the less remarkable. Indeed, there is little precedent for the *Meditation*'s deployment of the sonnet as a unit of paraphrase for each line of the psalm.[33] The sequential element is attained by threading the psalmist's song through enclosed sonnet meditations on each successive verse. The structure is instrumental to an engagement with the biblical text which is both expository and re-creative, a method of 're-revelation' through mediation which not only represents a novel configuration of the relation between the lyric sequence and the Psalter, but also dramatises the way in which the sinner's fallen subjectivity, like her fallen language, comes to mediate and re-reveal the signs of grace.

Poetic Hermeneutics

In the preface to his commentary on the psalms, Calvin famously declares the Psalter 'the Anatomy of all the partes of the Soule, inasmuch as man shal not find in any affection in himself, whereof the Image appeareath not in this glasse'.[34] At once textbook and anatomised body, the Psalter reaches out to pierce the reader's soul in alarming insight. If the psalms are a tool for introspection, the commentaries' close examination of the text parallels and mediates the redemptive procedures of self-dissection illustrated by David's example. Anne Lock makes striking use of the same metaphor to describe confessional self-disclosure in the *Meditation*. The fifth sonnet of the psalm paraphrase reworks the first half of Ps. 51:4, 'Againste thee onelye have I sinned, and don evill in thy sight', to articulate the discomforting sense of self-alienation and self-recognition latent in the images of pellucid self-reflection and unsuspected depths conjured by Calvin's preface. Lock pictures a soul first turned inwards in recognition of the sin committed before God's 'allpearcing eye', then turned inside out in gruesome exhibitionism:

> My cruell conscience with sharpned knife
> Doth splat my ripped hert, and layes abrode
> The lothsome secretes of my filthy life
> And spredes them forth before the face of God. (151-4)[35]

[32] See Terence Cave, *Devotional Poetry in France, 1570-1613* (Cambridge: CUP, 1969), pp. xii-iii.
[33] The popular Catholic primer *Heures de nostre dame* by Pierre Gringore (1525), which uses a structure of one stanza per line to paraphrase the psalms, has been identified as a potential model by Catherine A. Carsley, in 'Biblical Versification and French Religious Paraphrase in Anne Lock's 'A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner'', *ANQ*, 24.1-2 (2011), 42-50, p. 47.
[34] John Calvin, *The Psalmes of Dauid and others. With M. John Caluins commentaries*, tr. Arthur Golding (London: Thomas East, Henry Middelton, 1575), p. 6$^{v}$; 'vne anatomie de toutes parties de l'ame, pour ce qu'il n'y a affection en l'homme laquelle ne soit ici representee comme en vn miroir'. *Le Livre des Pseaumes* (Geneva: Conrad Badius, 1558), p. ii$^{v}$.
[35] I follow Felch's continuous lineation of the sequence.

It is conceivable that Lock is recalling Calvin's metaphor (the psalm commentaries had appeared in Latin in 1557 and in French in 1558) and that a measure of the reciprocity between self-exegesis and textual exegesis intimated by the preface also informs her image of a soul recoiled upon itself. The voice of the psalmist converges with that of the generalised penitent sinner invoked by Lock's title: there is a clear continuity, indeed, between the speaker of the non-scriptural, prefatory sonnets on the 'passioned minde of the penitent sinner' and 'the meditation of a penitent sinner […] upon the 51. Psalme', which allows the poem to stage a dissection not only of the psalmist's heart, but also of its mirror image in the sinner's soul.[36] The light of scripture searches into the reader at the same time as the reader searches into it, in a practice of reading oneself in and through God's word evoked by George Herbert in his two 'The H. Scripture' sonnets: the reader discovers in the 'thankfull glasse' of scripture ('The H. Scriptures I', 8) the secrets of the Word and of his life, revealed as coterminous and mutually illuminating: 'such are thy secrets, which my life makes good, / and comments on thee' ('The H. Scriptures II', 9-10).[37] The hermeneutic process activated by an activity of introspection is, in many ways, an Augustinian paradigm: as in the *Confessions*, scriptural exegesis is attendant on autobiography, a 'personal' recital which in turn takes on the quality of an allegorical narrative ready to be dissected by the interpreter of texts.

If the Psalter is a comprehensive anatomy designed to expose the interstices of the sinner's heart, the mirror it holds up to the reader also 'mends the lookers eyes' ('The H. Scriptures I', 9), inventorying the theological mysteries of redemption. In Donne's terms, David shows us 'how' and tells us 'why' to pray ('Upon the Translation of the Psalmes', 22). Though following Luther in reading Psalm 51 as foundational to justification by faith via Paul's letter to the Romans, Calvin admits no room for a paradox liable to suggest a reciprocity between man's 'judgement' of the justice of God and God's judgement of man's injustice. Rather than seeing a virtue in the discrepancies between the original and the translation, Calvin goes so far as to correct Paul's grammar, attributing to a lax transmission of the scriptural word the inconsistent translation of the phrase 'cum judicaris' variously in the passive sense of 'when thou art judged' (as Lock and the Coverdale Bible render it), and in the active meaning of 'judicor', 'when thou judgest' (in the Geneva Bible translation).[38] Martin Bucer's philological method is reprised by Calvin through an excavation of the active sense of the original

[36] A note on pronouns: the continuity between the two parts reflects a re-elaboration of the psalmist's prayer for personal devotion which arguably justifies signalling the proximity between the sequence's speaker and its author. For my immediate purposes, referring to the speaker as female also has the advantage of emphasising the reader-paraphraser's mediatory role with respect to the biblical text. Cf. Warley, in *Sonnet Sequences*, p. 50, who takes the speaker of the sonnets to be David and genders him as male to support an account of Lock's appropriation of (masculine) scriptural authority for political ends.

[37] George Herbert, *The English Poems*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: CUP, 2007). All further references from this edition.

[38] Cf. Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), p. 179. For the significance of Lock's original translation of the Vulgate in the margins of the *Meditation*, see Susan M. Felch, 'The Vulgate as Reformation Bible: The Sonnet Sequence of Anne Lock', in *The Bible as Book: The Reformation*, ed. Orlaith O'Sullivan and Ellen N. Herron (New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Press, 2000), pp. 65-88.

Hebrew 'when thou judgest'.[39] Where Wyatt falters before the 'diepe secretes that David here did sing', struck dumb by a mystery of grace fearful to behold (and perilous to misconstrue), Lock signals the doctrinal weight of this crucial passage by devoting two sonnets to it, deviating from the structural rule of one sonnet per verse. Catherine Carsley has sharply observed that the unusual splitting of verse four into two expository sonnets (five and six in the sequence) could be explained by the cross-reference to Ps. 51:6 (instead of Ps. 51:4) which appears beside Romans 3:4 in the Geneva Bible, a clue which allows us to reconstruct an interpretation filtered by Paul and reflecting Lock's attention to the latest biblical scholarship of the day.[40] It is the sixth sonnet which accordingly expands on the cruxes of 'ut justificeris' and 'cum judicaris' contained in the second part of the verse:

> But mercy Lord, O Lord some pitie take,
> Withdraw my soule from the deserved hell,
> O Lord of glory, for thy glories sake:
> That I may saved of thy mercy tell,
> And shew how thou, which mercy hast behight
> To sighyng sinners, that have broke thy lawes,
> Performest mercy: so as in the sight
> Of them that judge the justice of thy cause
> Thou onely just be deemed, and no moe,
> The worldes unjustice wholy to confound:
> That damning me to depth of during woe
> Just in thy judgement shouldest be found:
> And from deserved flames relevyng me
> Just in thy mercy mayst thou also be. (157-70)

Lock departs from the Geneva translation of 'that thou mayest be pure when *thou judgest*' (my emphasis) in her translation of the Vulgate. The penitent sinner sounds here almost more Lutheran than Calvinist in joining the passive sense of 'that thou maiest overcome when *thou art judged*' ('vincas cum judicaris') conveyed by 'them that judge the justice of thy cause', with the active meaning of God's 'judgment' of man. In its rhyme of 'confound' and 'found', the lyric holds together man's 'judgement' exposed as deficient by God's mercy, and summoned again to find him – and only him – just. The divine tribunal thus proves 'pure' in a retaliatory verdict which answers sin with damnation, at the same time as purifying the world's 'unjustice', 'overcoming' not only in being vindicated but also in vindicating man.

The symmetry of the final anaphora 'just in thy judgement […] / just in thy mercy' counterweighs *iustitia activa*, the justice of the sword, with *iustitia passiva*, the justice of a pardon 'performed' in accordance with the covenant 'behight / to sighying sinners', a recognition of God's just ire and just mercy which hinges syntactically on the revelation of his justice as absolute (166-7).

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[39] Calvin, *The Psalmes of Dauid*, p. 202$^{v}$; Martin Bucer, *S. Psalmorum libri quinque ad Ebraicam veritatem versi, et familiari explanatione elucidati per Aretium Felinum theologum* (Argentoratum: Andlanus, 1529), p. 228$^{r}$.
[40] Carsley, 'Biblical Versification and French Religious Paraphrase', pp. 44-6. Cf. Spiller, 'A Literary First', p. 46.

The significance of the subjunctives 'justificeris' and 'vincas' is emphasised by a sonnet built on three interrelated subordinates (God grants mercy *so that* the speaker may tell his glory, *so that* he may confound the world's opinion, *so that* he should be held just in his punishments and pardons) which are all governed, grammatically and theologically, by the invocation of mercy voiced by the first quatrain. The paradoxes of man's 'justification' of and through God are carefully nested in a conditional syntax: the judgement which 'clears' God has to be first made clear by God. The problematic passive subjunctive thus recoils back upon the sinner, even as the revelation of the divine which the sinner's life 'makes good' also remains in the subjunctive mood (as long as mercy does not descend to, as it were, make that life 'good'). In his commentary, Calvin is careful to avoid any suggestion that God's glory is conditional upon the sinner being delivered, remarking that 'the Aduerb [that] or the Hebrew word [*Lemognan*] importeth not so much the rendring of a cause in this place, as a consequence': it is the 'peculiar office of God' to bring light out of darkness, which 'appeareth more brightsome' ('elle en apparoit plus magnifique et en plus grand lustre') the deeper the darkness besieging the sinner.[41] Subtle inflections of meaning become witness not only to the nature of the divine in relation to sin, but also to an apprehension of God commensurate to the limits of man's understanding. God's grace thus dazzles the sinner all the more from the shadows of sin, even if it is not possible for it in fact to be any brighter than it already is. While Luther writes that 'the content of the psalm is the theological knowledge of man and also the theological knowledge of God', in Calvin even the light of God apprises the sinner more of his natural debility than of the nature of divinity.[42] The speaker's plea for mercy in Lock's paraphrase relinquishes human judgement, confounded before the mysteries of God's justice, yet simultaneously envisions the process by which man's darkened intellect may be illuminated to retrace the workings of justification. It is a performance of redemption (and of redemptive reading) couched in the conjectural humility of the subjunctive, but which nonetheless emboldens the sinner to petition and articulate the motions of that 'selfe word Justice' which in the first sonnet of the sequence so 'amaseth' her that the speaker can scarcely 'dare thy mercy sound againe' (94-5).

In the seventh sonnet, paraphrasing Ps. 51:5 ('For loe, I was shapen in wickednes, and in sinne my mother conceived me'), an understanding of the soteriological condition of man is secured by a linguistic performance apt to inculcate the 'proof of original sin' for which the psalm is, according to Calvin, a 'lightsome text' ('vn temoinage formel et bien notable pour prouver le peche originel').[43]

For lo, in sinne, Lord, I begotten was,

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[41] Calvin, *Psalmes of Dauid*, p. 202$^{v}$; *Le Livre des Pseaumes*, p. 343. The French translation does not mention the Hebrew etymology, though it does appear in the Latin version. See *In librum Psalmorum, Iohannis Caluini commentarius* (Geneva: Roberti Stephani, 1557), p. 245.
[42] LW 12, p. 311. 'Hae sunt istae duae Theologicae cognitiones, quas David in hoc Psalmo tradit, ut sit argumentum Psalmi de cognitione hominis Theologica et de cognitione Dei etiam Theologica', WA 40.2, p. 327.
[43] Calvin, *Psalmes of Dauid,* p. 203$^{r}$; *Le Livre des Psaeumes*, p. 343.

With sede and shape my sinne I toke also,
Sinne is my nature and my kinde alas,
In sinne my mother me conceived: Lo
I am but sinne, and sinfull ought to dye,
Dye in his wrath that hath forbydden sinne.
Such bloome and frute loe sinne doth multiplie,
Such was my roote, such is my juyse within.
I plead not this as to excuse my blame,
On kynde or parentes myne owne gilt to lay:
But by disclosing of my sinne, my shame,
And nede of helpe, the plainer to displaye
Thy mightie mercy, if with plenteous grace
My plenteous sinnes it please thee to deface. (171-84)

Lock's poem makes explicit Calvin's warning that recognising our corruption should not lead to blaming 'kynde' or 'parentes': 'David accuseth not his parents, ne putteth over the fault unto them: but cyteth himself to the judgement seate of God'.[44] The image of Adam's family tree swelling with the 'juyce' of sinful blood, compounded by Lock's characteristically liberal use of repetition, rhetorically enact the precept that David appeals to his elemental sinfulness not to excuse himself, but rather to 'enlarge the grievousness of his misdeeds' ('pour mieux montrer la grandeur de ses forfaits').[45] An exegesis of the hidden sense of the Word is coupled with, and proceeds from a meditative performance of the psalm's prayer which teaches the sinner in what words and with what spirit to utter her repentance. Lock's command of enjambement 'in the service of the flow of passion', praised by Michael Spiller as 'unequalled until Sidney began to write', is evident in this sonnet's dramatic pauses ('Lo / I am but sinne'), and in the carefully controlled balance between 'plenteous sinnes' and 'plenteous grace' of the poem's conclusion.[46] A poetic dramatisation of the psalm is thus joined with exegetical interpretation, anticipating the brand of poetic hermeneutics (or hermeneutic poetics) which would later be perfected by the Sidney Psalter's understanding of 'poetic virtuosity as an aspect of exegesis of the Psalter', as Jamie Ferguson has recently discussed.[47] This unity of exposition and performance is adumbrated, but never fully realised by Calvin's commentaries according to Véronique Ferrer: 'Calvin contribue à jeter un regard neuf sur le lyrisme psalmique et, par ricochet, à esquisser les principes stylistiques d'une poésie idéale. De l'exegète au poéticien il n'y a qu'un pas, que le réformateur s'interdit pourtant de franchir'.[48] It is only in the poetry of the second half of the century, Ferrer suggests, that we see the convergence of exegesis and poetics latent in

[44] Ibid. 'Dauid n'accuse pas yci son pere et sa mere qui l'avayent engendre, il ne reiette point la faute sur eux: mais se presentant deuant le siege iudicial de Dieu, il se confesse & recognoist une creature corrompue et damnable.'
[45] Ibid.
[46] Michael Spiller, *The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 90.
[47] Ferguson, *Reformation Hermeneutics and Literary Language in Early Modern England*, pp. 133-65, p. 135.
[48] Véronique Ferrer, ''La vraye maniere de bien prier': L'Exégèse au Service de la Prière dans les Commentaires de Jehan Calvin sur le Livre des Psaumes', *Réforme, Humanisme, Renaissance* (2008), 139-155, p. 155.

Calvin's commentaries, and, by extension, the potential held by poetic form to facilitate the performance of a newly internalised rite of confession.

A number of verbal parallels connect Lock's *Meditation* with Mary Sidney's *rime royal* paraphrase of the *Miserere*. The influence of Calvin's commentaries (via Arthur Golding's translation) is even more overt in Mary's echo of the explanation of the Hebrew word 'conceive' as signifying 'that we be cherisshed and kept warm in sin, as long as we be hid in the bowels of our mothers'.[49]

> My mother, lo! When I began to be,
> Conceiving me, with me did sin conceive:
> And as with living heat she cherished me,
> Corruption did like cherishing receive. (15-18)[50]

The Sidney version of Ps. 51:5 revives the dormant metaphor of the term's etymological root – transliterated by Golding as '*yachemotheni*, [she het herself of me] of the word [*yacham Chamam*] which signifieth [too heate or too warme]'.[51] The metaphor which Calvin regards as 'comingly mitigate[d]' by the euphemistic translation 'conceived' is thus rekindled in an arresting portrayal of a mother's tenderness, and, more unsettlingly, of sin as an enveloping maternal embrace.[52] Philological analysis becomes, in such a way, fertile ground for poetic re-vivification of the Word. In this light, it is not perhaps an overstatement to consider Lock's paraphrase as an early example of this philological drive.[53] There are numerous examples of a 'poetic hermeneutics', with more or less controversial resonance, in the *Meditation*: the third sonnet paraphrasing Ps. 51:2 conveys Calvin's philological explanation of the original Hebrew behind the adverbial 'amplius lava me' (signifying 'que Dieu le lave abondamment et avec multiplication et redoublement') through insistent repetition.[54] The import of 'the hidden and secrete thinges of thy wisedome thou haste opened unto me' (Ps. 51:6) is opened by the eighth sonnet, which interprets the 'hidden and secrete thinges' ('incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae') as the knowledge 'to se my sinnes, and whence my sinnes do growe' (190). The figure of 'hyssop' (Ps. 51:7) in sonnet nine is interpreted typologically as 'an apointed signe to be / Foreshewing figure of thy grace behight' (202-3), while sonnet sixteen glosses David's 'blood' guilt (Ps. 51:14) as a reference to original sin ('fleshe and bloud'), reiterating Calvin's injunction that every transgression should remind us of our inveterate sinfulness. The abuse of sacrifices (another salient point of reformed interpretations of the psalm) is explained in sonnet eighteen, which invokes the

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[49] Calvin, *Psalmes of Dauid,* p. 203[r].
[50] Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney, *The Sidney Psalms*, ed. R. E. Pritchard (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992).
[51] Calvin, *Psalmes of Dauid*, pp. 202[v]-203[r].
[52] As Hamlin points out, Lock's own sonnet contains a slight revision of the customary attribution of the Fall to Eve, in invoking both masculine 'sede' and feminine 'shape' as the sources of sin. See *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature,* p. 185.
[53] Cf. Carsley, 'Biblical Versification and French Religious Paraphrase', p. 47.
[54] *Le Livre des Pseaumes*, p. 341. William Hunnis' later metrical paraphrase *Seven Sobs of a Sorrowfull Soule for Sinne* adds homely zest to the phrase by referring to the 'manic washings' of dirty rags (London: Henry Denham, 1583), p. 38.

sacrifice of Christ 'alone' to account for God's eschewal of burnt offerings (Ps. 51:16): '[...] thy swete sone alone, / with one sufficing sacrifice for all / Appeaseth the [...]' (333-5).

This expansion of each line of the scriptural text, 'paraphrastically dilated' into a sonnet sequence (a phrase I borrow from the title of Henry Lok's *Ecclesiastes*), has been interpreted by Roland Greene as a gendered form of writing.[55] The *Meditation* crafts a 'poetics of female-gendered textual reproduction more than male-gendered creation, of enlargement more than originality', thus providing 'an alternative to the dominant tradition of poetic writing in English'.[56] Working from the assumption that 'invention' was a male prerogative in the period while 'dilation' was conventionally gendered as feminine, Greene suggests that the *Meditation* 'stands for a refusal of invention': Lock re-proposes the received text in a paraphrase devoid of the argumentative fluctuations and individuating subjectivity typical of the sonnet form.[57] However, as Kimberly Anne Coles points out, another and perhaps more obvious pattern of dilation informing the *Meditation* is the exegesis of Calvin's sermons on Hezekiah preceding the sonnet sequence, in addition to Calvin's commentaries on the psalms.[58] In the enthusiasm surrounding the re-discovery of the first sonnet sequence in the language as the work of a female author, much criticism of Lock's writing has tended to foreground the question of gender. The uncertain attribution makes reading the work in such terms a risky endeavour, but even setting aside the problem of ascription, Rosalind Smith offers a useful reminder that a facile identification of author and text can often result in a reductive treatment of women's writing (and, equally, of male authors voicing a female subjectivity).[59]

In Lock's case, critics have to work hard to uncover a repressed 'femininity' in the sequence, which remains obstinately neutral in its representation of a generalised sinner's abjection before God. We might well ask, with Wyatt's David: 'who hath exprest this thing?' And if this neutrality too has interestingly been read as a 'deflection of the gender issue […] at once safe, and potentially subversive', it could just as easily be regarded as a suppression of the individual in the service of reproducing the 'masculine' discourse of scripture, as described by Greene (Carew's words on Lock's 'suppression' of her rare learning with a 'rarer modesty' spring to mind).[60] In her poetry of 'paraphrastical dilation', therefore, is Lock merely reproducing a 'patriarchal' discourse in an exercise of self-erasure designed to reaffirm masculine authority in speaking? Or is she thereby vindicating a

[55] Henry Lok, *Ecclesiastes, otherwise called The preacher, […] paraphrastically dilated in English poesie, according to the analogie of Scripture* (London: Richard Field, 1597).
[56] Roland Greene, 'Anne Lock's Meditation: Invention versus Dilation and the Founding of Puritan Poetics', in *Form and Reform in Renaissance England: Essays in Honor of Barbara Kiefer Lewalski*, ed. Amy Diane Boesky and Mary Thomas Crane (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), pp. 153-70, p. 155.
[57] Greene, 'Anne Lock's Meditation', p. 161.
[58] Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England*, p. 129.
[59] Smith, 'Protestantism and Politics', p. 47.
[60] Kel Morin-Parsons, ''Thus crave I mercy': The preface of Anne Locke', in *Other Voices, Other Views: Expanding the Canon in English Renaissance Studies*, ed. Graham Roebuck, Helen Ostovich and Mary V. Silcox (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), pp. 271-89, p. 278.

subaltern position, as Aemilia Lanyer does in a kenotic gesture which refashions the female authorial subject into a vessel of grace: 'But yet the Weaker [my Muse] doth seeme to be / In Sexe, or Sence, the more [God's] glory shines' ('Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum', 289-90)?[61] If there is a gendered dimension to Lock's writing it pertains perhaps most convincingly to a conception of the work of translation as best befitting the limitations of her sex, hinted by a tantalising and oft-quoted passage in the preface to the translation of Jean Taffin's *Of the Markes of the Children of God*.[62] Deirdre Serjeantson has compellingly argued that the anonymity of the sonnet sequence can be explained as an attempt to ward off suspicion of a woman preaching in the public sphere within Lock's own Geneva circle (both John Knox and Christopher Goodman famously inveighed against female rule, though Richard Bertie, husband of the dedicatee of the *Meditation*, came to the defence of women in an unpublished rejoinder to Knox).[63] Translation, but not sermonising, marks the extent of permissible female intellectual labour.

Lock's *Meditation* appears to do the reverse of what Petrarch does to the penitential psalms: if the latter voids the content of the texts to fill the mould of seven psalms with a deeply personal prayer, Lock voids the self to fill it with the text of scripture, linguistically performing the process of mortification described in her translation of Calvin's sermons: 'We must then be so brought in subjection that being altogether stripped naked of our selues, our folly may constrayne us to seke in God that whiche wanteth in our selves.'[64] The soteriological paradigm whereby the sinner is exalted by erasing herself joins the passive and active sense of 'justification' with the gendering of the abject sinner as a typologically feminine posture of passivity. It is a paradigm which ultimately re-aligns Lock and Petrarch: neither is merely shaped by the Word, but both exert instead a shaping influence on the fabric of their reading and on the penitent's subjectivity, which scripture reveals and re-fashions by the same token as the text is revealed and re-fashioned by it. A confessional dynamic is what finally allows 'hermeneutics' to converge with 'poetics': reading becomes redemptive not only through the self-erasure involved in conveying the word of God through translation and paraphrase, but also through a re-creation of the text of scripture and of the self. Only by reverberating in the reader's soul and illuminating its most recondite shadows can the meaning of the book be extracted,

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[61] Aemilia Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*, ed. Susanne Woods (Oxford: OUP, 1993). Cf. Susanne Woods, 'Anne Lock and Aemilia Lanyer: A Tradition of Protestant Women Speaking', in *Form and Reform in Renaissance England*, pp. 171-84. Cf. Warley, *Sonnet Sequences*, p. 62.

[62] Lock, *Works*, p. 77: 'Everie one in his calling is bound to doo somewhat to the furtherance of the holie building; but because great things by reason of my sex I may not doo, and that which I may, I ought to doo, I have according to my duetie, brought my poore basket of stones to the strengthning of the walles of that Jerusalem, wherof (by grace) wee are all both Citizens and members.' On female translators in the period, see *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. Margaret P. Hannay (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985).

[63] Serjeantson, 'Anne Lock's Anonymous Friend'.

[64] Lock, *Works*, p. 33. Cf. Greene's account of the sequence as solely expressive of the ritual nature of the lyric, in its 'relentless' denial of character, in 'Sir Philip Sidney's Psalms, the Sixteenth-Century Psalter, and the Nature of Lyric', p. 25.

and grace begin its work of renewal. A 'hermeneutic' excavation and 'poetic' re-invention of the self is thus mediated by a reading of the scriptural word which yields its revelatory message of salvation by finding itself, in turn, newly embodied in the life of its reader.

'The soul in paraphrase': Prayer and Poetry

Anathemising the notion of any merit accruing to man in the process of justification leads Calvin to a significant redefinition of the function of prayer, in particular of the petitionary element involved in the impetration for forgiveness. In Aquinas' formulation, God allows us to attain by prayer what he has previously set aside as apt to be obtained by such means: though rejecting a conception of prayer as meritorious, the *Summa* thus leaves a space for man's words to be efficacious.[65] How is the supplication to be framed, and the attendant self-mortification to be conjured, however, when the sinner has already been saved – indeed, when she has been numbered among the elect before the beginning of time?[66] The unknown anabaptist lambasted by John Knox in a treatise which appeared in the same year as Lock's first work of translation takes this point to its extreme corollary: 'if your opinion be true then the preaching of repentance is vaine. For asmuche as the elect cannot finally perish, nether fall owt of the election & fauor of God, what nede haue they then of repentance?'[67] Knox undoubtedly presents a caricature of his adversary's critique which almost seems to anticipate the malevolent antinomianism sounded by James Hogg's 'justified sinner' as the consequence of a misplaced confidence in election. The anabaptist's blasphemous provocation is readily answered by Knox with the numerous scriptural *loci* enjoining repentance, and through the familiar account of contrition as the effect rather than the cause of justification, an argument accepted by scholasticism and articulated by Calvin's commentary on Psalm 51, as we have seen, in grammatical as well as theological terms. Yet the other, 'dark' side of predestination – and of its comforting assurance that 'we cannot call upon the name of God but with affiaunce, we can not praise his name except we know that he is favourable unto us' – is the terrifying possibility of being numbered among the reprobate.[68]

Though Calvin ascribes such an agonising condition of doubt to the 'Papistes' who refuse to be assured of God's mercy, this fear is palpable in Lock's prefatory sonnets.[69] The problem illustrated by the five poems on the 'passioned minde of the penitent sinner', is precisely the inaccessibility of prayer to the reprobate: for the penitent sinner, the ability to confess to God hinges on the discernment of the tokens of grace which have fled from her. In laying bare her secret 'sinne and shame', splayed

[65] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II. q.83, a.15.
[66] Cf. Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, pp. 292-3.
[67] John Knox, *An answer to a great nomber of blasphemous cauillations written by an Anabaptist* (Geneva: John Crispin, 1560), p. 237.
[68] Lock, 'Sermons of John Calvin', in *Works*, p. 54.
[69] Ibid., p. 46.

across the verse in conspicuous sibilance, the third sonnet's dialogue with despair appears to confirm the sinner's worst fears concerning her own election:

> But mercy while I sound with shreking crye
> For graunt of grace and pardon while I pray,
> Even then despeir before my ruthefull ey
> Spredes forth my sinne and shame, and semes to say:
> In vaine thou brayest forth thy bootlesse noyse
> To him for mercy, O refused wight,
> That heares not the forsaken sinners voice.
> Thy reprobate and foreordeined sprite,
> For damned vessell of his heavie wrath,
> (As selfe witnes of thy beknowying hart,
> And secrete gilt of thine owne conscience saith)
> Of his swete promises can claime no part:
> But thee, caytif, deserved curse doeth draw
> To hell, by justice, for offended law. (42-55)

The stirrings of damnation voiced by Despair threaten to make the speaker's inchoate 'crye' only so much 'bootlesse noyse'. The sinner contemplates with horror the possibility that her prayer might be vain, a doubt which the poem does not resolve. Despair, indeed, bears down on the speaker with heavy-handed participles, as if to confirm a sentence of damnation which has already been passed. The first sonnet of the preface, in a similar way, compresses in its short frame reference to the speaker's 'forsaken ghost', 'febled sprite', 'deserved death', 'daseled sight', 'distained life', and 'dimmed and fordulled eyen', which are (what is more) 'full fraught with teares and more and more opprest / with growing streams of the distilled bryne'. This surfeit of participles seems to evoke the sinner's subjection to the 'passion' of repentant grief as much as her imagined state of damnation. It is difficult to determine whether the passive inflection seals a soteriological verdict of 'foreordained' reprobacy or, on the contrary, shows a salvific affect at work in her soul – the sting of the scorpion cured with the 'oyle of the scorpion', as Lock describes it in the preface.[70]

The fear of the fateful 'markes' of the reprobate shapes the next poem into a plea for mercy so halted by the speaker's misgivings that it vaults over the octet break, leaving the trailing syntactical unit to be completed only in the final couplet.

> This horror when my trembling soule doth heare,
> When markes and tokens of the reprobate,
> My growing sinnes, of grace my senslesse cheare,
> Enforce the profe of everlastying hate,
> That I conceive the heavens king to beare
> Against my sinfull and forsaken ghost:
> As in the throte of hell, I quake for feare,
> And then in present perill to be lost
> (Although by conscience wanteth to replye,

[70] Lock, *Works*, p. 7. Cf. Susan Felch's discussion of this image in 'Curing the Soul: Anne Lock's Authorial Medicine', *Reformation*, 2.1 (1997), 7-38.

But with remorse enforcing myne offence,
Doth argue vain my not availyng crye)
With woefull sighes and bitter penitence
To him from whom the endlesse mercy flowes
I cry for mercy to releve my woes. (56-69)[71]

Conscience's interruption of the 'cry' at the volta dramatises the fraught attempt to raise the sinner's prayer – in this poem, and in the preface as a whole. This hesitancy becomes audible even in the space of individual lines, as words answer each other in a quarrel of assonances and internal rhyme, 'remorse enforcing' the previous enforcement of 'profe' (59), and arguing 'vain' the 'non availyng crye' against the possibility of a 'replye' (64). Christopher Warley draws attention to the transition from the penitent sinner's anguished and distempered spirit to the more assured and authoritative tone of the psalm paraphrase.[72] This occurs through an encounter with scripture which mediates an effectual declaration of sin and provides the only possible remedy for despair: a conception of God's mercy able to counteract the penitent's natural inclination 'to fall into the moste perillous peine and tourment of conflicte with sinne and desperation'.[73] However, the speaker's authorial voice is consolidated precisely through a recognition of her soul as 'deservedly forsaken from the start', indicating a deeper coherence between the two parts than the tonal shift might initially suggest.[74] Even if the posture of the abject sinner is ultimately found to be redemptive, the problem of how to be assured of justification persists in the psalm paraphrase: the fourteenth poem thus reprises the lament that 'the signes that dyd assure / My felying ghost of favor in thy sight, / Are fled from me' (273-5), and the sequence ends with a plea to 'Assure my soule, I crave it not in vaine'. Assurance, indeed, seems to have much preoccupied Lock: in later life she would go on to translate Taffin's treatise on identifying the 'markes' of the elect in the face not only of worldly persecution, but also of the internal torments of doubt.

While the apparent 'redundancy' of prayer is a perennial theological question, predestination only exacerbates the circular logic according to which the sinner who prays to discern the signs of salvation finds herself assured by the very fact that she is able to pray. The penitent's song in Psalm 51 thus becomes the answer to that for which it prays, as Calvin suggests in the fourth sermon on Hezekiah, in which he notably glosses 'the dead shall not prayse the [...] The lyving, the lyving shall sing of the' with reference to Ps. 51:5: 'when God sheweth hym selfe mercyfull towards us, and uttereth some signe of hys favor toward us, he openeth oure mouthes'.[75] The second sermon,

[71] In her most recent edition, Felch suggests that 'by conscience' (64) may be a printer's error, and suggests 'my conscience' as an alternative. *Anne Vaughan Lock: Selected Poetry, Prose, and Translations, with Contextual Materials*, ed. Susan M. Felch (New York: Iter Press, 2021), p. 82.
[72] Warley, *Sonnet Sequences*, p. 60.
[73] Lock, *Works*, p. 5.
[74] Warley, *Sonnet Sequences*, p. 62. Cf. Teresa Lanpher Nugent, 'Anne Lock's Poetics of Spiritual Abjection', *English Literary Renaissance*, 39.1 (2009), 3-23.
[75] Lock, *Works*, p. 51. On the resonance of Ps. 51:5 as a lyric invocation, see Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, p. 200.

conversely, seems to recommend a different way of framing repentant prayer. The penitent's absolute dependence on God, Calvin affirms, is best expressed by speechlessness:

> Therefore if one would make an arte of Rhetorick of the praiers of the faithful, it is a great abuse: for our lord humbleth us to this end, that we shold not imagine to obteine any thing at his hands by any fair tale: he had rather that we were so confused, that we had not only one word a right in oure praiers, but that nowe we shoulde cast out puffynges, and blowinges, and anon that we should abide styll with silence: alas my God, alas what shal I do? And when we shall mourne so, that we should be so wrapped in, and tangled, that there should neither be begynnynge nor ending.[76]

While sighs and groans best befit man's wretchedness, the sign of grace consists in the release of the sinner's song – a difficult space to navigate for the confessional lyric. If the doctrine of election thus enables the sinner to look up to God with a surer confidence and love – solving the problem of 'how' to address the fearsome judge who so terrified Luther – it risks leaving the 'why' of prayer unanswered. In the *Institutes* (III, 20, 11), Calvin recommends that, though the feeling of God's just ire and the assurance of his mercy seem irreconcilable, 'in prayers they must mutually meete together', for the repentance which terrifies us and the faith which comforts us are joined by an indissoluble bond.[77] The state of doubt is not only ill-advised, but also fatal, since it punctures the faith which anchors the sinner to justification.[78] In Calvin's theological vision there is an elision of doubt and unbelief which entails that, brought before God's tribunal, the sinner's uncertainty of absolution risks plunging her into the far more serious crime of treachery. If the postulant's footing is more secure in the certainty of redemption, she thus stands on a narrower ledge, opening upon the abyss of faithlessness.

The danger of conceiving of prayer as an exercise in persuasion implied by Calvin's warning against the 'arte of Rhetorick' seems to place poetry and prayer at variance: it is better to feel ourselves wrapped and tangled in our own misery than to unravel our soul in well-ordered 'paraphrase'. As Johnson would go on to say, 'repentance, trembling in the presence of the judge, is not at leisure for cadences and epithets'.[79] Though a considerable part of Christian devotion is couched in the form of poetry (the Psalter being the prime example), a gulf separating the aesthetic and the ethical often seems to inform such characterisations of the relationship between prayer and poetry: if the former is too sacred, too truthful to suffer a rhyme, it is also more 'ordinary' in expression than the 'noblest forme' of speech. Even Herbert's 'Prayer I', in its rhapsodic search for definition, climbs to seize a measure of the otherworldly before finally landing on the more prosaic,

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[76] Lock, *Works*, p. 29.
[77] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Thomas Norton (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1578), p. 354[v].
[78] As William Perkins succinctly puts it: '*there is no iustification by faith, if faith it selfe be made doubtfull'*, in *A reformed Catholike* (Cambridge: John Legat, 1598), p. 58.
[79] Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets*, vol. 1 (London: Dent, 1958), p. 174.

yet deeply intimate: 'something understood'. This tension is perceptible in the space of Calvin's commentary on Psalm 51: Calvin starts by condemning the 'dissimulation' ('feintise') of confessions which accumulate 'great gloriousnesse of words' for God's mercy ('un amas de termes hauts et magnifiques'), without an inner feeling of his judgment.[80] Yet David's example redeems the false profusion of terms of praise through sincere repetition of his plea for forgiveness: 'this heaping togither of words, sheweth how careful he was too obteine forgiuenesse' ('cet amas de parolles monstre combine il estoit soucieux d'impetrer pardon').[81] By emulating David's 'amas de parolles', the sinner too can show her ardent desire for forgiveness: rhetorical *imitatio* becomes a devotional exercise, even a devotional imperative.

The first sonnet of Lock's paraphrase follows this imperative in a plea which typifies her conciliation of exegesis and performance:

> Have mercy, God, for thy great mercies sake.
> O God: my God, unto my shame I say,
> Beynge fled from thee, so as I dred to take
> Thy name in wretched mouth, and feare to pray
> Or aske the mercy that I have abusde.
> But, God of mercy, let me come to thee:
> Not for justice, that justly am accusde:
> Which selfe word Justice so amaseth me,
> That scarce I dare thy mercy sound againe.
> But mercie, Lord, yet suffer me to crave.
> Mercie is thine: Let me not crye in vaine,
> Thy great mercie for my great fault to have.
> Have mercie, God, pitie my penitence
> With greater mercie than my great offence. (87-100)

The incessant repetition of 'mercy' partakes in a performative, ritual mode of grief-stricken lament redolent of the liturgical uses of the *Miserere*. Lock's sequence, as Mary Trull remarks, takes up the communal voice of Sion: repentance is not solely an individual affair, but one which involves the entire community of faithful.[82] But as well as being a 'script for performance' for the penitent's prayer, the sonnet is also devised as a meditation on the sinner's 'feare to pray', since prayer must depend on a prior justification of which she feels herself unworthy: the repetition thus tests the theological grounds on which the speaker may raise her cry. Showing 'how' while explaining 'why' the sinner is entitled to address God, the poem acts as a means of overcoming her resistance to speech. This may be better understood with reference to another instructive passage reflecting on the function of prayer in Calvin's commentary on Psalm 51:

[80] Calvin, *Psalmes of Dauid*, p. 201$^{v}$; *Le Livre des Pseaumes*, p. 342.
[81] Calvin, *Psalmes of Dauid*, p. 204$^{r}$; *Le Livre des Pseaumes*, p. 345. On Calvin's use of *amplificatio*, see Olivier Millet, *Calvin et la Dynamique de la Parole: Étude de Rhétorique Réformée* (Paris: Garnier, 2019), pp. 733-62.
[82] Mary E. Trull, *Performing Privacy and Gender in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), ch. 2.

> it appeareth that these two thinges fighte not one ageinst another [*qu'il n'y ait point de repugnance entre ces deux choses*]: namely that when wee haue embraced Gods grace by faith, we should neuerthelesse pray him to do away our sinnes. [...] For although GOD forgiue us quite and cleane, yit doth not the narownes of our fayth admit his so large goodnesse, but must needs haue it dropped into it by little and little [*qu'elle y distille peu a peu*]. And therefore that wee repeat one prayer oftenttimes, it is referred to the capacitie of our fayth, bicause that although GOD bee not assuaged by little and little, after the maner of men; yit are the procedings of our fayth but slow which leade us untoo full certeintie.[83]

Drop by drop, 'mercy' after 'mercy', the sinner's doubt about her own salvation is assuaged and the 'full certeinte' needed to claim her place among the elect is slowly distilled into faith. If the sonnet serves less the purpose of petitioning the divine tribunal than of persuading the sinner of God's mercy, prayer becomes a speech act which seems to remain trapped in the sublunar sphere, confined to addressing and redressing the weakness of humanity in an 'arte of Rhetorick' imagined as an almost solipsistic exercise in self-persuasion. At the same time, it is precisely through this self-persuasion, gained by degrees through the perlocutionary speech act of prayer, that the all-important faith in election is secured, and that the justification to which faith is witness becomes manifest. As William J. Bouwsma notices, Calvin's suspicion of all human efforts to procure mercy affords a curious 'theatricality' to confession, for man's depravity makes him incapable of unaffected self-examination or prayer. Even in the attempt to rid confession of the theatrical trappings of ritual and sacrament by framing it as an unmediated dialogue with the deity, repentance retains the character of a performance.[84] Part of this dramaturgy rests on the retroactivity of praying for a gift which has already been granted, staging an internal drama of pleading and forgiveness which acts as a salutary reminder of our abjection as well as of our 'foreordained' salvation. The experience of confession is read from a script provided by God. Hence the aspiration towards an unmediated communication with God through extemporary prayer reverts to a formalised self-annihilation via the Word, which shapes the sinner's prayer at the same time as restoring her identity, 'defacing' her into her true self.

The function of prayer as an internalised drama of self-assurance reflects the cultural shift described by James Simpson in terms of Protestantism's redefinition of spiritual life as 'a psychological field of action'.[85] It is significant, in this light, that the final sonnet of Lock's sequence returns to the first-person singular after giving voice to the collective prayer of Sion. This is a function not only of an attempt to distance the *Miserere* from its liturgical connotations, but also of the internalising and individualising tendency derived from the use of prayer as an instrument of 'self-persuasion':

> And round about then shall thy people crye:
> We praise thee, God our God: thou onely art

[83] Calvin, *Psalmes of Dauid*, p. 204[v]; *Le Livre des Pseaumes*, p. 346.
[84] William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p. 180.
[85] James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 350.

The God of might, of mercie, and of grace.
That I then, Lorde, may also honor thee,
Releve my sorow, and my sinnes deface:
Be, Lord of mercie, mercifull to me:
Restore my feling of thy grace againe:
Assure my soule, I crave it not in vaine. (373-80)

Instead of representing a 'polyphonic subjectivity', this final volta turns back inwards to look for the assurance of salvation craved by the speaker from the first throes of the preface: the congregation's voice can only be raised from the prior assurance of each individual member's salvation.[86] The phenomenon of puritan autobiography has been the object of much discussion, as the outcome of a cultural shift towards an introjection of confessional ritual: literary self-accounting is invested, it has often been observed, with the mediatory role of the priest, facilitating confessional self-scrutiny.[87] The performance of the *Miserere* offered by Lock's paraphrase, indeed, relies on a private reading experience more than on the 'incantatory' effect of ritual recitation.[88] With such antecedents as Clément Marot's psalm versifications and Wyatt's *Penitentiall Psalms*, the sequence seems to emerge from a staunchly Protestant literary and theological culture. However, as Clare Costley King'oo remarks, the sequence of the seven penitential psalms granted a surprising degree of spiritual self-management even to medieval Catholics (as a pattern of penitential devotion to be used in between confessions, for example).[89] Another significant antecedent to Lock, Pierre Gringore's 1525 Marian primer, is precisely this kind of literary paraphrase designed to aid private devotion. Lock's inheritors, in turn, are not only of a reformed persuasion, Henry Constable and William Alabaster standing as significant exponents of the genre in its later developments in England. Indeed, perhaps one of the most interesting parallels which presents itself in subsequent decades is the expository drive of Jean de la Ceppède's *Théorèmes* (1613).

Protestant and puritan 'individualism', much like Petrarch's fragmented poetic subjectivity, has often been caught in the secularising sweep of accounts of the modern subject intent on tracing the shift from a ritual to an individual experience of devotion. Lock's paraphrase seems to fit this pattern: ritual is consigned to inner contemplation, and literature is primed to take up the function of mediating its readers' encounter with the sublime. Yet contrary to Louis Dumont's identification of Calvin as 'prototype de l'homme moderne', it is possible to observe that the emphasis on a depravity remediated by the declaratory force of a profession of faith is a radicalisation of a tendency already present in the confessional culture of medieval and early modern Europe.[90] As Foucault observes, 'the

[86] Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England*, p. 133.
[87] See Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), and Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1969).
[88] Roland Greene, 'Sir Philip Sidney's Psalms, the Sixteenth-Century Psalter, and the Nature of Lyric', p. 25.
[89] Costley King'oo, *Miserere Mei*, p. 17.
[90] Louis Dumont, *Essais sur l'Individualisme: Une Perspective Anthropologique sur l'Idéologie Moderne* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), p. 291.

expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him and promises salvation'.[91] In this light, Calvinism's insistence on human depravity can be construed as a reaction to the power it simultaneously affords language. In exalting the Sidneys' work of 're-revelation' of the Word in 'Upon the translation of the Psalmes', Donne seems at times to echo Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*, even though the lyric ultimately mitigates Sidney's ambitious claims for a poetic imagination which seems to rival the divine in its creative potential. The poetic stretched to numinous heights in the *Defence* recoils back in Lock's paraphrase to the domain of the theological, as poetic justification – the very ability to raise a prayer to God – is shown to be dependent on a prior justification. Speech is possible only in so far as it manifests a sign of grace which has already been granted. And yet it is through the very act of speaking that the speaker finds herself justified: the solipsistic and thoroughly human form of speech that is prayer, conceived as an extenuation of human weakness through self-persuasion, is precisely what gives the penitent the faith which confirms her justification. The poetic and the linguistic are thus magnified again into vatic proportions, re-revealing the grace which justifies the sinner by being spoken.

Embedded in a pre-existing culture of devotional writing in Europe which was beginning to make its way to England, it is suggestive that the first sonnet sequence in the English language consists at once in a meditation on repentance and in a poetic performance of confession. Lock's *Meditation* frames the act of interpretation, both of the self and of the word of God in which the self is mirrored, as one of re-creation. The dual voice of confession, a form of speech which is intensely individualising, but also highly formalised and dependent on casting the sinner's life into a universal narrative of redemption, is here articulated by an adaptation of liturgical prayer to fit the requirements of private devotion. Both a 'script for performance' and a paraphrase of scripture, the *Meditation* is a striking example of the potential uses of poetry for private devotion during a time in which the manner of conducting confession was undergoing rapid and radical changes. The justifiability of poetry as a tool of devotion converges in the sequence with theological justification, as Lock, building on the example of Calvin's commentaries, finds the conditions of the sinner's speech dependent on a justification which is made manifest by speech itself.

[91] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 62; *La volonté de savoir*, p. 83.

## Chapter Three: Transfiguring Speech: Robert Southwell

### Sacred Parody

The interdependence of poetic and theological justification adumbrated by Anne Lock's *Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* is the central question raised by Robert Southwell's poetic enterprise. As the previous chapter argued, the 'arte of Rhetorick' is enlisted by Lock's sequence to articulate a conception of confession – both of sin and of faith – as a language which announces its own redemption, despite (or as a result of) the strategies of self-suppression which allow the authorial voice to ventriloquise and to be ventriloquised by the scriptural text. Southwell's work, similarly, seeks to salvage poetry from the suspicion of falsehood, even as it retains a residual ambivalence about the function of rhetoric and figurative representation. While Lock's sequence, despite much recent interest, never saw a popularity to warrant the claim of widespread influence, Southwell's contributions to English verse have long since been recovered from the Protestant bias towards which the formation of the English canon has traditionally leaned.[1] The spectral imprint of Southwell on the works of Spenser, Donne, Shakespeare, and Herbert has increasingly been recognised: oblique allusions and haunting elisions speak of a body of work which, even during the poet's lifetime, was compelled to conceal the allegiances it most deeply cherished. Anne Sweeney registers a sense of 'authorial elusivity', motivated by political necessity as much as by a theological paradigm, as an essential element of Southwell's literary production. This hushed literary and confessional identity sits curiously next to the status Southwell's work came to assume as a textual relic of its martyred author. While only external, posthumous interventions intent on recovering the voice of a forgotten female author seem able to act as a counterpull against the mechanisms of self-erasure intrinsic to Lock's *Meditation*, the magnetising figure of the poet-priest emerges all the more starkly out of the violence with which Southwell's living ministry was eradicated. These opposing impulses – erasure of a Catholic author on the one hand, and hagiographic consolidation of his identity on the other – are both at work in an early publication history which capitalised on the shock of the brutal execution suffered

[1] Louis M. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: YUP, 1962). See also Christopher Devlin, *The Life of Robert Southwell: Poet and Martyr* (London: Longmans, 1956), and Anne Sweeney, *Robert Southwell: Snow in Arcadia: Redrawing the English Lyric Landscape, 1586-95* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). On the marginalisation of Catholic literature in the canon, see Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); revaluations of Southwell's influence appear in John Klause, *Shakespeare, the Earl, and the Jesuit* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008); Gary Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), ch. 1; and Alison Shell, 'Southwell's Influence: Imitations, Appropriations, Reactions', in *Precarious Identities: Studies in the Work of Fulke Greville and Robert Southwell*, ed. Vassiliki Markidou and Afroditi Maria Panaghis (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 229-249.

by the young Jesuit in 1595, while enabling a poetry of Ignatian inspiration to permeate, almost seamlessly, into the Protestant literary mainstream.[2]

The enigmatic interaction between life and art in Southwell's work seems to invite a symptomatic method of reading, poised to uncover in the text the encoded messages and dramatic vicissitudes of the poet's apostolate, even as it points to a transcendent reality behind which the 'self' quietly and tantalisingly recedes. The elevation of the text to the status of a relic, however, risks going hand in hand with a hermeneutics bent on extracting the truth, even on dismembering the authorial 'corpus'. If inquisitorial or hagiographical habits of analysis are not to become 'collusion', perhaps they must content themselves with assuming the role of witness to Southwell's poetry of 'transfiguration'.[3] This chapter will seek to sidestep the twin temptations of reading Southwell's art as the consummation of his life or – at the other end of the spectrum – of reading his life as the consummation of his art. For while the former approach risks participating in an idolatry of the author's literary remains, the latter threatens to de-sacralise the spirit of the 'performing word' which brings Southwell's poetry to life.[4] If confession moves between reifying the power of language to shape a new self, and unravelling the self together with his words in the process of self-immolation, the tension between these two poles is also what animates a 'confessional poetics'. Southwell's verse can be described as 'confessional' not only as a result of the introspective recoil encouraged by Ignatian spirituality, but also in light of his polemical engagement with the literary culture of the age: one of the most distinctive features of a 'confessional poetics' which aspires to purchase its own, as well as its readers' redemption, is Southwell's moral emendation of conceits drawn from 'profane' love poetry – what Louis Martz terms 'the art of sacred parody'.[5] Following a brief contextualisation of the early modern usage of this descriptor, I will discuss two Petrarchan conceits which exert a shaping influence on Southwell's imagination – the trope of life in death and the wounding eyes of the beloved.

The concept of 'sacred parody' suffers from a problem of definition, not least because the use of the phrase to designate a transposition from the profane to the sacred – a 'consecrating' parody of the secular rather than a 'profanating' parody of the divine – seems unique to literary and musicological criticism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and to anglophone criticism in

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[2] Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, p. 19. On the poems' publication history, see Robert S. Miola, 'Publishing the Word: Robert Southwell's Sacred Poetry', *The Review of English Studies*, 64.265 (2013), 410-32. On Southwell's 'corpus' as a textual relic, see Arthur F. Marotti, 'Southwell's Remains: Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern England', in *Texts and Cultural Change in Early Modern England*, ed. Cedric C. Brown and Arthur F. Marotti (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 37-65; and Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), ch. 1.
[3] Geoffrey Hill, 'The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell', in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. 21-40, p. 30.
[4] Robert Southwell, 'Looke home' (22), in *Collected Poems*, ed. Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007). All further references from this edition.
[5] Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, pp. 184ff.

particular.[6] Louis Martz's reference to 'sacred parody' in this sense of the term is warranted by George Herbert's 'A Parodie', a poem which rewrites a song by the Earl of Pembroke on the consubstantiality of lover and beloved as a meditation on the speaker's spiritual union with God. Discussions of the genre have naturally centred on this lyric: only a 'neutral' understanding of parody to the exclusion of comedy or mirth appears able to conciliate the title of the poem with the fretful cadences of Herbert's speaker.[7] 'Parody' is used in this account as a synonym for imitation, and it is to this sense of formal transposition that Rosamond Tuve appeals when she warns against assuming that an agenda either to ridicule or to rebuke sinful verse informs the meaning of Herbert's poem.[8] While Martz takes the cue from Jesuit literary theory, Tuve draws on the musicological use of 'parody' to describe the widespread contemporary practice of adapting an existing melody to a new text, in the vein of the medieval *contrafactum*. The musical settings derived from popular tunes in both the Marot-Beza and the Sternhold-Hopkins Psalters were by this definition *contrafacta*. Another example is Eustorg de Beaulieu's *Chrestienne resjouyssance* (1546), a songbook presented by the author as an act of penance for the 'chansonnes charnelles' it repurposes as devout hymns.[9] An understanding of 'counterfeiting' as mimesis rather than travesty tallies with the keen musical sensitivity of a poet such as Herbert, and intriguingly echoes Quintilian's attribution of the origins of parody to the musical domain, which only 'by an abuse of language' has been extended to literature.[10] Though Tuve somewhat downplays the agonistic friction between divine and amatory verse which (in view of Herbert's early lyrics) is surely intrinsic to the poetics of *The Temple*, her account provides a valuable corrective to interpretations often more reflective of an exaggerated modern sensitivity to the admixture of sacred and profane than of contemporary readers' reception of such texts.[11] Gary M. Bouchard has recently reprised this line of critique to suggest the alternative nomenclature of 'sacred supplanting or substitution', in light of the 'clearly unironic imitation' of courtly love poetry modelled by Herbert and by Southwell before him.[12]

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[6] An understanding of 'parodia sacra' in the latter sense, as Francesco Novati and Mikhail Bakhtin employ it, is the most common definition. See the comprehensive overview of this question by Mark Burde, 'The 'Parodia sacra' Problem and Medieval Comic Studies', in *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior*, *its Meaning, and Consequences*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 215-242.

[7] Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, p. 186.

[8] Rosamond Tuve, ''Sacred Parody' of Love Poetry, and Herbert', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 8 (1961), 249-290, p. 262.

[9] Alice Tacaille, 'Eustorg de Beaulieu Parodiste: La 'Chrestienne resjouyssance' comme Propagande Musicale', *Révue d'Histoire du Protestantisme*, 3.3/4 (July-December 2018), 501-533.

[10] 'παρῳδή, quod nomen ductum a canticis ad aliorum similitudinem modulatis abusive etiam in versificationis ac sermonum imitatione servatur.' Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), IX, 2, 35.

[11] Tuve, 'Sacred 'Parody' of Love Poetry, and Herbert', p. 265. On *double entendre* in Herbert's 'Parodie', see the brief discussion by Raymond J. Wilson III, 'George Herbert's 'A Parodie': Its Double Meanings', *American Imago*, 34.2 (Summer 1977), 154-157.

[12] Gary M. Bouchard, ''If his compare with mine': Re-thinking Sacred Parody in Light of Southwell's Version of Edward Dyer's 'Fancy'', *Renascence*, 75.2 (2023), 111-28, p. 124.

But just how 'unironic' is sacred parody? As Gérard Genette remarks in his taxonomy of 'literature in the second degree', the 'serious' mode of transposition is often adjacent not only to the polemical, but also to the 'ludic'.[13] It is precisely the scission of μέλος from λόγος which Tuve regards as a straightforward borrowing of a formal scaffold able to 'straddle two worlds without tension' that provoked laughter, Scaliger recounts, among the first listeners of παρῳδία, a form of inverted 'rhapsody' which plays on the incongruity between the tenor of the melody and the engrafted subject matter ('est igitur parodia rhapsodia inversa mutatis vocibus ad ridicula retrahens').[14] Allusions to 'parody' in the sixteenth century were not insensible to the 'ludic' sense of the term, nor did this necessarily exclude a moralising purpose.[15] Ben Jonson associates parody with ridicule in one of the first attested uses in English ('A Parodie! A parodie! with a kind of miraculous gift to make it absurder than it was', *Every Man in His Humour*, 5.5), though other more 'neutral' descriptions were also current, such as John Florio's definition of 'parodia' as 'a turning of a verse by altering some words'.[16] Henri Estienne's *Parodiae Morales* (1575) illustrates the multivalence of the term in the period: while recognising its 'jocularity', Estienne insists that parody can be a pious endeavour.[17] The emulation of the classic sententiae which Estienne encourages by leaving blank pages for his readers to fill with their own aphorisms reveals the proximity of *parodia* and *imitatio.*[18] If this invitation presents the composition of parody as a didactic exercise designed to cultivate rhetorical and moral excellence, however, it is also suggestive of how easily imitation can slide, wittingly or unwittingly, into the warping and reduplicating mirror of parody: parody as a parody of *imitatio* (or as a parody of itself). In a similar vein to the literary phenomenon of 'spiritual' Petrarchism, the reception of the classical text plays out in a dynamic of simultaneous refutation and reinforcement of the author's *auctoritas*, a process which Linda Hutcheon aptly defines as an 'authorized transgression'.[19]

Emphasising the difference between modern and pre-modern responses to 'sacred parody' can have the paradoxical effect of entrenching the devotional further into the ambit of the moral and the

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[13] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, tr. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 24-30.
[14] Tuve, 'Sacred 'Parody' of Love Poetry, and Herbert', p. 265; Giulio Cesare Scaligero, *Poetices libri septem* (Lyons: Antonium Vincentium, 1561), I, 42, p. 46.
[15] Scaligero, *Poetices libri septem*, III, 97, pp. 144-5. See Robert Falck, 'Parody and Contrafactum: A Terminological Clarification', *The Musical Quarterly*, 65.1 (1979), 1-21, p. 4.
[16] Cf. Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 10. John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes, Or Most copious, and exact Dictionarie in Italian and English* (London: Blount, 1598), p. 259.
[17] 'ibi enim non seriae solum sed piae etiam, & quidem pietate Christiana dignae sententiae inuenientur, quae per parodiam scriptae fuerunt'. Henri Estienne, *Parodiae Morales* (Geneva, 1575), pp. 168-9. In his *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (Geneva, 1572), Estienne defines παρῳδία as 'canticum vel carmen ad alterius imitationem compono'.
[18] Sadly, readers took little heed of Estienne's instructions, as the empty pages in all extant copies bar one attest. See Hélène Cazes 'La Morale des Parodies: Leçons et Façons d'Henri Estienne dans les 'Parodiae Morales' (1575)', *Seizième Siècle*, 2 (2006), 131-147.
[19] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 74.

'serious'. Yet if transposition from the solemn to the trivial is comic, the inverse may be even more so, as Henri Bergson reminds us.[20] The case of Marian *serventois* in the troubadour tradition illustrates this mechanism well: the success of such songs depended on a close and often deliberately comic adherence between sacred and licentious registers, mimicking the conventions of the *chanson amoureuse* before the final twist into either a *sotte chanson* or a paean to the Virgin.[21] Though there may be no dissonance arising from this superimposition of the sacred and profane, irony in devotional poetry need not entail glibness, nor wit inauthenticity. When Herbert's 'Parodie' is not read as an altogether grave or solely formal adaptation, we may be better able to hear the poet gently chiding the lovers' self-enclosure evoked by Pembroke's cloying paradoxes of mutual self-subsistence, or perhaps to catch the sinner casting an ironic eye upon his own self-involvement in despair – the belief 'which cannot be' that God has forsaken him. Indeed, the risible may not be absent from early modern 'sacred parody' at all: as Anthony Martin suggests, the use of the term in a devotional context carries a self-deprecating comment on human and poetic slightness.[22] Thomas Merrill advances a contiguous reflection on the problem of linguistic accommodation which sacred parody brings into sharp relief.[23] The argument that sacred parody is only successful in its reforming enterprise in so far as it is able to avert ambiguity, equally, does not hold: its delicate negotiation of repetition and censure seems to rely precisely on an awareness and deliberate deployment of ambiguous referents. Gavin Alexander remarks that the re-directed verse form or musical pattern continues to 'signify' its original inflections of meaning in its new iterations.[24] How much more resonant, then, do overt semantic and figurative loans from love poetry remain? I shall return to the problem of analogical correspondence in representing the divine raised by Martin and Merrill in the course of a re-examination of the vestigial imprint of the secular on the sacred in Southwell's verse. As I will argue, 'sacred parody' in Southwell rests on an incarnational poetics, liminally situated between the earthly and the spiritual domain.

'To pleasing tunes succeedes a playninge voyce'

Robert Southwell's poetic works, both in manuscript and published form, are consigned to readers with a statement of their reforming aims. The epistle to the 'loving cosen' prefacing the Waldegrave manuscript of the poems (Stonyhurst MS A.v.4) sets out a veritable manifesto for 'sacred parody': 'the best course to lett them see the error of their works is to weave a newe Webb in theire

[20] Henri Bergson, *Le Rire: Essai sur la Signification du Comique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), p. 95.
[21] Perrine Galand-Hallyn and Fernand Hallyn, *Poétiques de la Renaissance: Le Modèle Italien, le Monde Franco-bourguignon et Leur Héritage en France au XVIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2001), p. 266; cf. Jane Taylor, *The Poetry of François Villon: Text and Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp. 155-8; on the influence of the *serventois* in England, see Frank Allen Patterson, *The Middle English Penitential Lyric: A Study and Collection of Early Religious Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1901), pp. 41ff.
[22] Anthony Martin, 'George Herbert and Sacred 'Parodie'', *Studies in Philology*, 93.4 (1996), 443-470.
[23] Thomas F. Merrill, 'Sacred Parody and the Grammar of Devotion', *Criticism*, 23.3 (1981), 195-210.
[24] Gavin Alexander, 'On the Reuse of Poetic Form: The Ghost in the Shell', in *The Work of Form: Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Ben Burton and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (Oxford: OUP, 2014), pp. 123-43, p. 135.

owne loome'.[25] As Alison Shell observes, the letter addresses itself to fellow poets more than to the general reader, representing 'a call not simply to contrition, but to the creativity of contrition'.[26] Sacred parody functions, in this light, as an eminently 'confessional' genre.

> Poets by abusing their talent, and making the follies and fayninges of love the customary subject of theire base endeavors, have so discredited this facultye that a Poett a lover and a lyer, are by many reckened but three wordes of one significacon. But the Vanity of men, cannot Counterpease the authority of god, who deliveringe many partes of scripture in Verse, and by his Apostle willing us to exercise our devotion in Hymnes and spirituall Sonnetts warranteth the art to bee good and the use allowable.[27]

The rejection of an equivalence between the poet and the liar has its roots in a longstanding debate on the moral defensibility of poetry which, from Petrarch to Guillaume Du Bartas, found itself embroiled in that other major controversy of Christian humanism: whether the study and imitation of the pagan classics was 'allowable'. It was a question which had famously set Coluccio Salutati against Giovanni Dominici, the Dominican preacher and author of the *Lucula Noctis* (1405), a recrudescence of an earlier dispute between the poet laureate Albertino Mussato and another Dominican, Giovannino da Mantova (1316).[28] Petrarch articulates the salient points of this last debate in a well-known defence of the 'proportionem inter theologiam et poetriam' addressed to his brother Gherardo and enclosed with a copy of the *Bucolicum carmen* (1349).[29] Boccaccio too comes to the defence of poetry in the *Genealogia deorum gentilorum* (1360), which, following Petrarch, refutes the spurious etymological connection between 'poio' and 'fingo' conventionally enlisted to denounce poetic falsehood.[30] Southwell's epistle is quite conventional in its recital of arguments drawn over the centuries to justify the uses of poetry, including Paul's injunction that the faithful should speak to one another 'in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' (Eph. 5:19). Like Petrarch, who puts at the forefront of his defence the scriptural metaphors for Christ ('Cristum modo leonem modo agnum modo vermen dici, quid nisi poeticum est?'), Southwell evokes a Christological redemption of poetry, descended in 'this measured and footed style' directly from the incarnate God.[31]

The approach to the classics envisaged by the *ratio studiorum*, the plan for Jesuit education which was being developed during Southwell's time as a student in Douai and Rome, leans more towards the Christian humanism of Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae linguae Latinae* (1471) in its emphasis on the acquisition of eloquence through stylistic imitation, rather than through an allegorical

[25] Southwell, *Collected Poems*, p. 1.
[26] Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination*, p. 69.
[27] Southwell, *Collected Poems*, p. 1.
[28] Coluccio Salutati, *Epistolario*, ed. Francesco Novati, vol. 4.1 (Roma: Forzani, 1905), pp. 170-240; Giovanni Dominici, *Lucula Noctis*, ed. Edmund Hunt (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1940).
[29] Francesco Petrarca, *Familiari*, vol. 2, ed. and tr. Ugo Dotti (Torino: Aragno, 2005), X, 4.
[30] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, ed. and tr. Jon Solomon (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 2011), XIV, 7.
[31] 'What is this, if not poetry, when Christ is called a lion, a lamb, or a worm?'. Petrarca, *Familiares*, X, 4, 1.

explication of myth, as exemplified by Boccaccio's *Genealogia* and Salutati's *De laboribus Herculis* (which saw among its inheritors Pierre de Ronsard's *Hercule Chrestien* of 1555). Works such as Franciscus Bencius' *Orationes de laudibus poeticae* (1592) and Jacobus Pontanus' *Poeticae Institutiones* (1594) thus recommend a process of culling the flowers of eloquence for devout purposes, a model of reading which would provide Southwell with a paradigm for the moral recodification of secular literature he would carry out in the vernacular.[32] The conversion of readerly taste finds itself aligned, in such a way, with the missionary work of the Jesuit expedition to England. The redemption of immoral poetry was a well-worn cause: it is difficult to imagine that Southwell was not familiar with the hagiographic poetry of Battista Spagnuoli, the 'Christian Virgil' who had authored an invective against amatory poetry, *Contra poetas impudice loquentes carmen* (1512), nor can the popularity of spiritual Petrarchism in Italy have escaped the notice of a poet who would go on to translate Luigi Tansillo's *Lagrime di San Pietro*. The influence of Guillaume Salluste du Bartas' *La muse chrestienne* (1574) in the Scottish court may also have paved the way for Southwell's favourable reception in England, although, as Shell remarks, Southwell's audaciousness consisted in dispensing with any mediatory figure along the lines of Du Bartas' Urania.[33]

This is an incisive insight not only into Southwell's poetics, but also into the workings of sacred parody, in its suspicion of the 'neo-platonic machinery' of *fin amor*, and of attendant interpretations of courtly love poetry which rely on an allegorical sublimation of human passion.[34] Gabriele Fiamma, a contemporary of Southwell's who rose to fame as a preacher, expresses this sentiment in the preface to his *Rime Spirituali* of 1570: the teachings of 'Platonic, philosophic love' propounded by interpreters of amatory poetry, Fiamma worries, do little to make up for its manifest lasciviousness.[35] The neo-platonic readings of Petrarch's vernacular poetry developed in the wake of Marsilio Ficino lie behind Fiamma's scepticism about the possibility of using earthly love, and earthly poetry, as a ladder to the divine (a possibility which, as we have seen, is highly fraught in Petrarch's own *Rime*).[36] By appropriating both the stylistic and semantic resources of love poetry, however, sacred parody is forced to disentangle the admixture of the religious and the earthly on which the neo-platonic love lyric relies. The genre thus puts in motion a process of 'de-analogising' the spiritualisation of the erotic, even as the semantic field of earthly love is plumbed once again to describe the yearning of the soul for its divine spouse.[37] The metaphors of the beloved as sublime mediatrix and giver of grace are

[32] Cf. Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 336.
[33] Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination*, p. 67.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Gabriele Fiamma, *Rime Spirituali* (Vinegia: Senese, 1570), p. 5.
[36] Sebastiano Erizzo, *Espositione di m[esser] Sebastiano Erizzo nelle tre canzoni di m[esser] Francesco Petrarca* (Venetia: Andrea Arriuabene, 1562). Benedetto Varchi proposed similar arguments in his *Lezzioni* (Fiorenza: Filippo Giunti, 1590).
[37] See Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 8.

not entirely cleansed of the earthly or even of the carnal in the devotional poem: 'passions I allow, and loves I approve', writes Southwell in the preface to *Marie Magdalens Funerall Teares* (1591), 'onely I would wishe that men would alter their object and better their intent'.[38] The restitution of the conceits of an idolatrous veneration to their original realm is not a simple matter of transposition: something is carried over in the movement from the spiritual to the earthly, and back again.

Southwell's adaptation of the ubiquitous Petrarchan sonnet 'Pace non trovo, et non ò da far guerra' (*Rvf* 134) is a case in point. The freezing fire and living death of Petrarch's tormenting love is here employed to describe the anguish of being separated from heaven: 'All welth is want where chefest wishes fayle / Yea life is loath'd where love may not prevayle' (5-6). In the Waldegrave arrangement, the poem is part of a sequence of meditations on mortal life as living death, a hallmark of medieval spirituality and of Petrarchan antithesis with a typically Augustinian flavour ('in istam vitam mortalem, an mortalem vitalem, nescio', *Confessions* I, 6).[39] The image of death as the beginning of eternal life makes for chilling reading where 'viva morte' and 'dilectoso male' (*Rvf* 132) are no longer understood as figures of speech. The next lyric in the sequence, 'Lifes deathes loves life', draws attention to the martyrological resonances of the *prolixitas mortis* conceit in an envoi which may allude to the death of Edmund Campion: 'Mourne therefore no true lovers death / Life onely him annoyes / And when he taketh leave of life / Then love beginnes his joyes' (29-32). A number of passages from Southwell's *Spiritual Exercises* invoke the 'martyr's privilege' in similar terms, articulating the young priest's desire for an act of sacrificial expiation able to bring an end to worldly temptation:

> Permitte me pro te torqueri, dissecari, flagillari, caedi et dilaniari. […] Permitte in hac vita peccatrices carnes lacerari, ut in futura beatitudine laceratae mereantur a te resarciri. Si hoc tibi non placeat, etiam, obsecro, concede mortem, ut aut cito moriendo peccare desinam, aut diu vivendo holocaustum sanguinis mei pro peccatis offeram.
>
> For Thy sake allow me to be tortured, mutilated, scourged, slain and butchered. […] Permit my sinful flesh to be torn by penance in this life, that its wounds may be healed by Thee in the happiness of the life to come. If this be not Thy will, I beg of Thee the boon of death, so that either by dying soon I may cease to sin, or by longer life I may offer Thee a holocaust in my own blood for my sins.[40]

The literal-mindedness of a 'biographical' reading sheds the 'living death' trope of some of its staleness in a grim actualisation of metaphor. In the polemic vein of parody, the emergence of this 'literal' sense in Southwell's *prolixitas mortis* lyrics can almost be read as a rebuke of the figurative

[38] Robert Southwell, 'The Epistle Dedicatorie', *Marie Magdalens Funerall Teares* (London: John Wolfe, 1591), sig. A3$^{v}$.
[39] PL 32, 663.
[40] Robert Southwell, *Spiritual Exercises and Devotions*, ed. Jean-Marie de Buck, tr. Philip Edward Hallett (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931), p. 180, tr. p. 104. Cf. 'Who would not die to kill all murdringe greives [?]' in 'Life is but Losse' (7).

contrivance of the conceit. The trope is 'materialised', however, only in so far as the startling flash of a 'literal', living sense can be folded back into an even more rarefied tropological scheme, in which the 'viva morte' is infused with an eschatological import. In Geoffrey Hill's words, 'the existence of the carnal sinners is an oxymoronic treadmill; and their only means of redemption is by way of the divine paradox'.[41] This is the characteristic move of sacred parody: in the first stanza of Southwell's 'What joy to live', the speaker thus depicts the condition of a lover pining for God through the familiar images of Petrarchan disquiet, before launching on a bitter condemnation of the unrest provoked by an existence mired in sin. The believer's burning desire for God and the condition of the earth-bound sinner find themselves strikingly and even puzzlingly aligned, leaving 'sacred parody' vulnerable to the charge of repetition in its transfiguration of restless *voluptas* into restless *zelus*. If the 'balefull blisse' (24) of life is a parody of heavenly delight, the speaker's desire for God is inflected – perhaps inevitably – by the same language of tormenting entrapment in contingency. But rather than casting doubt on the sincerity of his repentance, the repetition of the sinner's 'fixity in restlessness' serves to intensify his lament for finding himself estranged from heaven, becoming instrumental to the poem's censure of sin.[42]

The sacred parodist thus participates in the condition of sin he repudiates, inhabiting the living death of the flesh even as he re-orients it to describe the redemptive triumph of the martyr's privilege: 'To live where best I love death I desire' (12). The double meaning of 'viva morte' – as a life which is eternally dying, and as an eternal life achieved through death – epitomises the way in which ambiguity does not always entail an aporetic paralysis of meaning. It instead opens a gap for divine redemption to creep into a language seemingly condemned to remain entangled in oxymorons. Or more precisely, the sinner keeps treading oxymorons as a function, indeed as a condition, of his redemption. If ambiguity is witness to a language momentarily estranged from itself, the doubleness of the 'living death' suffered by sinner and martyr alike partakes in the necessary self-estrangement of the confessant's voice, an estrangement from his life of sin, but also an awareness of the gulf separating him from God which such a life and, as Southwell intimates, all mortal life entails. While sacred parody is often conceptualised as a form of censorship or sanitisation, in this light, it would perhaps be more accurate to describe it in terms of the procedures of confession. The ambiguity of sacred parody as a genre which tries to sunder, at the same time as it aspires to unify, the earthly and the spiritual, rehearses the confessant's acknowledgement of fallenness, spoken in the hope of overcoming the gulf of separation from God it symbolises. If divine paradox ultimately overcomes the oxymorons of contingency, Southwell's 'What joy to live' exudes an impatience with the circularity of its own wearying conceits (another feature of Petrarchan self-consciousness), which only death can bring to an end. There remains in Southwell's 'life in death' poems a germ of suspicion of the poetic

[41] Geoffrey Hill, 'The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell', p. 37.
[42] Kenelm Foster, *Petrarch: Poet and Humanist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), p. 65.

language so confidently reclaimed by his dedicatory epistle, a suspicion which may induce the 'skewing' language of parody to look askew at itself on the path towards redemption, and which is paradoxically essential to attaining it. It is in this sense that Southwell's poetry reaches for a consummation of meaning beyond the text, as Sophie Read argues in a discussion of the poet's 'martyrological aesthetic' – an 'inhibition', even a renunciation of language, allied to worldly contempt.[43] While Read frames this as a limitation, it is precisely such gestures of renunciation which a 'confessional' aesthetic enables to become redemptive, turning the failures of the speaking subject into moments of transcendence.

Sacred parody is an acutely self-conscious genre, an inevitable effect of a rhetorical strategy which leverages a direct comparison between texts. Southwell's most extensive work of transposition, 'Dyers phancy turned to a Sinners Complainte', depends on such a play of identity and difference, censuring and redeeming the genre of the courtly love lyric via the modalities of repentant prayer.[44] Dyer's elegy for the loss of a lady's favour is treated with a remarkably light touch, with only about a third of the poem diverging from the original (that the lady is probably Elizabeth is also congenial to a veiled condemnation of a ruler bent on eradicating Jesuit presence in England).[45] Such lexical and formal changes as Southwell does make include splitting Dyer's alexandrines to create a more hymn-like cadence, omitting the references to classical myth, and recalibrating the religious register invoked by the original to strike a more hopeful note. Southwell's light touch does not soften his polemical engagement with Dyer's poem, however, particularly in the final interpellation for readers to weigh a lover's grief against the loss of divine grace: 'Who feeleth most shall thinke it lest / If his Compare with myne' (151-152). The performance of personal and literary redemption staged by the poem seems to follow the previous lyric's instructions, couched in the voice of a penitent David: supplanting 'pleasing tunes' and 'phancies toyes' (18) with 'a playninge voyce' (15) will redress the infirm will, so that 'Wit bought with losse will taught by wit will mend' ('Davis Peccavi', 30). In stark contrast to the 'concupiscence of witt' (58) deplored by the speaker of Donne's 'The Crosse', the sinner is afforded a noticeable degree of agency by David's conception of 'wit' as a force for spiritual change. The poet's work of transposition thus instantiates the understanding of repentance as 'action' on which Robert Bellarmine, Southwell's teacher of controversial theology at the Roman College,

[43] Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England*, p. 56.
[44] The traditional English verse form of the 'complaint' which Emily Ransom identifies as a model for *Saint Peter's Complaint* may provide a context for the convergence of the figure of lover and penitent in this poem as well, although, as the first chapter of this thesis argues, this is also the characteristic posture of the Petrarchan lyric voice. See Emily A. Ransom, 'Complaint as Reconciliation in the Literary Mission of Robert Southwell', in *Precarious Identities*, pp. 172-204.
[45] Estienne recommends that the fewer changes the parodist is able to make, the more agreeable the result: 'quo autem minor est mutatio, […] eo jocundor est parodia'. Estienne, *Parodiae Morales*, pp. 132-3.

would insist in the *Disputationes*, contra Erasmus and Luther.[46] Literary composition is thus redefined by sacred parody as a work of penance.

Southwell's reproof of 'feyning Poets' at the end of the lyric (pointedly replacing Dyer's all-encompassing 'Poets' fained stile') is accompanied by an exposure of the underlying conflicts of the lover's condition:

> Behould such is the ende
> That pleasure doth procure
> Of nothing els but care and plaint
> Can she the mynde assure
> Forsaken first by grace
> By pleasure now forgotten
> Her payne I feele but graces wage
> Have others from me gotten. (73-80)

Encoded in these lines is a scathing critique of the abuses of devotional language in amatory poetry, in which 'grace' is allowed to become little more than a euphemism for 'pleasure'. The original referent of the lady as the dispenser both of pleasure and grief ('forsaken first was I, then vtterly forgotten', 39) is thus split by Southwell into the two opposing entities of grace and sin.[47] It is a critique which would have met the approval of Petrarch's Augustinus, who in the *Secretum* exposes Franciscus' neo-platonising idiom as an alibi for lust.[48] The central ambiguity of Petrarch's Laura as an emblem either of lust or divine grace is reprised by Southwell's diagnosis of *fin amor*: once again, the Petrarchan imprint is not merely a formal one, in light of Petrarch's carefully crafted mythology of conversion. The semantic restitution of 'grace' to a divine register directly leads to the restitution of hope witnessed in the second part of Southwell's 'Complainte': Dyer's inability to rid himself of the memory of the lady here turns into the comforting assurance that 'I cannot make him seeme afarre / that is in dede so neere' (111-2). The unbreakable 'vow' given by the speaker is no longer a prison, but his anchor to hope. Likewise, the 'torments sweete' (82) of repentance are mellowed by the prospect of forgiveness rather than describing love's palliation of bitterness with joy. Yet the language of confession circles back upon itself: 'But since that I have synned / And scourge none is to ill / I yeld me captive to my curse / My hard fate to fulfill' (121-4). The poem continues to inhabit the condition of the penitent lover, so that even the term 'phancy', conspicuously replaced with 'complaint' in the title, makes a surprise re-appearance in the poem to characterise the morose imaginations of the penitent: 'My phancies are like thorns / In which I go by night' (33-4).[49] The sacred parodist accuses

[46] Robert Bellarmine, 'De Poenitentia', in *Disputationum de controversiis Christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos*, vol. 3 (Ingolstadt: David Sartorius, 1601), I, 7, 1185.
[47] Sir Edward Dyer, *The Life and Lyrics of Sir Edward Dyer*, ed. Ralph M. Sargent (Oxford: OUP, 1935).
[48] 'ut scilicet humanis furoribus excusatio celestis accedat fiatque divino instinctu scelus immane licentius' (III, 255) ('to find an excuse from heaven for human follies, justifying a terrible crime with a kind of divine impulse'). Francesco Petrarca, *Secretum*, ed. Ugo Dotti (Milano: BUR, 2000), p. 234.
[49] Cf. 'casting true griefes in fansies forging mold' ('Saint Peters Complaynt', 731).

best by accusing himself: in lamenting that others have gained from him 'graces wage', the sinner almost seems to look woefully at his readers and at the profit they will be able to reap from his example.

I have so far been suggesting that a measure of resistance to 'neo-platonic machinery' is intrinsic to sacred parody as a genre, as well as to Southwell's poetic sensibility. Yet can the conception of poetry as a means to reach the divine, which sacred parody reclaims, survive the doubt it simultaneously casts on the creature's mediatory potential? This is one of the cruxes of Petrarch's fashioning of Laura as an allegory of poetic creation, and of the conflict it engenders in the operation of allegory itself – the ambivalence of the lady as a sign of divinity ('in cuius aspectu, siquid usquam veri est, divini specimen decoris effulget') and as mere 'mulierculam', her signifying capacity reduced to nothing more than the self-referential finitude belonging to a 'caduco […] corpuscolo'.[50] Laura's historical existence simultaneously unsettles and reaffirms the function of allegory, exposing the 'truth' of flesh and blood glimpsed behind the fictive figure, while granting it a new figural dimension as a symbol of earthly perdition. The ambiguity of the term 'parodia sacra', which Bakhtin uses to designate the downward movement towards carnality in the carnivalesque mocking of institutional ritual, becomes highly significant in this respect.[51] The fact that the reverse movement of 'sanitising' transposition has to bring the original terms back to the level of carnality in its condemnation of earthly love – in other words, voiding love's conceptual loans from the spiritual register – reveals the permeability of this upwards/downwards topography. This becomes a problem for Southwell: if the narrator of *Marie Magdalens Funerall Teares* consecrates the saint with the 'Laurell of the perfect lover', borrowing from the domain of the earthly in a eulogy of 'allowable' passion, the asceticism of divine love is at other times forced to condemn sense together with lust, as in Southwell's sixth sestain on 'Mary Magdalens Blushe': 'graunt I must sence is not free from Synne / For theefe he is that theefe admitteth in' (35-6).[52] Yet despite this rejection of sense, the darts of sacred and profane love deliberately mirror each other in the poem in a chiastic 'cross-encountring' (27) of body and soul. The treacherous porousness of the senses is, in fact, what allows the soul to become visible in Mary's cheeks: the *erubescentia* which, according to medieval penitential doctrine, has no small part to play in the remission of sins ('enim ipsa partem habet remissionis', states the canonical *De vera et falsa poenitentia*, X, 25).[53] The debased body is thus re-inscribed with the markings of grace.

[50] 'in whose appearance shines the pattern of divine beauty'. Petrarca, *Secretum*, III, 137, p. 210.
[51] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, tr. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 14.
[52] Southwell, *Marie Magdalens Funerall Teares*, p. 37$^{v}$.
[53] Pseudo-Augustine, *De vera et falsa poenitentia*, PL 40, 1122. Cf. Gratian, *Decretum*, ed. Emil Friedberd, CJC 1 (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1879), II, c. 88. Peter, by contrast, will doubt the ability of any blush to represent his 'inward feeling' (*Saint Peters Complaynt*, 580).

In ‘Lew’d Love is Losse’, the reproof of the mind which lingers upon the ‘picture’ rather than rejoicing in the ‘paterne’ is consonant with the poet’s efforts to emendate rather than reject wholesale, but the poem ultimately veers towards dismissing the signifying capacities of the ’picture’ altogether:

> If picture move more should the paterne please
> No shadow can with shadowed thinge compare
> And fayrest shapes whereon our loves do ceaze
> But sely signes of gods high beautyes are
> Go sterving sense feede thou on earthy maste
> Trewe love in Heaven seeke thou thy sweete repast. (6-12)

By the end of the stanza, the ‘picture’ is not so much a mirror image as a distortion of the divine, the prodigal’s ‘earthly maste’ a travesty of the ‘sweete repast’ of the eucharist. Far from offering glimpses of the divine, sense is connoted by deceit, luring man towards ‘a seeminge heaven’ which ‘proves oft a damninge hell’ (24). Such gestures away from the ‘sign’ and towards the ‘shadowed thinge’ are frequent in Southwell.[54] According to Sweeney they are part of a poetic project which deliberately sets itself against Sidney’s claims for the poet’s God-like creative autonomy.[55] A tension between poet and priest emerges in the course of Southwell’s critique of the ‘shadows’ of figurative language: ‘as poet he must claim only to reflect God’s creation, but as a priest he is an active interpretive channel for its most heavenly mysteries.’[56] If Southwell’s verse, as a number of commentators have posited, was designed to dispense a surrogate ministry to a community of recusants, poetic language too must become an ‘active interpretive channel’ between its readers and the heavenly mysteries to which they no longer have access, allowing a form of writing which is keenly aware of its own dissembling potential to function sacramentally.[57] While Sophie Read suggests that the eucharist is the ultimate destination of Southwell’s recurrent intimations of a fulfilment outside the representational function of the text, the transfiguration of the word incarnate may trouble more than evidence Southwell’s apparent preference for literal, bodily presence over the symbolic ‘absence’ of figurative meaning. The symbolic activity of the transubstantiated host does not point to a reality outside of language, but realises instead a union of flesh and word carried out by the sacramental ministry of the poet-priest. If, in Karl Rahner’s words, the priest ‘is always more and mostly less than a poet’, by the same token

[54] Cf. ‘Saint Peters Complaynt’ (‘His were but tipes, these are the figured thing’, 432), and ‘Marie Madgdalens complaint at Christs death’: ‘Where the truth once was and is not / Shadowes are but vanitye / Shewinge want that helpe they cannot: / Signes not salves of miserye / Paynted meate no hunger feedes’ (19-23). In the *Epistle of Comfort*, Southwell also argues that while baptism is merely a ‘figurative representation’ of dying to sin, martyrdom is a ‘perfect imitation’. Robert Southwell, *An Epistle of Comfort, 1587-8* (Ilkley: Scholar Press, 1974), p. 138.
[55] On Southwell and Sidney, see Sweeney, *Snow in Arcadia*, ch. 7.
[56] Sweeney, *Snow in Arcadia*, p. 240.
[57] ‘Southwell's writings construct a virtual church in an England where no other is possible.’ Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, p. 48. Cf. Devlin, *The Life of Robert Southwell*, p. 185; and Scott R. Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature, 1561-1595: Writing Reconciliation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

'the priesthood […] discovers in the grace of poetic power a charism for its own perfection'.[58] It is here that Southwell lands on the enduring conflict between Neo-Platonism and Christianity. What Augustine does not find in the 'books of the Platonists', crucially, is John 1:14's revelation that 'the Word became flesh': 'non ibi legi' (*Confessions*, VII, 9, 14).[59]

In 'At home in heaven', usually characterised as a straightforwardly neo-platonic poem, Southwell evokes the incarnation's radical reversal of hierarchies by exchanging the roles of earthly lover and heavenly beloved. It is the divine mediatrix (or mediator), this time, who falls foul of Cupid's darts. Like a new Sampson 'lul'd […] fast asleepe' to lay in 'our feeble natures lapp' (13), Christ is enthralled and dragged down to earth by the radiant beauty of the soul: 'Thy ghostly beauty offred force to god / It cheynd him in the linckes of tender love / It woonn his will with man to make aboade' (7-9). The soul's spiritual beauty is certainly what captures God's love, but the poem's account of the incarnation paradoxically seems to emulate the trajectory of the Petrarchan lover cast down to earth rather than elevated by his desire for a mortal creature (the very danger against which Southwell warns in the poem and throughout the shorter lyrics). As in 'What joy to live', the image passes through the carnal and the 'literal' only to recoil inevitably back into the tropological: in terms of the poem's narrative, Christ descends so as to enable the soul to look back to its home in heaven. The suggestions of sexual union are brought to bear on an account of incarnation as seduction: if as Leo Steinberg posits, sexuality represents the fullest revelation of Christ's humanity in the iconography of the Renaissance, the poem similarly allows the erotic overtones of the incarnation to manifest their own redemption.[60] Southwell's incarnational poetics emblematise the duality of sacred parody: the simultaneous rejection and rehabilitation of love is matched by the simultaneous rejection and rehabilitation of the 'allegory of love'. The literal 'descent' towards carnality, indeed, occurs within a dynamic by which poetry redeems (and is redeemed by) the tropological function of allegory. Southwell's poetry, in its suspicion of the distorting mimesis of 'picture' and 'sign' partakes in sacred parody's foreclosure of an allegorical sublimation of love, even as it 'persists in performing what is has shown to be impossible to do'.[61] In this it follows the mechanism described by Paul De Man, according to which the work of literature 'simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode'.[62] This ambivalence is reflected in sacred parody's tendency to repeat at the same

[58] Karl Rahner, 'Priest and Poet', in *Theological Investigations*, tr. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger, vol. 3 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967), pp. 294-317, p. 310.
[59] 'sed quia verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis, non ibi legi' ('but I did not find [here] that *the Word became flesh*'). PL 32, 741.
[60] Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).
[61] 'As such, we can call it an allegory'. Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: YUP, 1979), p. 275.
[62] De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p. 17.

time as it transgresses the rhetorical mode of the original text: as the ambiguity of the prefix 'παρα-', suggests, parody becomes both a 'counter-song' and a 'beside-song'.

In De Man's view, the persuasive force of rhetoric is always hindered by the function of the trope, a dynamic which 'both generates and paralyzes rhetoric'.[63] Such a tension is fundamentally inscribed in the story of the incarnation, which both exceeds and restores the capacity for earthly language to manifest the divine. Indeed, the word incarnate is the key to the reconciliation of the allegorical mode with its impossibility in Southwell, underpinning not only the mysterious tropology of divine paradox in his sacred parodies, but also their ability to function persuasively. The 'nomina Christi' which describe the saviour as lamb, lion and worm cited by Petrarch in his defence of poetry adumbrate this through an analogical incongruity which seems to widen the gap between signifier and signified, and simultaneously to manifest the redemption of a system of signification which promises to bridge that gulf. To put this in Augustinian terms, the Christological metaphors are an example both of *allegoria in verbis*, aware of its own distance from what it claims to represent at the surface of a chimerical figurality, and *allegoria in factis*, which by contrast brings figure and historical event together in close correspondence (*De Trinitate*, XV, 9, 15).[64] The same de-constructive and re-constructive logic which spoliates and resurrects the 'trope' inheres to confession's construction (and de-construction) of the trope of selfhood. In De Man's formulation, the de-construction of the concept of selfhood becomes the very means of its restitution: 'within the epistemological labyrinth of figural structures, the recuperation of selfhood would be accomplished by the rigor with which the discourse deconstructs the very notion of self'.[65] A recuperation which sets the scene for the newly redressed self to suffer yet another descent into the labyrinth which holds the key for its redressal, and so on again. If penance, like martyrdom, is an imitation of divine sacrifice, confession becomes witness to the process of dismantling the self which enables its renewal. Simultaneously suppressed and rehabilitated, like the authorial identity which hovers only half-concealed in between the lines of Southwell's poetry, the 'self' emerges from and not despite the relentless rigour of its own suppression plotted by the discourse of confession.

Eyes and Tears

De Man's conception of allegory as a device which reveals the foundational aporiae of its own symbolic activity finds a parallel in Giorgio Agamben's understanding of parody as 'para-ontology'. The scission between μέλος and λόγος operated by parody is not only a source of laughter, but also

[63] De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p. 131.
[64] Augustine, *De Trinitate Libri XV*, PL 42, 1069. On Petrarch's 'nomina Christi' as *allegoria in factis*, see Claudio Mésoniat, *Poetica Theologia: La 'Lucula Noctis' di Giovanni Dominici e le Dispute Letterarie tra '300 e '400* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984), pp. 85-6.
[65] De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p. 173.

prefigures for Agamben the separation of word and world which is constitutive of the operation of language itself:

> If ontology is the more or less felicitous relationship between language and world, then parody, as paraontology, expresses language's inability to reach the thing and the impossibility of the thing finding its own name. The space of parody – which is literature – is therefore necessarily and theologically marked by mourning and by the distorted grimace (just as the space of logic is marked by silence). And yet, in this way, parody attests to the only possible truth of language.[66]

The impossibility to attain an essential correspondence between name and thing is reinforced by parody's wilful distancing of its object: troubadour love is thus inherently 'parodic' in its attempt to keep the amatory object at a distance.[67] Agamben's suggestion that Petrarch endeavours to 'save literature from parody' by joining 'name' and 'thing' in the idolatry of Laura is less convincing in light of the 'parody' of the poet's literary enterprise which the lady also represents: while in Petrarch's account of the 'nomina Christi', the metaphors used to represent Christ speak to a system of signification in which essence newly corresponds to linguistic signs, the allegory of poetic creation represented by Laura could be said to reveal precisely a system of arbitrary signification, or as John Freccero puts it, 'a universe of autoreflexive signs without reference to an anterior Logos'.[68] A further difficulty emerges: if parody runs both 'counter to' and 'beside' ontology, the 'space of parody […] which is literature' may repeat as much as it challenges the ideal of a felicitous relationship between word and world. This becomes particularly clear in light of sacred parody's aspiration to restore an original meaning, and to wrest a profaned language of love back to its proper metaphysical orientation. Agamben's sketch of the function of parody as a critique of metaphysics must thus be measured against the way the genre might aim not solely to keep the represented object at a distance, but also to salvage the alienated signifier by bridging the gap which separates it from the divine. As such, Petrarch's attempt to re-join 'name' and 'thing' in Agamben's account seems to follow a dynamic intrinsic to (sacred) parody rather than opposed to it.

The liminal topography of the *sacer* entails that parody is at once a fallen language and one which cannot help speaking of the divine. As Augustine makes explicit in the famous account of the theft of the pears, sin parodically rehearses the attributes of God, such as the gratuitousness of grace or the self-sufficiency of the Trinity: 'Nam et superbia celsitudinem imitatur, cum tu sic unus super omnia deus excelsus' ('Thus pride wears the mask of loftiness of spirit, although You alone, O God, are high over all') (*Confessions*, II, 6, 13).[69] Even the parody of the divine performed by sin cannot

[66] Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, tr. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 50; *Profanazioni* (Roma: Nottempo, 2005), p. 54.
[67] Agamben, *Profanazioni*, p. 50.
[68] John Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel', *Diacritics*, 5.1 (1975), 34-40, p. 38.
[69] PL 32, 680.

help re-affirming the authority it transgresses: 'perverse te imitantur omnes qui longe se a te faciunt et extollunt se adversum te. Sed etiam sic te imitando indicant creatorem te esse omnis naturae, et ideo non esse quo a te omni modo recedatur' ('Thus even those who go from You and stand up against You are still perversely imitating You. But by the mere fact of their imitation, they declare that You are the creator of all that is, and that there is nowhere for them to go where You are not') (*Confessions*, II, 6, 14).[70] There is an ontological necessity in the sinner's parody of God. Yet the need for accommodation means that the language of contrition is also subject to a measure of constraint in representing the incommensurability of the divine: forced to speak from the reign of dissimilitude, the sinner is always re-presenting the sins of his expressive medium to the altar of expiation together with the sins of the flesh enclosed in it. The risk of repetition runs both ways, in sin's distortion of the divine which prevents it from removing itself fully from God, and in the danger inherent to confession of reiterating the repented sin. The temptation to assume 'the mask of loftiness of spirit' by taking pride in one's humility exposes the danger of the lie coiled in each new revelation latent in confessional discourse ('So may a selfe-dispising, get selfe-love', Donne will say in 'The Crosse', 38). Southwell's depiction of repentance in *Saint Peters Complaynt* dramatises the dangers of self-aggrandisement in mortification: 'matchlesse wretch' and 'catiffe most accurst' (60), Peter flagellates himself with epithets which almost seem to affirm his pre-eminence as 'cheefest Saint in Calender of Shame' (498). As Brian Cummings observes, 'the mortification is shouted, and in the shouting it is possible to find a false note. […] the shame, in its stridency, is a kind of inverted 'pride' (l. 64)'.[71] If Dyer's 'Phancy' is framed as a poetic challenge posed by an eclogue's destitute lover, answered and voiced anew by Southwell's sinner, Peter likewise entreats his echoing lament to 'Tell hearts that languish in the soriest plight / There is on earth a farre more sorry wight' (23-4). Assurances of a matchless grief, here too, are partly animated by poetic agonism:

> You fancies drudges, plung'd in follies tide:
> Devote your fabling wits to lovers layes:
> Be you o sharpest griefes, that ever wrung,
> Texte to my thoughtes, Theame to my playning tung. (33-6)

There is a parallel between the poet's strife against the 'paynim toyes' (17) decried by the prefatory verses to the 'Reader', and Peter's determination not to be outdone in humility, a continuity which casts the same shadow of a latent pride over the enterprise of sacred parody.

Like sin's parody of divinity, Peter's penance runs on a parallel track with respect to Christ's passion. The denial of Christ and the attendant vehemency of Peter's repentance, indeed, closely

[70] PL 32, 681.
[71] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, p. 349. Ronald Corthell suggests that Peter is 'as anxious to display […] his *primacy* as an apostate as he was to avow his pre-eminence in loyalty', in 'Irony, Recusancy, and Repentance in Robert Southwell's 'Saint Peter's Complaint'', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 65.1 (Spring 2023), 58-87, p. 69.

follow the model of penance as a repetition of martyrdom outlined by Michel Foucault. The practice of *exomologesis* in the early Christian church, Foucault explains, came about partly as a response to the problem of the *lapsi*, Christians who had been unable to undergo the ordeal of martyrdom: the spectacle of public penance became not only a means of absolving them from the sin of apostasy, but also a way for the lapsed to experience a 'miniature martyrdom' which would enable them to be reintegrated in the community.[72] Southwell ultimately has Peter declare that 'my pride is checkt', as the poem moves towards performing a final and more effectual gesture of relinquishing the self to God's mercy: the *Complaynt* thus guides a reader through the stages and potential pitfalls of confession, from the depths of despair to the hope of forgiveness.[73] The poem implicitly transfers to the reader the role of witness which, in *Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares*, is exercised by the narrative voice, able both to eulogise Mary's passionate grief and to doubt, with its characteristic sweet geniality, that 'there is some trespasse in thy tears, and some sin in thy sorrow'.[74] The invitation to regard the saint's 'faults' from a distance – even those he might be committing in articulating his repentance – testifies to the kinship between prosopopoeia and parody described by Quintilian (*Institutio*, IX, 2, 35). Yet a sense of narrative progression is far from evident even at the cusp of resolution. At the end of the poem, Peter can be found lamenting the maddening circularity of a grief that washes through the eyes to the heart, from the tongue to the ears, and back to the heart again: 'Thus circkling griefes runne round without an end' (678). Indeed, Peter seems to remain wilfully tangled in a song spun from 'everlasting matter of complaint' (38): 'pleasd with displeasing lot' (691), the penitent is 'deafe to reliefes' (741) and 'pensive to foster care' (742).

The meeting of Peter's and Christ's eyes which forms the centrepiece of the poem re-presents and seeks to overcome the circularity of repentant grief. The profusion of analogies in the long sequence, indeed, is reminiscent of Petrarch's comment on the inexhaustibility of praise and on the exhaustion of his own song in the *cantilena oculorum*, the three canzoni devoted to extolling Laura's eyes (*Rvf* 71-3). In a telling slippage of referents, the language of praise itself begins to cause the lover's dissolution by the end of Petrarch's epideictic exercise, in imitation of the wounding eyes of the beloved:

> ll dir m'infiamma e pugne,
> […] anzi mi struggo al suon de le parole,
> pur com'io fusse un uom di ghiaccio al sole.
>
> For my words burn and urge me,
> […] I melt when I hear my own words,

[72] Michel Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, ed. Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt, tr. Stephen W. Sawyer (Chicago: UCP, 2014), p. 111.
[73] Cf. Gary Kuchar's sense that the choice of a dramatic monologue encourages a symptomatic reading, in *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), p. 34.
[74] Southwell, *Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares*, p. 13[r].

as if I were a snowman in the sun. (*Rvf* 73, 10-15).[75]

Petrarch's poetic self-dissolution, inflamed and wounded by the circularity of praise, is redressed in Southwell by a gaze which reshapes what it captures:

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

The saviour's eyes re-constitute the self rather than dissolving it, salvaging the quintessential trope of revelation and spiritual refinement of troubadour love: 'equall shadows worths with shadowed things'. The eroticism of these lines is explicit in the early translation from Tansillo's poem which Southwell left unfinished: 'lyke as sometime (though vnworthy) be / to lyken sacred matters with profane) / […] by lookes a louer secret thoughts can se'.[76] The analogy is redeemed by the same token as it, too, is revealed unworthy by Christ's merciful gaze. Gary Kuchar argues that the encounter with the eyes of Christ is an instance of the 'saturated phenomenon' conceptualised by Jean-Luc Marion. The incarnation is the ultimate saturated phenomenon according to Marion, though Kuchar does not need to follow this argumentative thread to make the point that the 'saturation' of the face as a phenomenon which overwhelms cognition, imposing itself on the subject without becoming its object, casts repentance 'as an experience in which one is made subject to a power that both precedes and exceeds one's self'.[77] Yet there is perhaps a distinction to be drawn between the status of the face and that of the eyes as saturated phenomena: if Marion draws from Emmanuel Levinas the concept of the 'face' as the emblem of irreducible alterity, the gaze represents for Levinas, by contrast, the reduction of the other to analogical sameness.[78] Christ's eyes, indeed, are connoted by violence as well as by a saving grace: they are a mirror which mortally wounds the sinner in order to re-shape him in his image. The troubadour conceit of the wounding eyes, in light of Levinas' critique of the 'violence' of metaphysics, comes to symbolise the imposition of an ontological order to reality, rather than the encounter with an alterity that exceeds categorisation.

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[75] Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milano: Mondadori, 1996); *Canzoniere*, ed. and tr. Mark Musa (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1996).
[76] On the 'ocular eroticism' of this scene, see Debora Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 178.
[77] Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, p. 46. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, tr. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), ch. 4.
[78] 'L'objet de connaissance est toujours fait, déjà fait et dépassé'. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'Extériorité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 41.

An alternative to the violence of sight is hinted by Derrida's notion of tears as the 'quintessence' of the eye, in *Memoirs of the Blind*'s final allusion to Andrew Marvell's 'Eyes and Tears':

> Now if tears *come to the eyes*, if they *well up in them*, and if they can also veil sight, perhaps they reveal, in the very course of experience, in this coursing of water, an essence of the eye, of man's eye, in any case, the eye understood in the anthropo-theological space of the sacred allegory. Deep down, deep down inside, the eye would be destined not to see but to weep.[79]

Southwell's dramatic monologue too moves from seeing to weeping. The speaker's lengthy praise of the eyes gives way to an alchemical process of redemption by tears: 'Use feare, as fire the coales let penance blow. / And seeke none other quintescence but teares.' (460-1). Peter almost seems to force himself to bring the set-piece of the eyes to a close, becoming aware with Petrarchan self-reflexivity of the potentially limitless praise generated by the salvific object ('But o, how long demurre I on his eyes', 455). The piercing gaze opens at this point the floodgates of confession, which expresses the 'impostumde sore of perjurde lies' (446) through the channel of the weeping 'eyes'. Yet tears must in turn give way to a restored sight. Not only does the meeting of the eyes instigate the healing occlusion of vision, but the confounding of the self through tears leads back to a clearer perception of sin:

> My sight was valid till I my selfe confounded,
> Then did I see the disenchanted charmes.
> Then could I cut the anatomy of sinne,
> And search with Linxes eyes what lay within. (663-6)

The de-construction of the self engendered by the 'saturated' encounter with the alterity of Christ yields once again a re-construction of selfhood, just as its rhetorical representation continues to perform what it has shown impossible to do. In *Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares*, likewise, the saint's weeping initially acts as a barrier preventing her recognition of the risen Christ: as the narrator gently insists, the veil of tears must be dispelled for salvation to take effect.[80] At the same time, the tears are prized above all earthly objects, described by the narrator as the precious distillation of an alchemical process in an epideictic passage which rivals the set-piece of the eyes in *Saint Peters Complaynt*, and which would later be reprised by Richard Crashaw's 'The Weeper'. As Derrida shows in his examination of the challenge mounted by the philosophy of Levinas to metaphysics, not only is the encounter with alterity itself a 'recognition' which necessarily imposes the subject's categories of

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[79] 'Or si les larmes viennent aux yeux, si alors elles peuvent aussi voiler la vue, peut-être révèlent-elles, dans le cours même de cette expérience, dans ce cours d'eau, une essence de l'œil, en tout cas de l'œil des hommes, l'œil compris dans l'espace anthropo-théologique de l'allégorie sacrée. Au fond, au fond de l'œil, celui-ci ne serait pas destiné à voir mais à pleurer.' Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, tr. Pascale Anne-Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: UCP, 1993), p. 126; *Mémoires d'Aveugle: L'Autoportrait et Autres Ruines* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1990), p. 125.

[80] 'But there is such a showre of teares betweene thee and him, and thy eyes are so dimmed with weeping for him, that though thou seest the shape of a man, yet thou canst not discerne him.' Southwell, *Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares*, p. 43$^{v}$.

understanding upon the object, but the imposition of analogy is never entirely totalising: 'the same is not a totality closed in upon itself'.[81] The attempts to dispel the constraining shadows of dissimilitude in order to achieve an obliterating apprehension of the 'shadowed thing' in Southwell's poetry fold back upon themselves in a repetition of the circularity of sin – an imitation, or parody, which cannot help repeating, however distorted, the image of the divine. The pull of repetition haunts confessional language in Southwell, at the same time as it holds out a promise of grace and forgiveness, enabling the re-construction of the confessing self, time and again, in the face of its own dissolution.

[81] Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics', in *Totality and Infinity*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: UCP, 1978), p. 126.

## **Chapter Four:** Confession and Abjection in the *Holy Sonnets*

'White Sincerity'

The previous chapter argued that at the heart of Southwell's aesthetic project lies an ambivalence not only about the 'allegory of love', but also about the linguistic function of allegory itself. This, I suggested, subtends the corrective work of sacred parody: its dislocation of discursive conventions challenges at the same time as it re-vitalises the claims of allegory and its ontological underpinnings in the tradition of Neo-Platonism. The confessional dynamic of sacred parody is 'de-constructive' to the extent that the literary becomes the site of an admission both of the insufficiency and of the transcendental life of the linguistic sign. Indeed, it is the incarnation that models the literary work's rupture and restoration of the sign's symbolic activity through 'the humiliation of myth into fact' accomplished by the descent of word into flesh.[1] While Southwell's poetry is not often characterised as engaging in ambiguity or rupture, John Donne's religious verse has almost obsessively been discussed in such terms, frequently in connection with the author's conversion from the Catholic to the Protestant faith. But the difference in the two poets' fates – one a martyr of the Counter-Reformation, the other soon to become one of the most celebrated preachers of the Jacobean pulpit – only in part accounts for the impression of Donne as a 'Janus-faced poet'.[2] This doubleness appears ingrained in the texture of a self-conscious, ironic wit, justifying the suspicion with which subsequent readers have dissected the obliquity of the sentiments it frames.

If Southwell's performances of confession, far from collapsing into equivocation, redeem poetic discourse at those very junctures in which figural language finds itself unravelled, this chapter will suggest that, similarly, coming 'undone' is not a symptom of faithlessness in the poetry of Donne, but rather the condition for the emergence of a speaking subject able to manifest the truth. The ambiguating encounters of sacred and profane, literal and figural, and life and art in Southwell are matched in Donne's religious verse by a confessional subjectivity caught between dissolution and re-assertion of the self. Confession thus becomes a form of open lyric address, an unconsecrated and unconsummated *actus inchoatus*, as Donne will describe it in one of his Lenten sermons on the penitential psalms. Focusing on the *Holy Sonnets*, the first two sections will consider the central questions of authorial sincerity and agency raised by these lyrics: what kind of subject does a penitential culture fed by contemporary meditative practice and theological controversy bequeath to the lyric persona of the sonnets? And how does poetic form in turn inflect the performance of confession? Drawing on Julia Kristeva's understanding of the Christian confessional subject in *Powers of Horror*, the third section will conceptualise the vehement affects of the sonnets in light of

[1] C. S. Lewis, 'Is Theology Poetry?', in *They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses* (London: Bles, 1962), pp. 150-65, p. 159.
[2] Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p. 97.

the experience of the 'abject', a model of subjectivity well adapted to explain some of the vexatious dichotomies in which previous criticism has located the cruxes of Donne's sensibility in matters of devotion, from the relationship between body and soul to the tension between the performance of self and the performance of belief.

Much as in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, a final and definitive confession seems perpetually to elude the speaker of the *Holy Sonnets*. The Petrarchan posture of a contrition as 'humorous' (5) and 'ridlingly distemperd' (7) as the profane love the penitent claims to renounce encounters in Donne's verse the additional obstacle of a theological doubt which filters through the psychological drama of the sonnets.[3] The tendency to deploy the lyrics to document an internal struggle between the Catholic faith of Donne's forebears and the Calvinist orientation of the new Church of England which he eventually conformed to carries the risk of schematising along denominational lines a condition which, in embryonic form, is already present in Petrarch's fluctuations between the two recurrent questions of his spiritual dilemma: *quid ergo me retinet?* – the tormented consciousness of a spiritual inertia that must be overcome by moving towards God; and *quis dabit?* – the recognition that such a movement is impossible without grace to lift the sinner heavenwards, *sicut columbae* (Ps. 55:6).[4] Nonetheless, it is difficult to measure the extent to which theological controversy may be for Donne the shape the spiritual anguish of the sinner happens to assume or, conversely, its proximate or exacerbating cause – in other words, to weigh belief against experience.[5] Even when the doctrinal statements of the *Holy Sonnets* elude a precise articulation only to appear 'as contingent as the eschatological status of the sinner', theology remains 'an absolutely necessary adjunct to the personal narrative of the sinner'.[6] In 'Oh my blacke Soule', indeed, the pressures of controversy contort the speaker's plea in a disjunctive formulation of apparently incompatible soteriological alternatives. The sonnet's final turn towards *sola fide,* however, does little to answer the hollow echo sounded by Donne's own version of the psalmist's question: *quis dabit?*

> Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;
> But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?
> Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,
> And red with blushing, as thou art with sinne;
> Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might
> That being red, it dyes red soules to white. (9-14)

[3] 'Oh to vex me', in John Donne, *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1952). All further references from this edition.
[4] See chapter one for my analysis of *Rvf* 60 and its allusion to Ps. 55:6 (54:7): 'Quis dabit mihi pennas sicut columbae, et volabo, et requiescam?'.
[5] Cf. R. V. Young's suggestion that in the *Holy Sonnets* 'the expression of Christian experience seems more important than the articulation of theological distinctions.' 'Donne's Holy Sonnets and the Theology of Grace', in *'Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse': The Seventeenth-century Religious Lyric*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: Missouri University Press, 1987), pp. 20-39, p. 30.
[6] Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 388.

The speaker almost seems to test out the available paths to redemption – penitential expiation on the one hand, or the imputation of the saving sacrifice of Christ on the other – but far from redoubling his assurances of grace, in so doing he only accumulates doubt. The result, as Brian Cummings observes, is a theology etiolated by 'endless modulations'.[7] Allowing for an intrinsic theological elusiveness in the *Holy Sonnets* overcomes some of the problems involved in an attempt either to disentangle belief from experience or to attribute the inconclusiveness of the poems to an imperfect assimilation of Protestant doctrine – without, moreover, correlating the poems' aesthetic success either to theological consistency or solely to spiritual disquiet.[8]

A passage of the 'Litanie' is strongly reminiscent of the alternatives presented by 'Oh my blacke Soule' (given the roughly contemporaneous composition of the sonnets and of Donne's 'meditation in verse', indeed, it is surprising that a parallel between the two has not been advanced more often).[9]

> From trusting so much to thy blood,
> That in that hope, wee wound our soule away,
> From bribing thee with Almes, to excuse
> Some sinne more burdenous,
> From light affecting, in religion, newes,
> From thinking us all soule, neglecting thus
> Our mutuall duties, Lord deliver us. (138-144)

The speaker here appears to advocate for a *via media* between the Scylla and Charybdis of imputation and good works – a warning which arguably modifies an account of the *Holy Sonnets* as the product of Donne's inability to make up his mind. In this light, the anguish of 'Oh my blacke Soule' may derive from a dangerous flirtation with two theological extremes, rather than from theological inconsistency. R. V. Young hints as much when he suggests that Donne uses the sonnets as a testing ground to reach the median position favoured by the *Essayes in Divinity*.[10] A letter to Henry Goodyer describing the sources of the 'Litanie' appears to evidence Donne's ecumenical leanings: 'neither the Roman Church need call it defective, because it abhors not the particular mention of the blessed Triumphers in heaven; nor the Reformed can discreetly accuse it, of attributing more than a rectified devotion ought to do.'[11] But are Donne's remarks to Goodyer a plea for moderation or another deprecatory gesture designed, in the pattern of the litany, to deliver the poet from being 'discreetly accuse[d]'? The tone of the passage is more partisan than commentators have tended to concede: the arsenal of the new Church's claims to tradition is being augmented, Donne intimates, in the form of a

[7] Ibid.
[8] For the latter approach, see Richard Strier's seminal 'John Donne Awry and Squint: The Holy Sonnets', *Modern Philology*, 86.4 (May 1989), 357-384.
[9] John Donne, *Selected Prose*, ed. Helen Gardner and T. S. Healy (Oxford: OUP, 1967), p. 131.
[10] R. V. Young, *Doctrine and Devotion in 17th-Century Poetry: Studies in Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and Vaughan* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 8-9.
[11] Donne, *Selected Prose*, p. 131.

liturgical prayer not diminished or 'defective' by being cut off from Rome.[12] The quality of 'evennesse' (208) to which the 'Litanie' aspires, moreover, may not accord with a poetic temperament hardly known for a quiet or seraphic irenicism.[13] The word 'more' in Donne certainly carries a weight of 'sexual and theological guilt', but it is only by a corresponding surfeit of ascetic rigours that it demands to be curbed.[14] As such, it is licit to wonder whether Donne's conception of an ecumenical mean is better represented by yet another paradoxical extreme: the picture in 'Show me deare Christ' of an adulterous or prostituted Church,

> who is most trew, and pleasing to thee, then
> When she is embrac'd and open to most men. (13-4)

The paradox of a faith conditional on faithlessness calls for a radical recognition of the foundations of doubt upon which the edifice of belief is built. The trope of the adulterous bride thus does not necessarily falsify the sonnet's statement of catholicity. And yet this recognition requires, in exchange, a radical openness to the possibility that faith may be eroded, even betrayed by the doubt which secures it, just as Donne's image of betrayal seems to betray itself, by exceeding the meaning it purports to lay out.

In a similar way, the 'Litanie' seems to turn reflexively upon itself, unravelling the very plea it is intent on voicing.[15] The mistrust of 'excesse / in seeking secrets, or Poëtiquenesse' (71-2) is radicalised as the poem progresses into a mistrust of prayer:

> Heare this prayer Lord, O Lord deliver us
> From trusting in those prayers, though powr'd out thus. (125-6)

Ultimately, petition in the poem is only allowed to take shape as a form of ventriloquism, a shift which, as Arnold Stein points out, abandons all moderation in favour of an 'extreme of extremes': it is God who 'gives voice and word' to 'sighs, tears, thoughts' (205).[16] The empty ring of the rhetorical 'Who shall give thee that grace to beginne?' is turned into a prayer no longer echoing with the desolate voice of the self, but resonant with divinity: 'Hear thyself now, for thou in us dost pray' (207). The suspicion of the sinner's voice is thus accompanied by a supreme confidence in the voice of God speaking through him. The relation between these two rhetorical postures of demureness and

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[12] On the 'Litanie' as an expression of Donne's ecumenicalism, see Scott R. Pilarz, ''Expressing a Quintessence Even from Nothingness': Contextualizing John Donne's 'A Litanie'', *Christianity and Literature*, 48.4 (Summer 1999), 399-424; and Joshua Scodel, 'John Donne and the Religious Politics of the Mean', in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway, Ar.: UCA Press, 1995), pp. 45-80.
[13] Cf. Arnold Stein, *John Donne's Lyrics: The Eloquence of Action* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), pp. 182-3.
[14] Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 218.
[15] Cf. Hannibal Hamlin, 'Poetic Re-Creation in John Donne's 'A Litanie'', in *The Sacred and Profane in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Mary A. Papazian (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 183-210.
[16] Stein, *John Donne's Lyrics*, p. 183.

forthrightness is multivalent: on the one hand, the believer's profession of faith is conditional upon self-mortification; on the other, the shadow of doubt generated by the discourse of self-scrutiny constantly threatens to interpose itself between God and his own echo in the soul, disturbing the waters of its reflective surface, and thus troubling the manifestation of divine truth. Foucault frames this dynamic as a perennial tension between the dual 'alethurgic' processes of Christianity: the 'regime of faith' and the 'regime of confession of self'.[17] The discourse of confession is the essential 'hinge' (*charnière*) which simultaneously interlocks and divides the two. 'What was Protestantism', Foucault asks, if not an attempt to join avowal and faith 'in a type of truth act in which adherence to the dogmatic content has the same form as the relation of self to self in subjectivity exploring itself'?[18] As the mistrust of petitionary language in the 'Litanie' and the anguished circularity of the *Holy Sonnets* show, the attempt to derive a manifestation of truth from self-scrutiny which Foucault attributes to a Protestant emphasis on interiority does not succeed in conciliating the two 'alethurgies' so much as it lays bare the latent tension between them.

A de-sacralisation of the institutional processes designed to produce or manifest the truth of belief, indeed, de-stabilises (and de-sacralises) the procedures of subject formation, giving rise to an even more radical separation of self-profession and profession of faith. The paradox of this rupture is that even and perhaps especially in the rejection of institutional regimes of truth-telling, the critical distance assumed from the originating alethurgy inevitably calls upon the same motions of self-scrutiny on which the latter was founded. This explains in part why the Protestant de-sacralisation of penance does not ultimately produce a secularised confessional discourse, but only displaces its theological and institutional expression. The fatal enmeshment of the subject and the regime of truth to which he belongs (and by which he is created) thus continues to perpetuate its strategies of subjectivation despite the individual's attempt to relinquish them (an impasse which, as we have seen, implicates Foucault's own critical stance).[19] Having momentarily abandoned the poetry of theological language, it is possible to reformulate Donne's interrogation – is it my repentance that calls upon grace or must grace first call upon me to repent? – in the more prosaic terms of the power dynamics that shape the relation between the self's ability to put himself into discourse and the extrinsic structures of belief that facilitate or impel this self-verbalisation. For if one cannot adequately confess without adherence to a belief, it is equally difficult to profess faith without a prior deliverance from sin. As in Lock's *Meditation*, the promise of a faith which only requires to be spoken for it to re-create the self paradoxically heightens the risk of self-referentiality: hence the 'Litanie''s alternation between

[17] Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France 1979-80*, ed. Michel Senellart, tr. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2014), p. 84; *Du Gouvernement des Vivants*, ed. François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana and Michel Senellart (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), pp. 82-3.
[18] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, p. 85; 'l'aveu et la foi viennent se rejoindre dans [un type] d'acte de vérité où l'adhésion au contenu dogmatique a la même forme que le rapport de soi à soi dans la subjectivité s'explorant elle-même.' *Du Gouvernement des Vivants*, p. 84.
[19] See section two of the introduction.

a self-defeating and a divinely authored rhetoric of prayer. Veering between these two discursive poles, what is to prevent the mystical union of self-mortification and testimony which glorifies the martyr from sliding into a circularity that is merely self-immolating? Donne's *Holy Sonnets* continually raise this doubt – a doubt about the reliability of the truth manifested by the self that is fundamentally intertwined not only with a problematisation of institutional regimes of truth, but also with the mechanisms of self-problematisation on which the very possibility of fashioning the self (both inside and outside such frameworks) continues to depend.

'I am a little world made cunningly', much like 'Oh my blacke Soule', problematises itself by trying on and discarding each new penitential posture. The possibility of redemption, as a result, remains constantly out of reach, each new purgative proving insufficient to cleanse the sinner.

> I am a little world made cunningly
> Of Elements, and an Angelike spright,
> But black sinne hath betraid to endlesse night
> My worlds both parts, and (oh) both parts must die
> You which beyond that heaven which was most high
> Have found new sphers, and of new lands can write,
> Powre new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
> Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly,
> Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more:
> But oh it must be burnt; alas the fire
> Of lust and envie have burnt it heretofore,
> And made it fouler; Let their flames retire,
> And burne me ô Lord, with a fiery zeale
> Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale.

The penitent's efforts to instigate his own salvation ('that so *I* might / drowne my world with weeping'), founder weakly on an 'earnestly' which almost seems to look back antithetically at 'cunningly', as if to sully the benign valence of the adverb along with the perfectly elemented creation it figures. Twisting and turning in disjunctive volta after volta, the sonnet unfolds not only as a search for the shape the sinner's repentance should take, but also as a meditation on the impossibility of fashioning prayer out of worldly tears and carnal flames. The speaker's pleading 'earnestly' does not profess so much as it calls for a sincerity the lyric locates beyond what its fallen language is able to conjure. As chapter two suggested, a consciousness of the endemic sinfulness of human works affords an irremovable self-consciousness to confessions of a Calvinist orientation. 'I am a little world', likewise, performs its own fallenness, each invocation falling away to land finally upon a fiery zeal able to eclipse the soul and the frame of the poem itself. The sacred parodist's attempt to re-purpose the tears and fires of earthly love dramatised by another sonnet, 'O might those sighes and teares returne againe', gives way in this poem to an apocalyptic fantasy of self-dissolution. There is more than a hint of self-aggrandisement in the speaker's search for new tears to water his repentance 'beyond that heaven which was most high', as well as in the suggestion that he has single-handedly

wrecked the soul beyond repair. The allusion to astronomical discovery may encode a veiled reference to theological controversy, a warning against innovation, or 'light affecting, in religion, newes', perhaps equally applicable to Protestant as to Catholic attempts to reform penitential doctrine (though, admittedly, it is among Ignatius Loyola's company that Donne places Copernicus in his satire against the Jesuits).[20] The plea for God to consign the contaminated world to the flames almost seems to rise in direct response to a prideful undercurrent in the penitent's attempt to enlarge his repentance beyond ordinary means. Or is the desired destruction of the self another hubristic attempt to transcend a constraining microcosm? We may be witnessing here an instance of what a number of critics have described as the 'struggle for humility' characteristic of the *Holy Sonnets*.[21] 'Repair me now', 'impute me righteous', the sinner begs, or rather commands God, reminding him of the claims by which he is owed salvation, even if ultimately the imperatives are shouted into the void, exuding a sense of 'religious futility, of wild gesture'.[22]

The strenuosity of the *Holy Sonnets* has frequently been interpreted in terms of a recalcitrant subjection to God. Unwilling to erase himself before the divine, the moments in which orthodoxy seems to give way to idiosyncrasy are alternately prized and chided by a reception history which often yields the impression that the speaker of the *Holy Sonnets* falls short of something – of theological consistency, communion with the divine, even of psychological and moral integrity. Stanley Fish notably ascribes to Donne's sensibility a violent desire for possession (and self-possession) reflective of a gendered power dynamic.[23] Even where the poems appear to invert such gender roles by representing the speaker's utmost self-abasement, Donne cannot subdue a desire for control fitfully reasserted by the insistence with which he demands to be saved. It is in part as an attempt to save Donne from Fish's onslaught that Nancy Selleck proposes that lack of control over a permeable body/soul unit is embraced by the speaker of such poems as 'Oh to vex me, contraryes meete in one':

> As humorous is my contritione
> As my prophane love, and as soone forgott:
> As ridlingly distemperd, cold and hott,
> As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.
> I durst not view heaven yesterday; and to day
> In prayers, and flattering speaches I court God:
> To morrow I quake with true feare of his rod.

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[20] 'Patebit haec ianua aliquid in re aliqua novi molitis, mihi totam mundi machinam versanti, & pene novo Creatori, occludetur?' ('Shall these gates be open to such as have innovated in small matters? and shall they be shut against me, who have turned the whole frame of the world, and am thereby almost a new Creator?') John Donne, *Ignatius His Conclave*, ed. T. S. Healy (Oxford: OUP, 1969), pp. 14-5.
[21] Patrick Grant, *The Transformation of Sin: Studies in Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University, 1974), p. 42.
[22] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, p. 396.
[23] Stanley Fish, 'Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power', in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katherine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: UCP, 1990), pp. 223-252; cf. Elizabeth M. A. Hodgson, *Gender and the Sacred Self in John Donne* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), pp. 102-109.

So my devout fitts come and go away
Like a fantastique Ague: save that here
Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare. (5-14)

The 'interpersonal' or relational form of selfhood which Selleck argues was the predominant way of conceptualising the 'self' in the early modern period helpfully revises critical assumptions about subjectivity. In 'I am a little world', the final line's eucharistic allusion points, indeed, to a unification of God and man in a digestive fire which melds the outlines of subject and object. The sinner assimilates and is assimilated to God in a blaze which consumes at the same time as it consummates. Yet the suggestion that the speaker, in 'Oh to vex me', ultimately hails lack of control as the final and most desirable solution, and that 'shaking with fear' is the 'spiritual cure' to his distemperement risks downplaying the sinner's anguish over his state of tormenting instability.[24] David Marno, in a similar vein to Selleck, suggests that the sonnet achieves a 'higher level of devotion' as a result of the final turn towards a muteness it previously censured.[25] Both approaches fail to account for the unease evoked by the final disposition of 'feare', unmistakably a penitential attitude of 'attrition', rather than true 'contrition' originating from love for God. That post-Tridentine dogma was frequently accused of allowing for absolution despite insufficient grounds to testify genuine repentance, may leave us all the more sceptical about the conclusion that the sinner's 'best dayes' are those in which fear prevails.[26]

A humoral model of subjectivity, what is more, may veer too far in the attempt to deny the dualism on which the sonnets' negotiations between subject and object positions continue to rely.[27] While openness and receptivity to God may be necessary for grace to take its course, there are other encroaching influences against which the sinner must guard by hardening the boundaries of his identity. The speaker is thus constituted not only through an interpersonal flux which allows God to take possession over him, but also through a process of differentiation from sin. 'If faithfull soules be alike glorifi'd' illustrates how individuation coexists with an interpersonal model of subjectivity in the poems. The sonnet poses the problem of deceitful appearances, wondering whether glorified souls are able to see 'the mindes white truth' (8) or whether they are forced to rely on deceitful 'circumstances' and 'signes' to make their surmises. Faced with the fundamental inaccessibility of the truth about the self, the volta prompts the soul to turn back inwards:

[…] Then turne
O pensive soule, to God, for he knowes best
Thy true griefe, for he put it in my breast. (12-4)

[24] Nancy Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 78-80.
[25] David Marno, *Death Be Not Proud: The Art of Holy Attention* (Chicago: UCP, 2019), p. 222.
[26] On contrition and attrition in the poems, see Douglas L. Peterson, 'John Donne's Holy Sonnets and the Anglican Doctrine of Contrition', *Studies in Philology*, 56 (January 1959), 504-11.
[27] Cf. Brian Cummings, 'Donne's Passions: Emotion, Agency and Language', in *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 51-71.

The pronominal shift from 'thy' to 'my' underlines the introspective movement, as the dramatic address to the soul recoils back to the first-person subjectivity of the lyric persona: the redemptive gesture of surrender Selleck identifies in the 'self-objectifying' perspective of 'Oh to vex me' gives way to an intensely *subjective* experience of repentance born from the encounter with grace.[28] The only epistemic certainty, the speaker suggests, is the knowledge of the self reflecting God and reflected back to him. Confessional discourse straddles intersubjectivity and solipsism: at the same time as it unsettles a conception of the subject as the seat of autonomous agency by revealing him as fundamentally constituted by God, it re-affirms the dualistic premises of the subject's determination. As Foucault writes, the practice is intimately tied to a 'new way of philosophizing' identifiable with a Cartesian *prima cogitatio*: the discernment of the truth in 'a self-examination that yields, through a multitude of fleeting impressions, the basic certainties of consciousness'.[29] The validation of the 'white' truth of the mind occurs, however, at the cost of a pervasive scepticism about the communicability of the self. 'If faithfull soules' thus once again unravels itself by hinting at a truth beyond what it is able to represent. Donne's crown of sonnets, *La Corona*, opens with a confident assertion of the 'white sincerity' (6) of the poet's divine Muse, but the 'white truth' of Donne's speakers is ultimately located in a cloistered interiority witnessed and authenticated only by the deity from which that truth springs. In a 1629 sermon on Genesis 1:26, Donne will affirm: 'That goodnesse onely which consists in glorifying God, and God in Christ, and Christ in the sinceritie of the truth, is true whiteness'.[30] The 'rednesse' of a shameful blush is not a sign of an altered state of being, but of an innate, 'Adamic' sinfulness.[31] Yet Donne adds an unexpected twist to this conventional colour symbolism at the end of the homily: 'Be pleased to receive this note at parting, that there is a *Macula alba*, a spot, and yet white, as well as a red spot: a whitenesse that is an indication of a leprosie, as well as a rednesse'.[32] The visible world of 'signs' is cast again into disarray, as the mantle of 'white truth' vaunted by the pharisee turns into a sore, betraying the spiritual leprosy bred by trusting too much in one's own truthfulness.[33]

Is the 'white truth' asseverated by a speaker who 'valiantly hels wide mouth o'rstride[s]' a *Macula alba* or a sign of Christ's 'true whiteness'? The performativity often attributed to Donne's poetic persona would seem antithetical not only to a confession of self, but also to a sincere confession of faith. As in Petrarch, the question of the speaker's 'sincerity' may appear

[28] Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom*, p. 79.
[29] 'l'examen de soi-même qui délivre, à travers tant d'impressions fugitives, les certitudes fondamentales de la conscience.' Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1990), p. 60; *La Volonté de Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 80.
[30] John Donne, 'Two Sermons Preached Before King Charles upon the xxvi Verse of the First Chapter of Genesis', *The Sermons of John Donne: Sermons Preached at the Court of Charles I*, vol. 3, ed. David Colclough (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 157-75, p. 174.
[31] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, p. 388.
[32] Donne, *Sermons Preached at the Court of Charles I*, p. 174.
[33] Ibid.

inconsequential, even naïve. Colin Burrow takes such an approach when he writes in a review of John Stubbs' biography of Donne: 'If we are looking for Donne's 'life' it is more likely to be found in his writing's arrhythmic movements from role to role, from argument to argument, and in his anxious glances to his audience, than in even the most painstaking literary biography. A sense of performance, rather than of confession, runs through almost every word he wrote'.[34] Yet what is confession if not a kind of performance? The dramaturgy of a 'confessional conscience' proves a generative model for the devotional poem precisely because its self-conscious movement from 'role to role' anchors its sincerity: confession's self-defeating rhetoric, the implacable self-suspicion with which it scrutinises and dismantles its own assertions of 'white sincerity', is also what holds the potential to redeem the 'white truth' it holds out.[35] It is true that, as Anthony Nuttall wryly remarks, 'a very small quantum of reflexive intelligence can cost you your innocence'.[36] The introspective exercise of confession is thus a risky endeavour, one in which the danger of self-exculpation and over-scrupolosity are never far: indeed, the shape of the ritual seems to tempt each in turn. 'I have become a question to myself, and that is my infirmity', Augustine laments in the *Confessions* (X, 33)*:* the original infirmity (*languor*) of self-knowledge.[37] At the same time, confession is perhaps never so true to itself (and never so truthful) as when it is aware of its own falsifying potential. If so, it may lend itself to be consummated by God's grace because and not in spite of the subject's awareness that he stands on the very brink of giving himself the lie. The literary confession, so precariously poised between truth and falsehood, might paradoxically prove the most congenial place for investigating the truth claims of confessional discourse. The reflection of man, Reason says in Augustine's *Soliloquies*, almost seems to reach uncannily out of the surface of the mirror, as if wanting to substitute itself to the 'real' man (II, 9, 17).[38] Dismissing confession as a naïve category of literary analysis aids, perhaps, the 'persona' in the mirror to cross over from the other side, rather than allowing the mirror image to remain true to itself; for, as Reason adds, 'how could it be a true reflection if it were not a false man?' (II, 10, 1).[39]

Excess/Impurity

The paradoxes of confessional discourse in the *Holy Sonnets* go some way towards accounting for the motions of a lyric subjectivity which seems to pivot between shrouded self-enclosure and histrionic self-dramatisation. Excluding the 'personal' from Donne's poetic persona in the attempt to

[34] Colin Burrow, 'Recribrations', *London Review of Books*, 28.19 (5 October 2006), 3-6, p. 6.
[35] As Brian Cummings concludes, 'we should not be too easily persuaded by their scepticism any more than we should by their credence. The *Holy Sonnets* try out faith and faithlessness by turns. What makes them continually rewarding is not the ultimate triumph of either but the uneasy tension between the two, the way that the one depends on the other.' Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, p. 406.
[36] Anthony D. Nuttall, *Overheard by God: Fiction and Prayer in Herbert, Milton, Dante and St. John* (London; New York: Methuen, 1980), p. 66.
[37] 'mihi quaestio factus sum, et ipse est languor meus', PL 32, 800.
[38] 'an non tibi videtur imago tua de speculo quasi tu ipse velle esse, sed ideo esse falsa, quod non est?' Augustine, *Soliloquiorum libri II*, PL 32, 893.
[39] 'unde in speculo vera hominis imago, si non falsus homo?', PL 32, 893.

separate ethical from aesthetic considerations runs aground when faced with the interdependence between sincerity and performance thematised by Donne.[40] That the sinner's self-reflection simultaneously produces an acknowledgment of autonomous moral agency and of absolute dependence on God, as the previous section argued, is a problematic aspect of Donne's poetic subjectivity which is bound to and illuminated by the paradigm of confession. Neither a conception of self-contained subjectivity on the one hand, nor the openness of a permeable body on the other adequately grasps the moral and ontological condition of a confessing subject who is at once 'actor', 'witness' and 'reflexive object' of the truth act.[41] An alternative model of the kind of subjectivity produced by confession is offered by Julia Kristeva's conception of 'subjectified abjection' in *Powers of Horror*.[42] A work which sometimes tends to be flattened into a phenomenology of disgust, Kristeva's theory of abjection advances an ambitious response to Jacques Lacan's theory of the narcissistically determined subject.[43] The encounter with the abject is the 'pre-condition' of narcissism and of the self-contained, solipsistic subjectivity it emblematises.

The abject for Kristeva is the source of repulsion which represents the dissolution of meaning, but also demarcates the borders of the subject's identity. Abjection thus inhabits and haunts not only the edges, but also the deepest recesses of subjectivity and of signification. According to Kristeva, the Christian turn towards an internalisation of abjection – no longer locating pollution in external contaminants but in the soul itself – transfers sin to the sphere of discourse. By absorbing the abject in the act of purifying it, confessional speech establishes the 'symbolic' order at the same time as it becomes eminently expressive of the jettisoned domain of the corporeal or 'semiotic'. It is in art and literature that Kristeva finds the beating pulse of the subject's primal encounter with the abject, and of its various historical and cultural permutations: indeed, 'the artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies, appears as the essential component of religiosity'.[44] Art reveals the signifying mechanisms through which the abject is sounded and brought to light. This is the revolutionary promise held out by poetic language in Kristeva's early work: while sacrificial ritual conceals and reifies the passage from the semiotic to an order of language coextensive with social regulation, poetic language exposes the workings of its own sublimation of the 'semiotic' into the 'symbolic'.[45] The self-scrutinising dynamics of confession outlined by the previous section of this

[40] As Katrin Ettenhuber suggests in relation to the *Essayes in Divinity*, in Donne 'professional self-fashioning and inward contemplation are inextricably linked.' Katrin Ettenhuber, *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. 109.
[41] Foucault, *Du Gouvernement des Vivants*, p. 80.
[42] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, tr. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 128; 'abjection subjectivée', in *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 150.
[43] Jacques Lacan, 'Le Stade du Miroir comme Formateur de la Fonction du Je', in *Écrits*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), pp. 89-100.
[44] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17; 'l'expérience artistique, enracinée dans l'abjet qu'elle dit et par là même purifie, apparaît comme la composante essentielle de la religiosité.' *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, pp. 25-6.
[45] Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), pp. 70-83.

chapter partake in the self-reflexivity of a poetic language engaged, according to Kristeva, in re-tracing the processes by which the abject is unearthed, taunted, and imperfectly subdued. Perhaps confession thus betrays an essentially literary or artistic character; by the same token, it is the power transferred to discourse by confession's promise of redemption which enables poetic language to ring out with the force of revelation. The *felix culpa* of a confessional culture is, Kristeva suggests, the emergence of art as the culmination of confession's transformation of the abject in the most propitious place for communication with the divine.[46]

The sensuous terms in which Donne represents the life of the spirit have led in recent decades to an emphasis on the corporeal and material aspects of Donne's imagination: as we have seen, the question which then arises is how to conciliate Donne's 'interinanimations' of body and soul with the dualistic premises of a speaking subject who locates truth in an incommunicable interiority.[47] The dialectic instigated by the encounter with abjection has the merit of conceptualising a form of symbolic activity constituted in dialogue and in tension with the wordless, passive materiality of the 'semiotic', rather than subsuming the spiritual within a world of inert matter. The notion of 'subjectified abjection', relatedly, throws light on the paradox of the sinner's agency in confession, conceived both as a self-annihilating gesture of divine ventriloquism and as a truth act almost synonymous with intentionality and individual accountability. An examination of the 'confessional' subject of the *Holy Sonnets* through the lens of the 'abject' not only accounts for the emotional tenor of Donne's conceits, but also shows how passions perceived as excessive are intimately related to the kind of subjectivity from which they proceed – or which proceeds from them. The poet himself, indeed, emerges as a figure of 'abjection' – both repellent and repelled – in many critical accounts of the *Holy Sonnets*. Donne's first twentieth century editor, Herbert Grierson, measures the lyrics unfavourably against the devotions of 'simpler and purer souls' such as George Herbert.[48] Wilbur Sanders censures the tastelessness of Donne's sexual conceits, and Fish startlingly describes his use of language as 'bulimic' – that is, as characterised by a revulsion towards the very means of rhetorical manipulation with which the speaker exerts his lust for control: words are 'the object of his desire and of his abhorrence.'[49] Identifying and isolating an idiosyncratic personality in Donne's poems, it seems, replicates the same pattern of individuation set in motion by the cultural discourses of confession,

[46] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, pp. 153-4.
[47] See Elaine Scarry, 'Donne: 'But yet the body is his booke'', in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 70-105; Nancy Selleck, 'Donne's Body', *Studies in English Literature*, 41.1 (Winter 2001), 149-74; Ramie Targoff, *John Donne: Body and Soul* (Chicago: UCP, 2008).
[48] H. J. C. Grierson, 'The Poetry of John Donne', in *The Poems of John Donne*, vol. 2 (Oxford: OUP, 1912), pp. li-lii.
[49] Wilbur Sanders, *John Donne's Poetry* (Cambridge: CUP, 1971), p. 130; Fish, 'Masculine Persuasive Force', p. 223.

which are what enable the speaker's individuality to come into view, in the lyrics as well as in the minds of readers primed to recognise the marks of selfhood in the confessional voice.

Confession, undoubtedly, always poses a risk of contamination: as penitential manuals stress, care is required lest the priest's innocence be tainted by a lascivious recital of sin, or conversely, lest the confessor's leading question cause the penitent to begin entertaining previously unfathomed possibilities.[50] Thomas Docherty considers that Donne's divine lyrics deploy the language of confession in precisely this compromising rather than cathartic fashion: far from working as incitements to prayer, the poems 'work to damn' the reader 'by making her or him repeat the texts' errors, crossings or 'sinful' posture'.[51] Donne seems to anticipate this mutually incriminating and contaminating form of reading when, in a sermon on Psalm 38:3, he likens his youthful love poetry to an original sin which keeps visiting upon the author the sins of his future readers: 'their sin that shall sinne by occasion of any wanton *writings* of mine, will be my sin, though they come after.'[52] The inescapability of a transgression perpetually revived by posterity leads Donne to reflect on the ontological paradox of sin, one which Kristeva will describe as the 'weight of meaninglessness' that is the 'abject': 'Wofull riddle; sin is but a privation, and yet there is not such another positive possession: sin is nothing, and yet there is nothing else.'[53] Like the dispossession on which the posthumous life of the written word depends, even as it conjures an illusion of authorial presence, sin is connoted by the condition of absence – a radical lack from which, perhaps, its immanence and infinite reproducibility also stem. One consequence of such immanence is that the abject inexorably seeps into the attempt to 'abject' it. This can be observed in the mechanisms of 'abjection' mobilised by a pathologisation of the speaker of the *Holy Sonnets*: 'abjecting' Donne may thus involve an attempt to deny the hermeneutics of reciprocal contamination between author and reader imagined by Donne. An element of this denial of the abject within the critical position itself may be present in the view that Donne asserts an autonomous, narcissistic individuality resistant both to the influence of divine grace and to orthodoxy. In fact, the highly individuated voice of the speaker in the *Holy Sonnets* is not only consonant with orthodoxy, but directly results from it. As Foucault's model of the fundamental tension and interdependence of the two regimes of truth at the heart of Christian belief reveals, 'confession of self' tends to resist the discourse of faith at the same time as it cannot exist without it.

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[50] See Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Lea, 1896), pp. 378-80.
[51] Docherty, *John Donne, Undone*, p. 246.
[52] John Donne, 'Sermon Preached at Lincoln's Inn [spring or summer 1618] on Psalm 38.3', in *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, vol. 2 (Berkley: University of California Press, 1955), pp. 72-94, p. 88.
[53] Ibid.; Cf. 'A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me' ('Un 'quelque chose' que je ne reconnais pas comme chose. Un poids de non-sens qui n'a rien d'insignifiant et qui m'écrase'). Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2; *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, p. 10.

Foucault suggests in his posthumous *Confessions of the Flesh* that early Christian thought, in particular that of Augustine, de-emphasised the two principal categories of impurity and excess around which ancient morality was organised.[54] Moving the source of pollution to the soul meant that the avoidance of excess was no longer functional as a guiding ethical principle: no 'moderate' amount of concupiscence can ever be good. Transferring purification to discourse eventually enables an affirmation of juridical structures underpinned by the absolute power conferred to language.[55] Foucault indicates in outline that the juridical turn makes the category of impurity obsolete. Yet one might say in keeping with his analysis that, rather than diminishing the role of excess and impurity, Christianity's internalisation of pollution taboos leads on the one hand to a rehabilitation of excess – in the necessity for vehement mortification – and on the other to a sense of impurity which belongs to the fabric of the fallen being, and which thus becomes all the more irremovably central. Both these tendencies are manifest in the theology of justification from sin and the resulting meditative practices which inform Donne's poetic sensibility. The foundational equivalence of death and sin locates impurity in man's very being, which becomes the object (or 'abject') of pollution from which he can only purify himself through ascetic self-mortification and, ultimately, death. Donne, in this vein, will describe sin as the self-perpetuation of an endemic malady in a 1626 sermon preached at Paul's Cross: 'I am as apt to take, as to give infection; I am a reciprocall plague; passively and actively contagious; I breath corruption, and breath it upon my selfe; and I am the Babylon that I must goe out of, or I perish'.[56] As Kristeva writes in relation to the experience of 'abjection' evoked by the sight of a corpse: 'it is not I who expel, 'I' is expelled'.[57] The contemplation of mortality in the *contemptus mundi* tradition thus shadows a twofold meaning: it warns of a contingent and precarious condition, while also mirroring an endemic, sinful contamination of the flesh. Donne's reference to the 'excrementall jelly that thy body is made of at first, and that jelly which thy body dissolves to at last' in a 1628 Lincoln's Inn sermon on Job 19:26 echoes the meditative practices recommended by works such as pseudo-Augustine's popular *Speculum Peccatoris* (translated in English in 1585).[58] The sinner is here instructed to regard himself as a living corpse, whose 'conception is menstruous and filthie superfluitie of nature, that is, whose beginning is dirte, & ende rottennesse'.[59] The penitent does not

[54] Michel Foucault, *Les Aveux de la Chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), p. 329.
[55] Kristeva makes the same observation in *Powers of Horror*, p. 132; 'l'acte de jugement exprimé par la parole.' *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, p. 154.
[56] This sermon will be analysed at length below. John Donne, 'Sermon 3 Preached upon the Penitentiall Psalmes', in *The Sermons of John Donne*: *Sermons Preached at St Paul's Cathedral, 1626*, ed. Mary Ann Lund (Oxford: OUP, 2017), pp. 37-52, p. 48.
[57] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 3-4; 'Ce n'est plus moi qui expulse, 'je' est expulsé.' *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, p. 11.
[58] John Donne, 'Sermon Preached at Lincoln's Inn [Easter Term 1620], on Job 19.26', in *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, vol. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 91-113, p. 105.
[59] 'Vide in hoc speculo quid es, quid eris, cuius conceptio tabes menstrua origo lutum, putrendo finis.' Pseudo-Augustine, *Speculum Peccatoris* (Paris: Antoine Caillaut, ca. 1485-90), p. 7; *The Glasse of Vaine-Glorie* (London: John Windet, 1585), p. 34.

turn away from the 'utmost of abjection' that is the cadaver, but on the contrary draws out and inhabits the heart of darkness from which his revulsion springs.

The inner kernel of self-contempt, however, is inextricable from that of self-love, just as fear of the abject is invariably accompanied by desire in Kristeva's scheme. Augustine's founding statement that two kinds of love create two different cities – one built on contempt of God and love of self, the other on love of God and contempt of self – reveals the inextricability of self-mortification and desire (*City of God*, XIV, 28).[60] Donne's contemporary, the Jesuit writer Luis de la Puente, is thus able to extol the sanctity of self-hatred in Catullan fashion: 'nunquam enim tantum te amas quanto te ita odisti' ('you never love yourself as much as when you hate yourself').[61] De la Puente paints a remarkable picture of self-contempt as a hecatomb of the sins harboured by the soul. The sins dwelling in the inner citadel are to be slaughtered one by one, and their putrefying corpses quickly removed in order to purify the soul from the resulting miasma: a warning at once of the necessity and dangers attendant on immersing oneself in the memory of sins, even in the process of expelling them.[62] As Jean Delumeau argues in his analysis of guilt as a 'historical object', the contempt of the self is matched by a narcissistic pull exerted by the demands of a guilty conscience:

> Paranoid fear of corruption, the consciousness of an insolvent debt, and the image of a destructive God, loved and hated at the same time, who does not allow His subjects any of their own desires and is content with their martyrdom: these are just so many factors that simultaneously induce perfectionism and narcissism. For the feeling of guilt combines two fears: that of losing the love of the other and that of being unworthy of oneself.[63]

Stachniewski reaches a similar conclusion in an account of the *Holy Sonnets* which reads their anguish in terms of a theology responsible for 'brutaliz[ing] self-esteem'.[64] The Calvinist orientation which Stachniewski identifies as the source of a dangerous self-contempt in the poems, however, derives from a longstanding tradition which shapes self-regard (if not a narcissistic love of the self, as Delumeau suggests) out of the exercises of self-mortification it prescribes. Calvin's description of the human heart, 'so throughly soked in poison of sinne, that it can breath out nothing but corrupt stinke'

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[60] 'Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo, terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, caelestem vero amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui'. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, PL 41, 456.
[61] Luis de la Puente, *Dux Spiritualis*, tr. Melchiorre Trevinnio (Coloniae Agrippinae: Kinchius, 1617), p. 270. Cf. Gaius Valerius Catullus, *Catullus*, ed. D. F. S. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), Carmen 85.
[62] De la Puente, *Dux Spiritualis*, pp. 265-267.
[63] 'Peur panique de la souillure et conscience d'une dette insolvable, image d'un Dieu dévoreur, à la fois haï et aimé, qui ne concède aucun désir propre à ses sujets et se satisfait de leur martyre, autant de facteurs qui poussent à la fois au perfectionnisme et au narcissisme. Car le sentiment de culpabilité associe deux craintes: celle de perdre l'amour de l'autre et celle d'être indigne de soi.' Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th-18th Centuries*, tr. Eric Nicholson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 300; *Le Péché et la Peur: La Culpabilisation en Occident, XIIIe-XVIIIe Siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), p. 335.
[64] John Stachniewski, 'John Donne: The Despair of the Holy Sonnets', *ELH*, 48.4 (Winter 1981), 677-705; cf. Paul Cefalu, 'Godly Fear, Sanctification, and Calvinist Theology in the Sermons and Holy Sonnets of John Donne', *Studies in Philology*, 100.1 (Winter 2003), 71-86.

(*Institutes*, II, 5, 19) is thus not only in line with medieval penitential culture, but is enlisted in an ultimately consolatory narrative of redemption.[65]

The limit of both these approaches – Delumeau's conception of a Catholic 'pastorale de la peur', and the 'persecutory imagination' Stachniewski attributes to Calvinism – is the tendency to import or displace the pathologisation of the individual to Christian culture at large. The guiding myth of narcissism, equally, does not accommodate the inextricability of desire from the drive of rejection. If 'there is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded', self-mortification is a process that can never be complete.[66] The desire for an ideal self thus feeds on its own starvation, as Luis de Granada, another Jesuit author much in vogue in the seventeenth century, imagines in his *Sinner's Guide*. The creator is here described as an artist who deliberately leaves his work unfinished, the picture coming to life half-formed: 'God will afflict thee with hunger, that being compelled by this necessity, he might make you enter in by the right gate. […] For this cause, he that hath made thee, would not presently finish and make thee perfect.'[67] Calvin also refers to human works as eternally striving to be perfected by God's grace: 'vnpure, vncleane, and but halfe works' (*Institutes*, III, 17, 9).[68] The perennially insatiate desire of the lover, indeed, is enshrined with a transport of lyricism by Augustine's prayer in the *Confessions*: 'Fragrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelo tibi; Gustavi et esurio et sitio; Tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam' ('Thou didst breathe fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for Thee: I tasted Thee, and now hunger and thirst for Thee: Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace') (X, 33).[69] Donne, similarly, will define confession as a form of prayer that is eternally yearning, a cry which is at once a response to a call and a questioning, despairing plea for consummation.

Abject Creations

Donne's most extensive discussion of confession occurs in a sermon on Psalm 32:5: 'I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confesse my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin'.[70] Confession is an 'art' according to Donne: 'This is the Sacrament of Confession; So we may call it in a safe meaning; That is, the mystery of Confession: for true Confession is a mysterious Art'.[71] Playing on the translation of μυστήριον as 'sacramentum', the sermon raises the controversial question of whether confession

[65] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Thomas Norton (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1578), p. 128[v].
[66] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 5; 'Rien de tel que l'abjection de soi pour démontrer que toute abjection est en fait reconnaissance du manque fondateur de tout être, sens, langage, désir.' *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, pp. 12-3.
[67] Luis de Grenada, *The Sinner's Guide*, tr. Francis Meres (London: Richard Field, 1614), p. 27.
[68] Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 332[v].
[69] PL 32, 795.
[70] John Donne, *Sermons*, ed. Mary Ann Lund, vol. 12 (Oxford: OUP, 2017), p. 37.
[71] Ibid.

constitutes a sacrament, perhaps as an attempt to 'pique his auditors' interest with a whiff of heterodoxy', as Mary Ann Lund suggests.[72] The pun de-sacramentalises confession without de-sacralising it: the arcane secrecy of the Catholic ritual, as Donne describes it, is substituted by the inscrutable workings of justification. Even its ironic paradoxes come under Donne's purview: 'the mystery of the Kingdome of heaven is this, That no man comes thither, but in a sort as he is a notorious sinner'.[73] While the Catholic form of confession is a 'torture of the Conscience', a 'usurpation of God's power', and a 'spying into the counsails of Princes' (all conventional talking-points of anti-papist propaganda), Donne makes a point to remind his listeners that no reformed church has banned private confession – at least not the 'un-mis-interpretable' kind.[74] The fundamental problem of man's participation in the process of justification is articulated in characteristically somatic terms, the dawning of David's guilty conscience likened to the conception of new life: 'It was his first quickning, and inanimation, which grace gave his soul, as the soule gives the child in the Mothers wombe.'[75] Almost in counterpoint to the account of man's conception from an 'excrementall jelly' which heralds the putrefaction of the corpse, the action of grace is here described as a redemptive act of 'inanimation'.

The image encapsulates the notion of the penitent as a passive recipient and vessel of grace, but may also hint at a more active gestational role in bringing the gift of repentance to term. Indeed, if the sinner's task is simply that of letting himself or herself be traversed by grace, confession is the crucial link between prevenient grace and the grace which absolves the sinner. Donne thus lingers on the conjunction 'and' of the psalm's 'I will confesse *and* Thou forgavest' to press the point that the syntactical relation between the two clauses is not one of cause and effect:

> This is a wide doore, and would let out Armies of Instructions to you; but we will shut up this doore, with these two leaves thereof, The fulnesse of Gods Mercy, *He forgives the sin and the punishment*; And the seasonablenesse, the acceleration of his mercy, in this expression in our text, that *Davids* is but *Actus inchoatus*, He sayes *he will confesse*, And Gods is *Actus consummatus*, *Thou forgavest*, Thou hadst already forgiven the iniquity, and punishment of my sin. These will be the two leaves of this doore; and let the hand that shuts them be this *And*, this Particle of Connection which we have in the text, *I said, And thou didst*. […] So that this Hand, this *And*, in our Text, is as a ligament, as a sinew, to connect and knit together that glorious body of Gods preventing grace, and his subsequent grace; if our Confession come between and tie the knot, God, that moved us to that act, will perfect all.[76]

The speech act of confession, in other words, only becomes performative when it is sanctified. Yet the sinner's confession is absolutely necessary to 'come between and tie the knot', providing the material link between prevenient and subsequent grace. Mary Ann Lund remarks that Donne 'has

[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., p. 47.
[75] Ibid., p. 38. On 'inanimation' in Donne, see Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, pp. 11-15.
[76] Ibid., pp. 48-50.

comparatively little to say on the issue of priestly absolution or the absolving 'power of the keys': the image of the 'ligament' woven by grace, however, may hint at the minister's prerogative to bind and loose the sinner. It is divine grace, rather than priestly absolution, that must intervene to validate the sinner's confession. The pun on 'Hand/and' turns the conjunction into a bodily tendril which escapes a logical or grammatical interpretation: language becomes material and opaque, figuring the mystery of an embodied covenant of grace. Confession is the 'and': a hinge which connects but does not signify connection, shutting the door on further disquisition about the precise relation between man and God in justification, at the same time as it opens the way to salvation. The ambivalence of the 'hinge' of confessional discourse joining self and belief described by Foucault re-surfaces in Donne's acute sense of the 'mystery' of confession.

Rather than clarifying the mysterious 'art' of confession, the bodily metaphors which pervade the sermon only complicate matters, shrouding the operation of grace in images which ambiguate the distinction between volition and compulsion. Confession, we are told towards the end of the sermon, is like vomit. Donne himself seems squeamish about the analogy, introducing it half-apologetically:

> It is but a homely Metaphor, but it is a wholesome, and a usefull one, *Confessio vomitus*, Confession works as a vomit; It shakes the frame, and it breaks the bed of sin, and it is an ease to the spirituall stomach, to the conscience, to be thereby disburdened.[77]

The preacher's humbled rhetoric self-reflexively imitates the medicine of mortification conjured by a figure of speech more 'usefull' than pleasing. The allusion is to Origen's second homily on Psalm 37, extant in the Latin translation of Rufinus.[78] Both a chastising of language and irrepressible regurgitation of words, confession becomes akin to one of those abject bodily fluids from which one recoils, but which serves to bring into relief (or into being) what is healthy and pure: so that 'after we have been cleansed it may illuminate and brighten us' ('postea vero expurgatos iam vitiis illuminet et illustret').[79] Kristeva's words are apposite: 'During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit'.[80] Augustine also refers to confession as vomit in the *Enarrationes*, making explicit the convergence of sin and beauty 'as the lining and the cloth of one and the same economy': 'Confitentur enim peccata sua, vomunt mala quae avide voraverant: […] et erit confessio et pulchritudo. Amamus pulchritudinem; prius eligamus confessionem, ut sequatur pulchritudo' ('They confess their sins, and thus they vomit the sins they had avidly devoured: […] and

[77] Ibid., p. 43.
[78] 'iustum eum dico qui per confessionem suam peccatorum suorum evomet passiones', in Origen, *Homélies sur les Psaumes*, ed. Emanuela Prinzivalli, tr. Henri Crouzel and Luc Brésard (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1995), Hom. 37, II, 2-3, p. 308; the image recurs in 37, II, 6, p. 318.
[79] Origen, *Homélies*, 38, I, 7, p. 352.
[80] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3; 'Dans ce trajet où 'je' deviens, j'accouche de moi dans la violence du sanglot, du vomi.' *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, p. 11.

there will be confession and beauty. We love beauty; let us confess first, so that beauty may follow').[81] In the *Confessions*, the metaphor is employed to conjure the effect Augustine hopes his autobiography will produce, in a passage which alludes to a kind of mimetic reflex provoked by the sight of someone vomiting (or confessing): 'quae utinam audissent qui adhuc usque diligunt vanitatem et quaerunt mendacium: forte conturbarentur et evomuissent illud' ('If only those could have heard me who still loved vanity and sought after lying. Perchance they would have been troubled, and have vomited up their error') (IX, 4).[82] The image is also expounded by William of Auvergne in a description of the physiology of sin and its expulsion which posits that the healthier the appetite and digestive system of the Christian is, the more frequent and virulent the episodes of vomiting will be.[83]

Speech inhabits a space of ambiguity here: both voluntary and involuntary, choked by passion and carefully considered, symptom and relief of a spiritual malady. Particularly problematic is the nature of confessional rhetoric that the metaphor of *confessio vomitus* adumbrates. As Jean-François Lyotard observes, the analogy of confession to vomit connotes authenticity:

> One waits for panting words, hot off the breath, almost disgusting in pitch. Sin must be vomited out in spasms. Its confession will be seen as genuine only insofar as it is irrepressible, as if confession in itself was already due to the grace of the power it invokes, making the sinner unable to keep within his or her ignominy.[84]

In contrast to the mimetic function exercised by reading the story of the *Confessions* envisaged by Augustine, the fact that speech must be humbled for confession to be genuine leads Lyotard to doubt whether repentance can ever be expressed in a written form (a doubt which can be extended to the formulaic aspects of the ritual more generally). Donne shares Lyotard's scepticism: echoing pseudo-Augustine's *De vera et falsa poenitentia*, in a sermon on Psalm 6:8-10, he deplores the practice of 'confessions by letter', which by removing the occasion for blushing 'remove the shame, which is a part of the repentance'.[85] If the 'autoptic blush' of 'Oh my blacke Soule' is no more able to effect its own redemption than the red Adamic earth is able to dye itself white, in this instance Donne seems to make a small concession to the role of human works, co-opted in a critique of Catholic abuses of the

[81] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 123; 'C'est un des génies du Christianisme, et non des moindres, d'avoir ramassé en un seul geste la perversion et la beauté comme l'envers et l'endroit d'une seule économie.' *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, p. 146. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 95, 7, PL 37, 1252.
[82] PL 32, 767.
[83] William of Auvergne, *De Sacramento Poenitentia liber unus*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. F. Hotot, vol. 2 (Orléans, 1674), p. 487. See Lesley Smith, 'William of Auvergne and Confession', in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (York: York Medieval Press, 1998), pp. 95-107. Smith, however, mistakenly states that the image has no patristic precedent.
[84] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine*, tr. Richard Beardsworth (Stanford: SUP, 2000), p. 92.
[85] John Donne, 'Sermon No. 1 Preached on the Penitentiall Psalmes [April, May, or June 1963]', in *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, vol. 6 (Berkley: University of California Press, 1953), pp. 39-61, p. 58.

sacrament.[86] Donne's endorsement of the remission afforded by the penitential blush in the service of anti-Catholic polemic is all the more striking in light of the apocryphal nature of the text alleged by Erasmus and of Luther's strenuous rejection of its authority in his criticism of penance.[87] Though the involuntariness of 'erubescence' precludes a definite attribution of agency, *enim ipsa partem habet remissionis*.[88] 'Vomiting' as a somatic phenomenon is less unambiguously spontaneous, as Origen's prescription of the therapeutic remedy of *confessio vomitus* intimates (Fish's own somewhat distasteful metaphor of 'bulimia' is also resonant in this respect). Does confession then relinquish or impose control over the self in its gesture of self-mortification?

Another problem arises in response to Donne's use of the 'homely Metaphor' of confession as regurgitation: how does the 'material' conceptualisation of sin as regurgitated substance accord with the notion of moral impurity as a quality of the tainted human will? A tension emerges, in other words, between confession imagined as a process of 'abjecting' an external contaminant (a spiritual indigestion, or *indignatio ventris*, as William of Auvergne puts it) and the idea of an innate contamination which proceeds from a state of abjection that has been *subjectified*.[89] Donne's reference to vomit in a sermon on Proverbs 25:16, preached at court in 1621, illustrates this ambiguity. Here, 'honour, ease and plenty' are imagined as galling substances destined to be spewed by the sinner who has eaten them to excess: 'his honey was his soule, and that being vomited, he is now but a rotten and abhorred carcass'.[90] The passage bears some resemblance to Donne's elegy on a husband's 'Jealosie':

> Ready with loathsome vomiting to spue
> His Soule out of one hell, into a new. (7-8) [91]

The sinner, like the jealous husband, expels not only sin, but the soul itself. The inextricability of the abject from the interiority it has corroded paints a terrifying possibility: the 'loathsome vomiting' instigated by God's grace may not initiate a medicinal process of renewal, but deprive the sinner of the tainted soul altogether. The sermon on Proverbs is notable for Donne's emphasis on the liminal and heterogenous, one of the foundational characteristics of Kristeva's abject, informed by Mary Douglas' theory of impurity as 'matter out of place'.[92] Sin, Donne explains, renders man '*non unus*

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[86] On Donne's citations of Augustine as filtered by Gratian's *Decretum*, see Ettenhuber, *Donne's Augustine,* pp. 98-100.
[87] See Martin Luther, *Confitendi Ratio*, WA 6, 157-169, p. 164. On Erasmus' exclusion of the *De vera et falsa poenitentia* from the Augustinian canon, see Arnoud S. Q. Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation: The Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500-1620* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), pp. 80-1.
[88] Pseudo-Augustine, *De vera et falsa poenitentia*, PL 40, 1122. The treatise forms part of Gratian's *Decretum*, ed. Emil Friedberd, CJC 1 (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1879), II, c. 88.
[89] William of Auvergne, *De Sacramento Poenitentia liber unus*, p. 487
[90] John Donne, 'Sermon No. 10: Preached at Whitehall, April 8, 1621, on Proverbs 25.16', *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, vol. 3 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 225-40, p. 327.
[91] John Donne, *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: OUP, 1965).
[92] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

*sed multi*': he will only become unified, '*unus homo*, one and the same man' when he is returned to God's care.[93] Donne perhaps has in mind (though he does not explicitly cite) another illuminating maxim of Origen's: *ubi peccata, ibi multitudo* (*Homilies on Ezekiel,* IX, 1).[94] Like the stickiness of honey which blurs the distinction between subject and object in Jean-Paul Sartre's account of the 'viscous' (surely a significant precursor to Kristeva's 'abject'), the sermon hints at a dread of a heterogeneity which encroaches on the distinctiveness of the self.[95] An assertion of individuality underlies Donne's use of the image in the second satire's invective against the plagiarising poet who chews 'others wits fruits', and 'rankly digested, doth those things out-spue'.[96] The Senecan analogy of the creative process to the bee's transformation of nectar into honey is troubled by a fear of undifferentiation – of a literary as well as of a moral kind.[97]

The *actus inchoatus* of confession conjures the agony of coming into existence as a half-created being that is still mired in the 'abject' even as he rebels against it.[98] The notion of sin as an entity which attaches itself irremovably to the soul, moreover, presents a striking contrast to the physiological expulsion of sin which leaves the soul radiant implied by *confessio vomitus* (Augustine's confident *erit confessio et pulchritudo*). This exposes an ambivalence in the theorisation of sin as a substance which it is possible, and indeed necessary to cast out, but which also clings viscously to the soul, and to the language which attempts to purify it. Like the self-suspicion which attaches itself to the procedures of confession even as it is produced by them, transferring the task of purification to speech means that confessional language continually re-presents the abject which it tries to expel. Kristeva formulates this fundamental 'ambivalence of sin' with reference to the Adamic myth, which, she argues, opens two 'channels of interpretation' of the Fall: 'the one locates it in relation to God's will and in that sense causes it to be not only original but coexistent with the very act of signification; the other places it within the femininity-desire-food-abjection series'.[99] The 'subjectified' abject absorbed by the paternal law of discourse leads to an unforeseen and sacrilegious corollary: the possibility that 'the invitation to perfection is also an invitation to sin,' and vice versa.[100] Once it is introjected, it seems, sin permeates ever deeper, infecting the very soul of belief. Defining sin as an intrinsic quality of the will rather than as an extrinsic substance, in other words, has the

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[93] Donne, *Sermons*, ed. Potter and Simpson, vol. 3, p. 228.
[94] Origen, *Origenes Werke*, ed. W. A. Baehrens, *Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 33 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1925).
[95] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 654-662.
[96] John Donne, *The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: OUP, 1967).
[97] Seneca, *Epistles*, tr. Richard M. Gummere, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1920), Ep. 84, 3-4.
[98] The term *actus inchoatus* bears comparison to the Thomsitic designation of confession motivated by 'attrition' rather than 'contrition' as *confessio informis*. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Suppl*. q.5. a.1.
[99] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 126; 'l'une le situe par rapport à la volonté divine et en ce sens le rend non seulement originel mais coextensif à l'acte de la signification elle-même; l'autre le place dans la série féminité-désir-nutrition-abjection.' *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, p. 148.
[100] Ibid. 'De là à supposer que l'invitation à la perfection est aussi une invitation au péché, et vice versa, il n'y a qu'un pas – que la théologie officielle ne franchit peut-être pas, mais que le mystique s'accorde le vice insondable d'accomplir.'

potential to undermine the law which defines it as such, just as conferring a purificatory power to speech paradoxically leaves it vulnerable to abomination and blasphemy (or to what Kristeva would characterise as sinful jouissance). This is the challenge to divine law posed by Donne's 'If poysonous mineralls': the poem's 'dispute' with God opens by posing the question of the ambivalence of sin, understood either as external contamination or as internal infection of the will.

> If poysonous mineralls, and if that tree,
> Whose fruit threw death on else immortall us,
> If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
> Cannot be damn'd; Alas; why should I bee?
> Why should intent or reason, borne in mee,
> Make sinnes, else equall, in mee, more heinous? (1-6)

Why should 'intent' and 'reason' determine sinfulness rather than an absolute measure of impurity? The internalised otherness of the abject creates a crisis not only for the subject, but also for the structures of belief on which his identity rests. The sinner's 'wracked speech acts' mirror this crisis of signification: in the poem, 'the state of sin is bodied forth in fallen syntax'.[101] The doubt about whether reason makes human sin more 'heinous' is abandoned as the volta turns away from the speaker's blasphemies. Yet the sonnet implicitly answers its own questions, by dramatising the very sin of 'reason' which 'threw death' upon Adam: not the external contamination of a forbidden food, but inquiring too closely into the workings of divine justice. The final prayer for God to forget the speaker's sins begs for the sin of the poem itself to be forgotten. Yet even in the final gesture of self-erasure, the plea for forgetfulness risks re-formulating the speaker's envy for the vegetative unconsciousness of sin, and for that other (eminently human) faculty of 'memory' to fall away and drown in a 'Lethean flood'.

The abject thus seeps into the confessional discourse which sets out to banish it, insinuating itself at the heart of signification and of divinity itself. The 'abjection' internalised by what we might define as the 'masculinity-fear-language-law' axis, juxtaposed to a conceptualisation of sin in terms of the 'femininity-desire-food-abjection' series identified by Kristeva, heralds the ultimate abjection of the incarnate God. Kristeva surprisingly does not push her reflections to this conclusion, but it is clear that the sacrifice of God is the culmination of the primal 'abjection' of the divine word implied by the substitution of extrinsic pollution for spoken sin. Indeed, only by immersing itself in the abjection of the 'somatic' order can the restoration of the 'symbolic' order – of matter's ability to signify – take place. The iconographical tradition of 'Jesus as mother' is revelatory: the feminine axis of the abject is overtly joined in the figure of Christ with the axis of paternal discourse.[102] Donne's 'Why are wee by all creatures waited on?' inverts the terms of 'If poysonous mineralls' to articulate the same doubt

[101] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, p. 399.
[102] See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

about the nature of impurity in relation to human sin. Wondering at the subjection of creatures who appear 'more pure then I, / Simple, and further from corruption?' (3-4), the poem lands upon the 'wonder' of 'wonders' that is the sacrifice of Christ. The hierarchy of purity is radically disturbed by the deity who dies for his own creatures and 'foes'. 'Spit in my face, ye Jews', similarly, dwells on the magnitude of God's self-abasement:

> Spit in my face yee Jewes, and pierce my side,
> Buffet, and scoffe, scourge, and crucifie mee,
> For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd, and onely hee,
> Who could do no iniquitie, hath dyed;
> But by my death can not be satisfied
> My sinnes, which passe the Jewes impiety:
> They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I
> Crucifie him daily, being now glorified. (1-8)

The poem measures the distance between the abjection of Christ and the abjection of the sinner: the speaker jettisons himself as the most sinful of creatures, but instead of emerging purified, only exposes even greater depths of sin. There is undoubtedly an element of pride in the sinner's attempt to rival Christ's sacrifice, leading Thomas Docherty to regard the poem as a failed *imitatio Christi*.[103] Yet the conclusion reached by the sinner that any penance he might undergo will be insufficient to expiate his sins – something which only the sacrifice of Christ can bring about – is entirely orthodox. The confession remains an *actus inchoatus*, mired in impurity and waiting for God to consummate it.

In a similar way, 'Batter my heart, three person'd God' inhabits the position of utmost self-abjection, at the same time as it resurrects the figure of the self by means of humiliation and violent dispossession. Beauty and perversion are joined as the 'lining and cloth of the same economy' in the well-known paradox of sexual conquest:

> Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
> Except you enthrall mee, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee. (12-4)

Purity is attendant on impurity, even if the poem remains writhing in the violence of abjection. The feminine position of the abject, equally, helps re-establish the paternal law and the self-possessed subject, by the same token as it troubles it. It should not be surprising, in light of this dynamic, that the sinner's humiliation shadows his vindication, both in 'Spit in my face' and in 'Batter my heart': 'That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee' (3). The nature of confession as a type of speech which casts down the one who utters it at the same time as he 'rises' by its means is the linguistic counterpart of the abiding paradox of Christian belief: 'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time' (1 Peter 5:6). As Katrin Ettenhuber shows, this is a paradigm

[103] Docherty, *John Donne, Undone*, p. 138.

of the Augustinian hermeneutics of 'ascending humility' developed by Donne's *Essayes in Divinity*.[104] Donne adopts this almost as a definitive statement of belief, a personal 'Sermon', in his 'Hymne to God, in my sicknesse':

> And as to others soules I preach'd thy word,
> Be this my Text, my Sermon to mine owne,
> Therfore that he may raise the Lord throws down. (28-30)

The language of Donne's confessions is thrown down so that it may be raised up again. In the verse dedication addressed to E. of D., which introduces six 'Holy Sonnets' (the Variorum suggests these were six of the 'Holy Sonnets' or 'Divine Meditations' rather than *La Corona*, as was previously thought), Donne eulogises his patron by claiming that it was the latter's wit that wrought the poems, in the same way that 'the Suns hot Masculine flame / Begets strange creatures on Niles durty slime' (1-2).[105] The image provides an alternative to the second satire's revulsion at the plagiarist's recycled words: literary influence (and patronage) becomes an act of conception, or inanimation. Repentance is figured in similar terms as literary creation in Donne's sermon on confession (Psalm 32:5):

> This is our quickning in our regeneration, and second birth; till this come, a sinner lies as the Chaos in the beginning of the Creation, before the *Spirit of God had moved upon the face of the waters Dark*, and *voyd*, and *without forme*; He lies, as we may conceive, out of the Authors of Naturall Story, the slime and mud of the River *Nilus* to lie, before the Sun-beames strike upon it; which after, by the heat of those beames, produces severall shapes, and formes of creatures. So till this first beame of grace, which we consider here, strike upon the soule of a sinner, he lies in the mud and slime, in the dregs and lees, and tartar of his sinne. […] as the new creatures at Nilus, his sins begin to take their formes, and their specifications, and they appeare to him in their particular true shapes, and that which hee in a generall name, called Pleasure or Wantonnesse, now cals it selfe in his conscience, a direct Adultery, a direct Incest; and that which he hath called Frugality, and providence for family and posterity, tells him plainly, My name is Oppression, and I am the spirit of covetousnesse.[106]

Man is unformed matter led to differentiate itself from the dark waters of unconsciousness by the 'masculine' flame of grace. The passage is shaped by the ambiguity which recurs in Donne's accounts, as well as in his performances, of confession: the sinner is created as abject at the same time as he is revealed as such. The blasphemous question once again arises: is sin located in the materiality of sin or in the discourse that calls it into being *qua* sin? The dreadful possibility that 'the fall is the work of God' which the mystic 'grants himself the fathomless depravity' of uttering is figured by the inanimation which gives sin the power to speak and name itself.[107] Even in this confession, however, the sinner remains a half-formed creature immersed in the dregs and lees of the abject, aware of his

[104] Ettenhuber, *Donne's Augustine*, ch. 3.
[105] John Donne, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne: The Holy Sonnets*, ed. Gary A. Stringer, vol. 7.1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. lxxxvii-xci.
[106] Donne, *Sermons*, ed. Mary Ann Lund, vol. 12, p. 39.
[107] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 127.

abjection, and waiting for the grace of absolution to perfect him. The six 'Holy Sonnets' are similarly presented to Donne's patron as objects waiting to be 'purifie[d]' of their dross and consummated by his readers' judgment. Kristeva paints the picture of a literature characterised by confessional 'jouissance', a profession of sin resplendent in art fashioned out of the very inquisitorial discourses aimed at quashing the abject: art thus 'provided sinners with the opportunity to live, openly and inwardly apart, the joy of their dissipation set into signs: painting, music, words'.[108] The internalisation of the 'abject', indeed, is shadowed by the inherent self-destructiveness of confession, which infiltrates and unravels the very structures of signification. Yet the artistic jouissance of confession remains enclosed in the discourses which determine it: 'spoken sin' in Donne's sonnets of repentance is both redemptive and damning.

[108] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 131; 'l'art a donné aux pécheurs la chance de vivre, ouvertement et intérieurement à l'écart, la joie de leur débordement mis en signes: peinture, musique, parole.' *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, pp. 153-4.

## **Chapter Five:** Autobiographical Liturgies in *The Temple*

'Layes upon thine Altar burnt'

The third chapter of this thesis suggested that 'sacred parody' in the poetry of Robert Southwell simultaneously unsettles and re-asserts the neo-platonic premises of courtly love. Its problematisation of the signifying codes of amatory poetry and of the rhetorical function of allegory participates in a dynamic characteristic, according to Paul De Man, of literary and of confessional discourse. The fourth chapter gave an account of the *Holy Sonnets* in terms of Julia Kristeva's model of 'subjectified abjection', tracing Donne's depictions of confession as an unconsummated speech act which remains mired in the 'abject' while attempting to differentiate itself from it. This chapter will qualify the aporetic drive of confession identified by De Man and Kristeva by focusing on the sacramental and liturgical processes of subject formation in George Herbert's lyrics. *The Temple* has frequently been construed as the product of a dialectic between speech and silence, coincident with the motions of vivification and mortification of the sinner: in Anthony Nuttall's incisive formulation, 'Herbert's poetry owes much of its life to a kind of death-wish'.[1] The tension between the affirmation and the dissolution of the poetic voice is embedded in a confessional paradigm, the 'technology of the self' which holds together self-revelation and self-destruction: 'cette étonnante contrainte […] de tout dire pour tout effacer', the 'astonishing constraint' the Christian West places on the sinner 'to say all in order to erase all'.[2] Far from undermining its hold on the subject in the process of unravelling itself, confession emblematises in Foucault's account the fundamental foreclosure of a subject vowed to keep promulgating the structures of subjectivation from which he emerges: whether consigned to silence or to a permanent self-verbalisation which amounts to yet another, more pernicious form of muteness, no deliverance from the original stain of power seems possible for the 'beast of avowal'.

As I have indicated, this foreclosure erodes Foucault's own critical stance, for it too finds itself always and already imbricated in the prevailing 'regimes of truth' it seeks to elude, as well as leaning on the same 'technologies' of self-scrutiny. The recurrent attempts to dismantle the notion of an autarchic subject in the philosophical domain, likewise, seem to reproduce in a different form the confessant's recognition of the essential dispossession of his identity. But while repentance promises to restore the subject from his defacement through the gift of grace, deconstructing the 'trope' of the self may in fact claim to relinquish a fixed subject position only to anchor it, covertly but no less surely, to an almost deified ideal of indeterminacy. The fundamental solipsism betokened by a self perpetually engaged in exposing the illusory nature of his own identity paradoxically mirrors, in a

[1] Anthony D. Nuttall, *Overheard by God: Fiction and Prayer in Herbert, Milton, Dante and St. John* (London; New York: Methuen, 1980), p. 62.
[2] Michel Foucault, 'La Vie des Hommes Infâmes', in *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 3, ed. Daniel Defert, François Ewelt and Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), DE 196, p. 245; cf. Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), pp. 16-49, p. 43.

secular parody of divine plenitude, the circularity of the gift which gives itself back to the giver. As R. V. Young observes, 'the deconstructionist and the devotional poet are […] alike in deploring the secular humanist's illusion of self-sufficiency'.[3] If Herbert's self-erasing speakers appear at times to prefigure the 'death of the author', the voice of the poet conjures the presence of the Logos that speaks through him, in the same breath as it announces its absence. This sacramental dialectic of presence and absence gives rise, in Sophie Read's words, to a 'poetry of process'.[4] The impossible union of text and speech, silence and voice, space and time, and the persons of giver and receiver performed by the liturgical rite is the aspiration of *The Temple* – an aspiration which, however, is not always fulfilled. While this can partly be attributed to a crisis in the signifying power of language occasioned by the reformation of sacramental doctrine, and in particular of the understanding of the eucharist, the oscillation between a dislocated and a redeemed interiority in *The Temple* evokes a liminality experienced by its speakers as intrinsic to the penitent's condition.[5] This experience becomes all the more acute, this chapter will argue, as a result of the reformation of the liturgy which, by substituting auricular confession for a corporate act of contrition, accentuated the penitential character of the eucharist. Joining the consciousness of the sinner's alienation from God with the recognition of the workings of grace revealed by his contrition, a confessional paradigm of self-poiesis shapes in Herbert an aesthetic sensibility marked by the concourse and conflict of the transcendent and the contingent.

Herbert's frequent recourse to the rhetorical figure of *metanoia* is described by Sophie Read as 'more than a penitent impulse', in an analysis of *The Temple*'s dialectics of assertion and retraction which presupposes a distinction between the poetic and the theological import of the term that had become a focal point of controversy since Erasmus' translation of Matthew 4:17's *metanoite* as *resipiscite*, rather than *poenitentiam agite*.[6] While in a theological sense *metanoia* signifies a forward movement of conversion, 'in rhetoric, the figure exists as a narrative dramatisation of doubt'.[7] Much like the palinode, *metanoia* holds a potential for 'equivocation and elusiveness' which enables it to

[3] R. V. Young, 'Donne, Herbert, and the Postmodern Muse', in *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century English Religious Lyric*, ed. John R. Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), pp. 168-87, p. 187.
[4] Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), pp. 103-4.
[5] The connection between the sacrament of the eucharist and a new metaphysics of signification emergent in the post-Reformation has attracted considerable critical attention. See in particular Gary Kuchar, *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2005); Regina M. Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Palo Alto: SUP, 2008); Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England*; Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); and most recently Shaun Ross, *The Eucharist, Poetics, and Secularization from the Middle Ages to Milton* (Oxford: OUP, 2023).
[6] Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England*, p. 101.
[7] Ibid., pp. 103-4.

'illustrate a process of emendation without entirely performing it'.[8] The scene of rupture dramatised by *metanoia* as a figure of speech, however, is perhaps not so far removed from its theological counterpart. Foucault's account of *metanoia* as the manifestation of the 'passage' ('the wrenching away, the movement, the transformation, the access') inserts back into the theological domain the idea of a non-linear process of conversion. This is due not only to the ever-present possibility of a relapse, but also to the overhaul of linear temporality engendered by the action of grace in repentance, which must act preveniently to restore the sinner's image before he is able to turn towards it.[9] Foucault's remarks on the 'sacraments of the dead' in early Christianity suggest that the act of *metanoia* central both to baptism and penance represents at once 'the soul's movement acceding to the truth, and the manifested truth of that movement'.[10]

> [*Metanoia*] holds together, in the order of time, that which one no longer is, and that which one is already; in the order of being, death and life, the death that is dead in life and the life that is new life; in the order of will, detachment with regard to evil and commitment with regard to good; in the order of truth, the awareness that one has truly sinned and the confirmation that one is truly converted.[11]

Rather than conferring access to a lasting illumination, early Christian rituals of purification situate the moment of transformation in the gulf stretched between the two poles of past and present, life and death, sin and God. There is a 'double break' (*double rupture*) in the subject: never quite able to adhere seamlessly to the truth, he breaks away from himself towards the light, only to break away from the light again by falling back into his own darkness.[12] Though Foucault bases his commentary on the Shephard of Hermas and on Tertullian's writings, it is Augustine who perhaps best articulates the movement of reaching out towards God and falling back into darkness, in a passage of the *Confessions* which pictures the soul waiting for the dawn 'in the continuing uncertainty of human knowledge' ('incerto humanae notitiae'):

> Respiro in te paululum, cum effundo super me animam meam in voce exultationis et confessionis, soni festivitatem celebrantis. Et adhuc tristis est, quia relabitur et fit abyssus, vel potius sentit adhuc se esse abyssum.

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[8] Ibid.
[9] 'Le rôle de la *metanoia* dans le baptême […] est de manifester le 'passage' – l'arrachement, le mouvement, la transformation, l'accès.' Michel Foucault, *The Confessions of the Flesh*, ed. Frédéric Gros, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Penguin, 2021), p. 41; *Les Aveux de la Chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), p. 57.
[10] Ibid. 'La *metanoia* constitue ainsi un acte complexe qui est mouvement de l'âme accédant à la vérité, et vérité manifestée de ce mouvement.'
[11] Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh*, pp. 40-41; 'Elle fait tenir ensemble, dans l'ordre du temps, ce qu'on n'est plus et ce qu'on est déjà; dans l'ordre de l'être, la mort et la vie, la mort qui est morte et la vie qui est la nouvelle vie; dans l'ordre de la volonté, le détachement à l'égard du mal et l'engagement à l'égard du bien; dans l'ordre de la vérité, la conscience qu'on a vraiment péché et l'attestation qu'on est converti vraiment.' *Les Aveux de la Chair*, p. 57.
[12] Michel Foucault, 'Leçon du 27 février 1980', *Du Gouvernement des Vivants: Cours au Collège de France (1979-1980),* ed. François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana and Michel Senellart (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 184.

> *I take breath a little* in Thee, when *I pour out my soul in Thee with the voice of praise and confession, the noise of one feasting*. And my soul is still sad, because it falls back and becomes an abyss, or rather it feels that it is still an abyss. (*Confessions*, XIII, 14, 15)[13]

The feeling of intrinsic rupture from divine light is the reason why, according to Foucault, the essential innovation introduced by Christianity with respect to pagan antiquity is not a set of new beliefs surrounding the Fall (*la chute*), but rather a series of practices designed to manage the relapse (*la* re-*chute*).[14] By holding together sin and grace on the threshold of the 'double break' from God (as an inveterate sinner) and from oneself (as a redeemed subject), *metanoia*'s representation of a state of rupture as constitutive of identity sits at the heart of Christian doctrine and practice. The contested sacramental status of penance in the Reformation, in this light, perhaps only brings to the fore and radicalises the intermediate state of 'becomingness' to which the ritual of confession bears witness.

The poetry of Herbert carries an echo of Augustine's feeling that, despite the light of God breaking in through the shadows, we continue to 'trail the remains [of this darkness] in our body which is dead in sin' ('tenebrae, quarum residua trahimus in corpore propter peccatum mortuo').[15] Holding the speaker in a twilight space between sin and sanctification, Herbert fashions in *The Temple* a poetics of the 'threshold', or of 'double rupture'. At the opening of the 'Church', the longest section of *The Temple*, the pattern poem of 'The Altar' thus silently announces the sinner's redemption through the visual restoration of the broken altar, even as it ostensibly stages a meditation on the poet's inability to manifest the divine. The lyric is often read as an *ars poetica* for *The Temple* as a whole: Stanley Fish considers it exemplary of the 'career of the poet-speaker, who begins by asserting his agency and control, and then gradually relinquishes his claims to both the form and the effects of his art'.[16] Indeed, it appears that only by disavowing himself is the poet able to step into the consecrated space of the 'Church':

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant reares,
Made of a heart, and cemented with teares:
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workmans tool hath touch'd the same.
A HEART alone
Is such a stone,
As nothing but
Thy pow'r doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame,
To praise thy Name:

[13] PL 32, 851.
[14] Foucault, *Du Gouvernement des Vivants,* pp. 182-4. 'Le christianisme a pensé la faute, non pas tellement en termes de chute […]. Le christianisme a pensé la *re*chute.'
[15] Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII, 14, 15, PL 32, 851.
[16] Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-century Literature* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 212.

That, if I chance to hold my peace,
These stones to praise thee may not cease.
O let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,
And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine.[17]

If the speaker claims to raise a shattered altar, the shape hewn from the raw stone of the heart fills the page unbroken, embodying the power which God infuses in the damaged 'frame' of soul and poem alike.[18] The allusion is to the sacrifice of the repentant heart of Psalm 51:17 (50:17), 'the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise', a passage frequently enlisted by Protestant polemic against Catholic ceremonialism. As in Anne Lock's paraphrase of the *Miserere*, however, the iconoclasm intimated by the speaker's preference for a stone untouched by human hand is counterbalanced by the almost sacramental efficacy of his prayer of repentance. The introjection of penance does not preclude external or ritual forms of devotion. If the 'Altar' delimits a deeply personal space for the consummation of the sacrifice of praise, the 'hieroglyphic' form of the poem, indeed, is what enables the sinner's broken heart to find itself newly 'cemented'.[19] Richard Strier remarks that the final couplet enables the poem to take shape as a perfectly formed altar at the very moment when the poet abandons 'all thought about the power of his art'.[20] While this leads Strier to suggest that the most important referent is therefore the 'internal and non-literal' altar of the heart (rather than that of the poem), it is by being sculpted into an icon that inner contrition is transfigured into a visible sign of grace, in keeping with the Augustinian definition of *sacramenta* as *verba visibilia*.[21] As if in answer to the sinner's plea that the sacrifice of God should become his own, the capital 'I' raised by the poem to coincide with the shape of the altar also becomes a token of grace: far from undermining the speaker's admission of fallibility through a silent vindication of individual artistry or autonomy, the first-person subject mortifies and 'reares' himself up at one and the same time by yielding himself to God.[22] As in the 'Clasping of Hands', the sacrifice of praise becomes all the more one's own by partaking in and revealing the sacrifice of Christ:

If I without thee would be mine
I neither should be mine nor thine. (9-10)

But while the 'Clasping of Hands' finally collapses all pronominal distinction in the plea to 'make no Thine and Mine', 'The Altar' solidifies an identity that is all the more 'mine' for being given.

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[17] George Herbert, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: CUP, 2007). All further references from this edition.
[18] Cf. Anthony Low, *Love's Architecture: Devotional Modes in Seventeenth-century English Poetry* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), pp. 93-4.
[19] Joseph H. Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954), p. 140.
[20] Richard Strier, *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry* (Chicago: UCP, 1983), p. 195.
[21] Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum libri XXXIII*, IX, 16, PL 42, 357. Cf. Ross, *The Eucharist, Poetics, and Secularization*, p. 132.
[22] 'The sacrifice accomplishes not an annihilation but a transfiguration of the self'. Robert B. Shaw, *The Call of God: The Theme of Vocation in the Poetry of Donne and Herbert* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1981), p. 104.

The sacramental redemption of the sinner's self-sacrifice takes place in an overtly liturgical context. Psalm 51:17 was one of the penitential 'sentences' appointed to introduce the order of Morning and Evening Prayer.[23] The word 'altar', however, remained highly charged, having been removed from the 1552 version of the Book of Common Prayer in favour of 'the Lord's table'.[24] Another, less orthodox liturgical echo may be latent in the title and in the position of 'The Altar' at the start of the 'Church': the antiphonal modulation of Psalm 42:4 (43:4) in the introit of the Roman rite, 'introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam'. The deep affinity between Herbert's poetry and the Prayerbook extends, as Ramie Targoff has shown, from the liturgical character of a first-person singular which converges with the first-person plural, to the circumstances of *The Temple*'s publication in Cambridge as a duodecimo book with typographical features associated with inexpensive copies of the Book of Common Prayer.[25] Nor are allusions to Catholic ritual missing from Herbert's poetry, most notably the variation on the Good Friday sequence of 'Improperia' which supplies the structure of 'The Sacrifice'. The fact that Herbert's lyrics were construed and perceived by his contemporaries as contiguous with liturgical texts is illustrated in miniature by the way in which 'The Altar', like a liturgical script, exceeds the speaker's claim over the language he utters, even as its prayer relies on an intimate encounter with God to be efficacious. The confession of praise voiced by the lyric ultimately eclipses its author not only through the textual arrangement of the poem as a 'hieroglyph' which visually absolves its own confession of sin, but also through the posthumous survival of the words of the text, the 'stones' destined to continue their song in perpetuity, even when the faltering self falls silent. While the speaker of the 'Dedication' is imagined in competition with his lyrics ('make us strive / who shall sing best thy name'), 'The Altar' thus subordinates the author to the textual afterlife of his poem, which, surviving as a script for performance, revives a voice sanctified by a transcendent sacrifice of praise, rather than a simulacrum of authorial presence tied to a contingent historical moment.

The text functions, in other words, according to the logic of Derrida's 'supplement', the surplus of signification which, adding 'plenitude' to 'plenitude', intervenes from outside the 'positive' meaning of the text as an extraneous addition, 'alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it'.[26] The voice of God speaking through the poem is manifested by the textuality of 'The Altar': its typographical shape, which may appear to modern eyes little more than a curiosity or baroque flourish, is a 'frivolous futility' which in the end proves essential to the poem's meaning, the

[23] Herbert, *The English Poems*, p. 92.
[24] *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 697. All further references from this edition.
[25] Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: UCP, 2001), ch. 4.
[26] Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 208; *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 144-5.

'overabundance of value' which 'makes all commerce possible'.[27] Supplementarity is a quality which inheres not only to textuality in Derrida's account, but also to signification itself. The question then arises: can the surplus of meaning to which the sign lends itself dispose of a transcendent referent, or does a sacramental understanding of the linguistic phenomenon only expose its inherently sacral nature? As Catherine Pickstock argues in her critique of Derrida, outside a transcendental account of the sign, writing risks being reduced to a mechanism for reproducing sameness.[28] The privileged position assigned to the text in Derrida's account reproduces a 'metaphysics of presence' in another guise, according to Pickstock, re-presenting and in fact intensifying a dualistic divide between subject and object, which gives rise to a 'contractualised construction of subjectivity'.[29] As an antidote to the 'spatialised' and 'textualised' subject of modernity and post-modernity, Pickstock advances a vision of a 'liturgical' order of signification in which the self is constituted in relation to the simultaneous indeterminacy and determination that can only be afforded by a transcendent point of origin.[30] A doxological 'supplementation' of meaning balances voice and text in the 'here and now' of the liturgical performance, which brings to pass the events it recounts, rather than communicating them as 'enclosed and anterior', as a written account might do under other circumstances.[31] Derrida's description of the supplement as the absence which is 'the anterior default of presence', indeed, can be easily turned around: presence becomes the anterior default of absence, in a sacramental system of signification.[32] Pickstock's challenge to Derrida is perhaps most successful in demonstrating that the supplementary logic of the liturgy calls for a transcendental referent, an 'external' quid which touches on a deeper reason for the text's iterability than its potential merely to reproduce itself. This is all the more evident in literary and especially poetic language, which cannot simply chronicle or re-present, but must carry a surplus of meaning which determines its 'ritual' function. However, supplementarity continues to rely in *After Writing* on the performance of a written record of the liturgy: in Herbert's poem, similarly, it is the 'spatial' arrangement of interiority on the page which becomes witness to the transcendent, redemptive 'quid'. Moreover, as I will suggest, the 'trailing' shadows of contingency complicate the manifestation of the divine both in a vocalised utterance and in the written word, so that Herbert's *Temple*, though it aspires to the union of divine and human, and of singular and collective identities promised by the liturgy, ultimately oscillates vertiginously between them.

[27] Jacques Derrida, *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980), p. 101.
[28] Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 185.
[29] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 3.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 217.
[32] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 145.

The notion of the book as 'a sacrificial altar' is full of resonances with respect to the form of authorial 'absence' adumbrated by Herbert.[33] Like the absence of the divine Author, the disappearance of the authorial voice does not preclude 'nearness', as the speaker of 'The Search' puts it:

> For as thy absence doth excell
> All distance known:
> So doth thy nearenesse bear the bell,
> Making two one. (57-60)

Augustine's question – 'Deus meus, ubi est?' (*Confessions*, XIII, 14, 15) – is reprised by the poem: 'Where is my God? what hidden place / Conceals thee still?' (29-30).[34] In a similar way to the 'supplement', which is both extraneous and intrinsic to the operation of the sign, God is found both in the deepest recesses of the soul and in the most unfathomable distances from it: 'interior intimo meo et superior summo meo' ('more inward than the most inward place of my heart and loftier than the highest' (*Confessions*, III, 6, 11).[35] The description of the introit, in *After Writing*, as a movement towards a 'superfluous destination which is also a beginning' can be applied to the dynamic which animates the meeting of verbal and visual, and of internal feeling and external performance in Herbert's 'The Altar' and in *The Temple* as a whole: the altar is always receding as we advance towards it, at the same time as no step is possible without God's prevenient advance towards us.[36] The poetic artifact in Herbert's *Temple* is thus 'self-consuming', as Stanley Fish would have it, only in so far as – like the smoke which envelops the censed book of scripture – the text itself is transfigured into a burnt offering which rises towards the divine Logos, 'uttered as writing, only to re-expire in the out-breathing of the spirit'.[37] The verse altar fashioned by the poem becomes a 'place of alteration' from the earthly to the heavenly as much as from the private to the collective, and vice versa.[38] The performance of redemption in 'The Altar' can only be accomplished by a recital which, line after line, enacts a temporal and spatial 'distention' of the self, only to gather both time and space into a prefiguration of transcendence. It is therefore through its 'materiality' and historicity that the poem announces its participation in eternity, dramatising the paradox of a sacramentality released by human infirmity, and of the impossible liturgical task of calling forth the divine from the depths of sin: even as we acknowledge our debility in advancing towards the altar of God, the fundamental givenness of grace revealed by the liturgy means that 'to be in the time of sin is nonetheless to dwell in a kenotic space in which we have always already unknowingly arrived'.[39] The mysterious coherence of the

[33] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 185.
[34] PL 32, 851.
[35] PL 32, 688.
[36] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 183.
[37] Ibid., p. 219.
[38] Ibid., p. 183.
[39] Ibid., p. 185.

subject attained by the liturgy in the face of rupture and fragmentation is achieved by various rhetorical means: apostrophe, satire, chiasmus, and the halting cadences of the asyndeton.

In *The Temple*, a well-known instance of asyndeton can be observed in 'Prayer (I)'. As Brian Cummings remarks, the poem seems to work its way towards silence by exhausting the 'resources of its own language', but in so doing allows its disjointed and suspended syntax to stand as 'a trope for the gift of grace'.[40] God's glory is enhanced by the stammering, self-abasing language of the sinner, held together by a mysterious grace woven through its broken fragments. 'The Odour 2 Cor. 2:15' creates a similar effect by imagining that the bruised language of the flesh releases a sweeter scent by being crushed (a favourite conceit of Richard Crashaw's, which also appears in Southwell's elegy for Mary Stuart, 'Decease Release').[41] In rhetorical terms, the poem stages a subtle meditation on the chiasmus of the 'sweet commerce' between human and divine, as well as on the function of apostrophe. The talismanic words '*My Master*' which cense the speaker's mind and poem explicitly take on the quality of a spoken utterance, as the poet almost invites us to repeat with him: 'How sweetly doth *My Master* sound! *My Master*!' (1). Like the text of scripture, the apostrophe is likened by Pickstock to the 'self-consummating evaporation' of incense, its vocative displacement of attention away from the speaker enacting 'the reciprocal movement of an *ekstasis* which sensuously *attracts*'.[42] Herbert's apostrophe, indeed, blurs the identities of the speaker and his interlocutor: man's reflection in the divine allows for the words '*My Master*' to take on added sweetness, thereby sweetening the returning breath of the servant's initial offering – a call which is finally revealed as nothing 'but the breathing of the sweet' (25). The perfume of the 'pomander', likewise, can be taken to refer either to the holy name of God or to the 'pomander' of poems (as the OED indicates, the term was used to denote 'a book containing a collection of prayers, secrets, poems'). In God's sight, the broken words of man become both consecrated and consecrating.

Yet the other side of apostrophe's 'ecstatic' invocation is the state of suspension it simultaneously and necessarily represents, materialising in its most primitive form as an 'animal cry' waiting for a response: 'O that to thee / *My servant* were a little so' (11-2). The poem mimics not only the movement of divine inhalation and exhalation which gives the speaker breath to utter his invocation, but also the expectant attitude of a sinner holding his breath. The indicative mood of the first two stanzas thus gives way in the last four to a purely subjunctive scenario: the speaker's 'shoulds' and 'woulds' remain breathlessly waiting for the words '*My servant*' to 'employ' (30) and sanctify his life. The 'commerce' between divine and human envisaged at the end of the poem, significantly, would not only be 'sweet', but also 'new' to him. The apostrophe reverts in such a way

[40] Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 327.
[41] 'Gods spice I was and pounding was my due / In fadinge breath my incense savored best' (5-6), in Robert Southwell, *Collected Poems*, ed. Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007).
[42] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 195.

to a 'monologic' as opposed to a 'dialogic' form of address: the speaker's utterance is *not* yet fully coincident with God's entry into language. As such, it is the expression of a desire experienced not yet as ecstasy, but still as lack.[43] Pickstock's characterisation of the vocalised text as a self-consuming 'out-breathing' of the spirit is thus faced with the difficulty of conciliating the state of suspension between sin and grace in which the penitent lives – the two extremes of life and death held together by the speech act of *metanoia*. For if a sacramental understanding of language posits a meeting of worldly and heavenly, it also entails – as with all things holy – a separation.

'Priesthood', written before Herbert's ordination of 1630, is a poem which conjures this state of separation, while voicing a prayer to overcome it. The lyric dramatises the speaker's doubt about the possibility of channelling grace through human vessels 'both foul and brittle' (11):

> But thou art fire, sacred and hallow'd fire;
> And I but earth and clay: should I presume
> To wear thy habit, the severe attire
> My slender compositions might consume. (7-10)

The analogy of the text as a burnt offering recalls Herbert's youthful sonnets advocating the need for poetry to shed '*Venus* livery': 'Why are not *Sonnets* made of thee, and layes / upon thine Altar burnt? […]' ('New Year Sonnet (I)', 5-6). The burning of 'layes' upon the altar of God, an older and perhaps more cautious poet realises, is a perilous task: nothing but ashes – destruction rather than transfiguration – may be what awaits the self-consuming incense of the soul upon stepping into the holy fire. The 'self-corrective syntax of qualification' that is one of the hallmarks of Herbert's poetics intervenes, however, to offer up the poet's religious (and literary) ministry in spite of his fears of presumption.[44]

> Yet have I often seen, by cunning hand
> And force of fire, what curious things are made
> Of wretched earth […] (13-5)

The argumentative swerve here exemplifies the equivocal logic of *metanoia* described by Sophie Read, allowing the doubt to persist after its correction; indeed, the correction gathers force precisely from the poem's articulation of doubt.[45] Retraction is attendant on affirmation, silence and speech held in a continual, productive tension. Like Augustine, Herbert makes his confession 'tacite […] et non tacite' ('silently: and yet not silently') (*Confessions*, X, 2, 2).[46] As Elizabeth Clarke remarks, the characteristic 'effect of silence' conjured by Herbert's verse is belied by the persistence of the poems as written texts waiting to be read: 'writing cannot reproduce a linear chronology, and in a poem the

[43] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 194.
[44] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, p. 325.
[45] Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England*, ch. 3.
[46] PL 32, 780.

noisy words continue to exist beyond the temporary silence which is the spatial end of the graphic representation'.[47] The mute text redeems a voice fallen into silence by folding back into speech. Writing's disruption of linear chronology heralds, in such a way, the voice's participation in the time of eternity through its rehearsal of the written word. Yet, as Derrida shows, this disruption is part of the signifying activity: the apparent resurrection of a linear narrative of the self via the vocalised utterance carries some of the rupture of linear chronology that belongs to textualisation. Even when oral performance seems to restore the poet's voice to its original unity, the poem keeps running into a silence which clings to both voice and text.

The voice does not remain unalloyed by its textual frame, 'this text that we read – language floating from a space which has swallowed itself up along with its demiurge, but which remains present still and forever in all these words which have no voice left to be pronounced'.[48] If the self-immolating gestures of Herbert's 'slender compositions' incinerate their author rather than transfiguring him, the voice of the divine demiurge risks being swallowed up along with him. Sapped of life, the text possesses neither time nor space – a suspension which amounts to a form of stasis rather than eternity. The silence of graphic representation thus becomes permanently and irretrievably woven in the fabric of words cut off from past and future vocalisation. To counter this kind of 'suspension over the void', Catherine Pickstock draws on the eleventh book of Augustine's *Confessions* to offer an 'alternative phenomenology of the sign' grounded in liturgy:

> speech is dying and living at once, in such a way that the recurrent dispossession of each syllable of the spoken word, rather than being related to the ontological disposal of the sign towards an anterior ideal, is in fact […] the condition of possibility for there to be a sign at all.[49]

The scansion of the syllables which allows a fulness of meaning to manifest itself redeems the 'distention' of temporality and signification by joining memory with expectation. But the quality of speech as a phenomenon both 'dying and living' can also prefigure the immobility of an eternal present which precludes a forward-moving teleology. Augustine describes this condition as the limbo between 'dying unto death and living unto life' which forestalls his conversion ('haesitans mori morti et vitae vivere') (*Confessions*, VIII, 11, 25).[50] Herbert, similarly, represents the scansion of time as dust moving through the hourglass of the flesh in ambivalent ways: while 'Faith', in the eponymous lyric, cleaves to each grain of fleshly dust, carefully measuring and setting every particle aside for eventual re-unification, 'Church Monuments' imagines an inexorable run to death in which both flesh and time are dissolved into ash.

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[47] Elizabeth Clarke, *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), p. 247.
[48] Michel Foucault, 'Le Langage de l'Espace', in *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 1, ed. Daniel Defert, François Ewelt and Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), DE 24, p. 411.
[49] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 115. Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 26-27.
[50] PL 32, 760.

The tension between the two opposite ends of *metanoia* – mortification and vivification – can be mapped upon Herbert's ambivalent representation of his verse either as bearing the redemptive mark of grace or as intrinsically decayed. Barbara Lewalski is right to suggest that, in *The Temple*, the speaker's 'groans and longings give presumptive evidence of his calling to enter the Church', yet this does not sufficiently account for the ways in which the promise of forgiveness manifested by contrition is tempered by the consciousness of the gulf of sin separating the poet from God.[51] An intriguing example is the conclusion of 'Good Friday', a poem which reflects on the impossibility of representing Christ's sacrifice. The lyric is composed of two sections distinguished in the Williams manuscript by two different titles ('Good Friday' and 'The Passion'). Both thematise the difficulty of measuring the gift of God – and thus of 'counting' or 'recounting' it in the measure of verse. Only through Christ's engraving on the heart of the sinner, 'The Passion' concludes, can the blood of the speaker spill out in turn as writing that is witness to redemption:

> Since bloud is fittest, Lord, to write
> Thy sorrows in, and bloudie fight;
> My heart hath store, write there, where in
> One box doth lie both ink and sinne: […] (21-24)
>
> Sinne being gone, oh fill the place,
> And keep possession with thy grace;
> Lest sinne take courage and return,
> And all the writings blot or burn. (29-32)

The blood disgorged from the poet's heart is hallowed by the salvific sacrifice of Christ. The lyric thus blends a soundly Protestant salvation economy (it is the sacrifice alone which causes the flight of sin from the heart) with a suggestion of the expiatory potential of writing. The assimilation of the poet's penitential self-oblation with Christ's sacrifice affords a sacramental character to the speaker's 'writings': the mark of salvation penned by Christ holds together the sinner's humanity and the promise of grace which can be read between the lines of his prostration. Yet the hold the poet is able to exert on this sacramental promise proves tenuous. The final two lines drafted in the Williams manuscript, indeed, suggest a greater degree of assurance in Christ's possession of the heart ('ffor by the writings all may see / Thou hast an ancient claim on me'), revised in the final version of the poem to emphasise the speaker's continued need for purification ('Lest sinne take courage and return, / And all the writings blot or burn').[52]

When instructed, as Astrophil is by his Muse, to 'looke in thy heart and write', will the poet find written in his soul the words of Christ, or a heart still possessed by sin?[53] 'Jordan (II)' famously alludes to the first sonnet of Sidney's sequence in its evocation of the cleansing of an overwrought

[51] Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, N.J.: PUP, 1979), p. 286.
[52] Cf. George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: OUP, 1941).
[53] Philip Sidney, 'Astrophil and Stella', in *Poems*, ed. William A. Ringler Jr. (Oxford: OUP, 1962).

poetic style, reprising the first 'Jordan' poem's rejection of amatory poetry. The need for a continual baptismal renewal intimated by 'The Passion', however, qualifies Herbert's proposed redemption of poetic form. The first sonnet of Vittoria Colonna's *Rime Spirituali* employs a similar conceit as 'The Passion' to signal the shift from profane to devotional poetry, relinquishing the praise of a deceased lover in order to take up the nails of the cross as pens, the blood of Christ as ink, and his body as paper.[54] In Herbert's poem, instead, the 'ink' derived from the heart of the sinner has the potential to blot out the sign of grace branded on the heart. Writing's ability to become a sacrifice which cleanses its own medium is jeopardised by the threat that the speaker's sinful blood will spill over onto the page, or burn it in a ruinous rather than transfiguring fire. *The Temple* takes shape from this bifurcation between the redemptive blood of Christ and the despoiling blood of sin running through the poet's creations – an ambivalence which could be described, borrowing Maurice Blanchot's phrase, in terms of a 'torn intimacy' (*intimité déchirée*), which finds it necessary constantly to guard the 'tear' between the visible and the invisible opened by taking up the voice of the divine.

As Blanchot writes, the literary work is determined by an impossible enclosure of divine silence in human speech. The divine mysteries the artwork manifests cause it to become all the more brashly visible, even as its innermost meaning remains veiled: 'the work is thus both hidden in the god's profound presence and visible through the absence and obscurity of the divine'.[55] This space between enclosure and disclosure, which allows for words clothed in mystery to persist despite the self-effacement of the poetic voice, is one which *The Temple* inhabits while being haunted by the doubt that sin will insinuate itself anew in the life blood of its 'slender compositions'. The altar of the heart, in other words, is not always the place of 'alteration' in the sacramental and liturgical sense described by Pickstock, but becomes instead a place of containment and separation. The association between writing and intimacy evoked by 'The Passion' seems in fact to gesture towards a 'spatialised' rather than liturgical interiority, one at constant risk of tilting back into a 'mundane topology'. A 'textualised' subjectivity, according to Pickstock, holds the speaker in an abstraction of time and presence, rather than in the liturgy's ecstatic suspension 'between a bounded but never autonomous, never finitely definable space, and an infinite 'space' which is a strange, situating metaspace'.[56] The spatial metaphor is central to the poetics of *The Temple*, but while the contingency of speech and the materiality of form appear sanctified in poems like 'The Altar', in other lyrics the subject's necessary separation from God brings about a 'monologic' isolation rather than a 'dialogic' exchange. This kind of 'textualisation' reflects a state of suspension that does not so much resemble the nature of eternity

[54] 'Poi che 'l mio casto amor gran tempo tenne', in Vittoria Colonna, *Rime Spirituali* (Vinegia: Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1546).
[55] Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, tr. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pp. 230-1; 'l'œuvre est donc tout à la fois cachée dans la profonde présence du dieu et présente et visible de par l'absence et l'obscurité du divin.' *L'Espace Littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 241. Cf. chapter 1, section 2 for Petrarch's conception of poetry as a veiling and unveiling of the truth.
[56] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 228-32.

as Augustine's hesitation between dying and living – the temporal warp which belongs to the elusive yet immobile moment of the present. This paralysis of a sinful 'here and now' endows its textual representations with a peculiar self-referentiality, even solipsism. Barred from the 'sweet commerce' towards which 'The Odour' yearns, language remains 'floating' at the level of abstraction even as it attempts to pull reality into ever more minute and particularised distillations of immediacy. The attempt to reveal all, in such a way, paradoxically renders the truth which such representations aim to seize ever more rarefied and distant.[57] Herbert's negotiation of the ambiguities of a poetics poised between interiority and exteriority, as well as his concern with quantifying the magnitude of Christ's gift in the opening lyrics of 'The Church', illustrate this difficulty, as the next section of this chapter will suggest. Considering the 'spatialised' poetic subjectivity of *The Temple* in the context of liturgical and sacramental reform, I argue that confessional language is not always empowered to bridge the spheres of private and public, but also holds the potential to separate them further.

'Hath a sinners plea / No key?'

The language of confession is one connoted both by secrecy and revelation. As part of his critique of the primacy assigned to 'transparency', Thomas Docherty suggests that the privacy of the confessional provides one of the few spaces left in the modern world for removing oneself from increasingly commodified configurations of temporality and subjectivity in the public sphere:

> The confessional is a site of essential silence. That is to say: the confessional box represents a *reduction* of space and of time: it is a 'here-now' that cannot be represented (its words cannot be rehearsed again, for the confessor is sworn to silence), and it is thus a kind of space that is nowhere: a utopia.[58]

To put it another way, the confessional offers a space of grace. The 'utopia', we might add, extends to a complete reversal of the parameters of worldly justice in favour of divine mercy. There is something counter-cultural, Docherty rightly observes, in this gift of an unreproducible 'here and now', when measured against the exhibitionism of popular media's declinations of confession, and transparency's demand for a perspicuous subjectivity which seems to relinquish the subject all too easily to surveillance and control. Yet a 'culture of transparency', as Docherty shows, is inescapably bound to a culture of confession, even if outside a spiritual framework of forgiveness the secular counterparts of confessional discourse seem to take on a strikingly impoverished, if not an altogether sinister aspect. At one end, the inherently individuating processes of introspection may descend into individualistic forms of self-regard – or, philosophically, into the solipsism of the Cartesian subject which Foucault

[57] 'Because the myriad impressions of concrete details cannot point beyond themselves, all such representation can do is project one object after another in a serial procession whose only cohesion, the linearity of succession and the sum of its quantity, is in any case evacuated by the annihilative order of obsolescence and desire as lack.' Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 90.
[58] Thomas Docherty, *Confessions: The Philosophy of Transparency* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 72-3.

traces back to a 'confessional' *forma mentis*.[59] At the other, the correspondence between outward self-representation and inner reality (simply put, the sincerity) required of the confessant may degenerate into a construction of subjectivity which in effect banishes interiority, rendering the self only legible at the most superficial levels of performativity. This banishment of interiority becomes not merely the condition of the subject's legibility, but also the grounds of individual subjectivation (for when identity is reduced to performance, the declaimed script encodes and implements the subject's conformity all the more effectively). Between the inscrutable depths and performative outposts of the self, is confession able to fashion a subjectivity that is not merely histrionic or validated by an incommunicable interiority? Or does the shape of confessional discourse inevitably veer towards either a performative or a solipsistic configuration of the subject?

By shifting the main scene of confession to private prayer on the one hand, and to public ritual on the other, the reformation of the sacrament of penance in the early Church of England almost seems to precipitate this orientation towards one or another extreme, even if what emerges from the interaction of the two is an irreducible interdependence between public and private utterance. While rendering the value of interiority absolute, the privacy of auricular confession, perceived as treasonous, was eschewed in favour of a public gesture of participation in a polity fashioned around the liturgical text. The initially conservative position on penance adopted by the Ten Articles of 1536 and the Bishops' Book of 1537 gradually gave way to a more profound reformation of sacramental theology, culminating in the Prayerbook's provision of auricular confession as a discretionary pastoral remedy. Anti-Catholic sentiment mixed, as in Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, with a recognition of the benefits of confession as a form of spiritual guidance. Ronald K. Rittgers remarks on the 'lack of theological precision' which Luther's conflicted stance on the sacramental valence of private absolution bequeathed to his successors.[60] That this paved the way for a more radical reform of sacramental theology than Luther may have envisaged is illustrated by the fate of confession in the Church of England.[61] William Tyndale's assurance that 'shrifte in the eare is verely a worke of Sathan', much like Luther's pronouncements on penance, is parenthetically mitigated in the exposition on John by an admission that auricular confession could be salutary if restored from Catholic abuses.[62] In the Elizabethan Church, the sacrament of penance was criminalised by three separate parliamentary acts, rendering confession increasingly suspect even if, in principle, it was permissible in a non-sacramental form. Partaking in the sacrament thus took on the significance of a

[59] Michel Foucault, *La Volonté de Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 80.
[60] Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of the Keys: Confession, Conscience, and Authority in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 2004), p. 216.
[61] See also Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, N.J.: PUP, 1977), p. 351.
[62] William Tyndale, 'Of Confession', in *The Obedience of a Christen Man* (Antwerp: J. Hoochstraten, 1528), p. 96$^{v}$; 'that tradition restoryd unto the right use were not damnable', William Tyndale, *The Exposition of the Fyrst Epistle of Seynt Jhon* (Antwerp: M. de Keyser, 1531), B3$^{v}$.

treasonous pledge of allegiance, almost as if to resurrect the original sense of *sacramentum* as a judicial oath.

Richard Hooker's conclusions on the subject of penance in the sixth book of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* exemplify the Calvinist position finally reached by the Church on the question: 'to use the benefit of this help for the better satisfaction in such cases, is so natural, that it can be forbidden no man; but yet not so necessary, that all men should be in case to need it.'[63] Hooker's understanding of auricular confession as the preserve of 'timerous and doubtful mindes' echoes statements such as Edmund Grindal's praise of a custom laudable in so far as it may benefit 'the unlearned man and feeble conscience'.[64] Assurance of forgiveness was a function now exercised by the sermon, as John Jewel's *Apology of the Church of England* (1562) suggests in framing a rejection of the 'power of the keys' arrogated by Catholic ministers in terms of a banishment of secrecy:

> the disciples of Christ receaued this authoritie, not for to heare the secret confessions of the people, or to occupie themselues about priuy whysperinges […] butte to the entent they shoulde go, they shoulde teache, they shoulde openly preache the Gospell.[65]

Even the more pronounced sacramentalism of the 'avant-garde conformists' of James' court did not extend to a resurgence of a sacramental understanding of penance, despite reports that Bishop Andrews revived the practice during Lent.[66] Assurance was to be provided not only by the sermon, but also by the two sacraments of dominical institution retained by the Church: baptism and the eucharist. The celebration of the Lord's Supper, in particular, took on a markedly penitential vein in the new liturgy.

The evolution of Thomas Cranmer's thought on penance, as Ashley Null's meticulous reconstruction has shown, led the general trend towards a more distinctly Calvinist understanding of repentance.[67] In the 1549 version of the Book of Common Prayer, the form of absolution used for the Visitation of the Sick is still admitted for use 'in all pryvate confessions'.[68] The Communion service, indeed, exhorts any participant afflicted by a troubled conscience to 'confesse and open his synne and griefe secretly':

> that he may receive suche ghostly counsaill, advyse, and comfort, that his conscience maye be releved, and that of us (as of the ministers of God and of the churche) he may receive comfort

[63] Richard Hooker, *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker* (London: Thomas Newcomb, 1666), p. 371; Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 4, 12.
[64] Edmund Grindal, 'A Fruitful Dialogue between Custom and Verity', in *The Remains of Edmund Grindal*, ed. William Nicholson (Cambridge: CUP, 1843), p. 57.
[65] John Jewel, *An Apologie, or Aunswer in Defence of the Church of England* (London: Reginald Wolf, 1562), p. 10$^{r}$.
[66] Peter Lake, 'Lancelot Andrewes, John Buckeridge, and Avant-Garde Conformity at the Court of James I', in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp. 113-33.
[67] Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love* (Oxford: OUP, 2001).
[68] BCP, p. 75.

> and absolucion, to the satisfaccion of his mynde, and avoyding of all scruple and doubtfulnes: requiryng suche as shalbe satisfied with a generall confession, not to be offended with them that doe use, to their further satisfiyng, the auriculer and secret confession to the Priest.[69]

As Jewel and Hooker will re-affirm, confession is reserved for the scrupulous (perhaps overscrupulous) among the communicants. Any residual hint of sacramentalism is wiped from the 1552 Communion service, which exhorts the penitent to open only his 'griefe' (no longer his 'synne') to the priest. The formula of absolution retained in the Visitation of the Sick may itself have been a concession to an older generation, and was perhaps intended to be discontinued entirely in due course of time.[70] The injunction that the congregation should not be offended by those still seeking absolution is an indication of the contentious nature of a pastoral practice which the Church continued to promote as beneficial: the finer points of scriptural and theological justification were easily lost in the universal suspicion engendered by the government's policy of politicising confession.[71] In George Herbert's *A Priest to the Temple,* the country parson thus finds himself in the position of arguing for the benefits and even of the necessity of individual confession with his parishioners:

> *Besides this, in his visiting the sick, or otherwise afflicted, he followeth the Churches counsell, namely, in perswading them to particular confession, labouring to make them understand the great good use of this antient and pious ordinance, and how necessary it is in some cases: he also urgeth them to do some pious charitable works*.[72]

Echoing the orthodox position of the Church now enshrined in the liturgy, the 'country parson' labours to persuade his flock to repent, much as his predecessors might have done in centuries past, but without the argument of a sacramental duty to enforce the 'antient and pious ordinance' of 'particular confession'.

The relegation of confession to a form of spiritual counsel was accompanied by the prominent role the 'generall confession' assumed in daily worship and in the Communion service. Margo Todd has suggested that the Scottish kirk expanded and turned confession of sin into 'arguably the central ritual act of protestant worship'.[73] The same could (arguably) be said of the transformation of confession into a public act of worship undertaken by Cranmer's reform of the liturgy. That the 'generall confession' was meant to supplant the requirement of sacramental penance before partaking in Communion is clear from the expectation that the majority of the congregation will be 'satisfied' by

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[69] BCP, p. 25.
[70] Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance*, p. 241.
[71] As Gregory Dix observes, 'under the appearance of impartiality this was an official defence of an innovation.' Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), p. 644.
[72] George Herbert, 'A Priest to the Temple', in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson, pp. 249-50. I reproduce the original emphasis.
[73] Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven: YUP, 2002), p. 129.

a public act of contrition.[74] The formula for general confession employed by the Sarum rite at Compline, spoken by the priest privately in the introduction to the missal, is turned by Cranmer into a congregational prayer in the 1549 order of Communion, where it is placed before the 'comfortable words' and the Prayer of Humble Access:[75]

> we knowlege and bewaile our manyfold synnes and wyckednes, which we from tyme to tyme, most grevously have committed, by thought, word and dede, agaynst thy divine majestie, provokyng moste justly thy wrath and indignacion against us, we do earnestly repent and be hartely sory for these our misdoinges […][76]

In 1552, the general confession would be 'regularised as a language of daily discipline' through the office of Morning and Evening Prayer.[77] In the order of Communion, the prayer is moved before the consecration of the host and the reception of the eucharist. According to Ashley Null, the most significant change in the 1552 Prayerbook was precisely 'Cranmer's complete reordering of the Communion service to fit his Protestant understanding of what made true repentance possible'.[78] The sacramental miracle is no longer the change of the elements, but the change of heart manifested by the act of contrition and cemented by the reception of the body of Christ. If the transformation of the practice of confession operated by the Prayerbook was the emblematic representation of the liturgy's gathering of private into collective devotion, an individual experience of repentance subtends and enables the performance of the rite.[79] There is, as Dix argues, an inherently individualising tendency in Cranmer's understanding of the eucharist as a 'mental 'action'', so much so that, 'from being the action which creates the unity of the church as the Body of Christ, the eucharist has become precisely that which *breaks down the church into separate individuals*'.[80] Dix's striking assessment sketches the unforeseen consequences of the emphasis on the individual laid not only by a 'mental' (and penitential) configuration of the eucharist in the Anglican rite, but also by the 'mental action' of contrition that forms the 'matter' (or, in Thomistic terms, the *quasi materia*) of sacramental confession.[81]

By shifting repentance to private devotion on the one hand, and to public worship on the other, the reformation of penance in the Church of England entrenched the separation between these two spheres – as if to anticipate what I have defined as the 'solipsistic' and the 'performative' aspects of a confessional construction of subjectivity in the secular domain. Sarah Beckwith suggests, in this vein, that the abolition of auricular confession in Reformation England compromised the 'permeability of

[74] As Ramie Targoff points out, 'the 'satisfaction' of the collective group, not the 'quietness' of the inner self, renders the aspiring communicant worthy of admission.' *Common Prayer*, p. 33.
[75] BCP, p. 702.
[76] BCP, pp. 32-3.
[77] BCP, p. 724.
[78] Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance*, p. 242.
[79] Cf. Targoff, *Common Prayer*, p. 30.
[80] Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 671.
[81] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Suppl*. q.5. a.1.

the boundary between private and public' formerly adjudicated by the parish priest.[82] This denominational distinction, however, may be too stark. Confession in the period tended to move 'indoors' in both Protestant and Catholic practice. A clear example of this tendency is the architectural innovation of the confessional introduced in Counter-Reformation Milan, which, in John Bossy's words, was responsible for 'more or less abolish[ing] the sacrament as a social ritual'.[83] In Herbert's *Temple*, the performance of a prayer that approaches the quality of liturgy is accompanied by the construction of a closeted devotional subjectivity. Robert Whalen's notion of 'sacramental interiority' captures the theological and structural pre-eminence of inwardness in *The Temple*, and the 'dissonant blend of the potentially contrary imperatives of public ceremony and private devotion' to which this gives rise.[84] A lyric which reflects on the fraught relation between private and public prayer, and on the ultimate interdependence of the two, is Herbert's 'Confession':

> O What a cunning guest
> Is this same grief! within my heart I made
> Closets; and in them many a chest;
> And, like a master in my trade,
> In those chests, boxes; in each box, a till:
> Yet grief knows all, and enters when he will. (1-6)

The poem thematises as the same time as it performs a confession. The increasingly minute compartmentalisation of the self, bounded by the halting measure of these carefully punctuated lines, is the only defence the craftsman is capable of producing against God's searching gaze: though protected by the enclosure of its artfully fabricated stanzas, the heart's truth proves defenceless against the incomparably 'subtill' (11) griefs of repentance. 'God's afflictions' (9) twist their screws and burrow into the soul until they seize the 'prey' of truth (15), a vindictive advance which shadows a latent violence in confession's extraction of interiority. The gesture of opening the self up to view finally brings about a wholesale destruction of the speaker's torturous (and tortured) inwardness:

> Onely an open breast
> Doth shut them out, so that they cannot enter;
> Or, if they enter, cannot rest,
> But quickly seek some new adventure.
> Smooth open hearts no fastning have; but fiction
> Doth give a hold and handle to affliction. (19-24)

[82] Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 52.
[83] John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400-1700* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), p. 134; See also John Bossy, 'The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (1975), 21-38.
[84] Robert Whalen, *The Poetry of Immanence: Sacrament in Donne and Herbert* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2002), p. 113.

The depths probed by grief are thus exposed as fabrications: the poet gives up 'fiction' in favour of a plain style which seems to condemn the 'trade' of a deceitful poetic craft.[85] But is the speaker's confession undermined by the crafting of yet another, all too 'smooth' container?[86] Without going so far as to read a deconstructive gesture in the adjective 'smooth' (as Jeremy Tambling contends), the contrast established between poetic 'fiction' and confessional sincerity undeniably poses a problem for a confession that is written in the shape of a poem.

To match a renewed simplicity of style in the final stanzas, the lyric almost seems to flaunt a deliberate guilelessness, and to require of its readers a correspondingly innocent faith in the speaker's promise that he will now manifest the full truth about the self. The jubilant tone of the final stanza's 'I challenge here the brightest day' (28) strikes a very different note from the usual pattern of self-rebuke remediated by divine intervention in *The Temple*. In 'The Holdfast', for example, it is a lesson in humility that sets right the speaker's confession of praise, by appearing to undo it: 'But to have nought is ours, nor to confesse / That we have nought' (9-10).[87] The assurance of sincerity in the final stanza of 'Confession' is all the more striking because it is what enables a recovery of faith in the representational function of the poetic word, jeopardised by the poem's equation of 'fiction' with 'affliction'. The deictic 'here', indeed, anchors the survival of 'Confession' both as a poem and as a confession in the face of the lyric's acute awareness of its own deceitfulness. By pointing back to the frame of the poem – to the 'here and now' of its performance – the speaker makes space for a redemptive form of speech to enter into the dim and cramped dwellings of poetic 'fiction'. The sinful opacity of human language is rendered translucent: a sincere confession may not require the extinction of the poetic voice. What the deictic also announces, nonetheless, is an inescapable self-referentiality, in pointing not only to the poem, but also to the poet's breast. Confession's reliance on an unverifiable and unsoundable truth is paradoxically enhanced by the poem's emphatic evacuation of its interior spaces: the transparency to which the sinner aspires proves no less opaque than his labyrinthine interiority when he is left with nothing but his word to secure the comparison of the heart to the 'brightest day' and 'clearest diamond'.

The inner truth seems to recede ever more deeply the more openly the sinner is called upon to broadcast his confession. If the Prayerbook's substitution of the requirement to confess individually for a collective act of contrition rehearses the transmutation of the singular into the collective voice and the passage from autobiography to allegory (or from the personal to the symbolic) that defines confessional discourse, the quality of inwardness and of an unsoundable intimacy is nonetheless what

[85] See on this point Cristina Malcolmson, *Heart-work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic* (Stanford: SUP, 1999), p. 132.
[86] Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 88-90.
[87] 'Even the acknowledgment of the givenness of the given is taken away from him.' Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, p. 326.

makes public utterance possible. In Herbert's 'Confession', it is as if the truth can only be expressed in terms of the purest deixis, in the intimate and shifting referentiality that belongs to the gesture with which the speaker points to his breast, declaring that it is 'here' and nowhere else that the truth lies. The 'spatialised' subjectivity conjured by the speaker's compulsive construction of hiding places is thus matched by the localised and irreproducible immediacy to which the poem's confession points. The 'space' of the heart, indeed, is revealed as coextensive with the textual fabric of the poem: the speaker's subjectivity is embedded in the textual artifact tasked with renewing it through a performance of contrition. The first and second chapter of this thesis suggested that a model of subjectivity construed in literary terms subtends, in different ways, the work of both Petrarch and Anne Lock. Petrarch's self-conscious construction of subjectivity is absorbed and even consumed by its own literariness through the identification of Laura with the poetic laurel: the penitent-lover almost seems to inhabit a textual limbo fuelled by a desire which scatters and fragments the self into shreds of verse. The term 'autobiographical liturgy' used by Ester Pietrobon to describe Petrarch's penitential psalms also serves as an apt appellation for the *Canzoniere*, not only due to the sequence's alignment of the love story with the liturgical year, but also as a result of the dialectical interplay between the 'ritual' and the 'fictive' (or 'autobiographical') processes identified by Roland Greene as the defining characteristic of the Petrarchan lyric sequence, and which can also be called upon as a working model of a 'liturgical' poetics.[88]

The personal prayer crafted by Petrarch's imitation of the psalms distils the singular from the collective voice, but there is a generative ambiguity in the notion of an 'autobiographical liturgy' which allows the individualising impulse to coexist with the ritual iterability of Petrarchism (and of confession). Herbert's *Temple*, likewise, moves between a liturgical voice which re-creates the self, and a personal voice that re-creates the liturgy in its own image, on the one hand fashioning its contingency into a sign of transcendence, on the other pointing back to a contingent experience that can never be communicated, and which continually repeats the conditions of its own fallenness. For the danger of the deictic gesture by which the speaker validates his sincerity in 'Confession' is a self-referentiality that remains oriented towards the self rather than directing the gaze towards God. An instance of the resultant textual 'limbo' can be observed in the allusion to the Prayerbook's general confession woven into the circular structure of 'Sinnes Round', each stanza devoted to confessing thoughts, words, and deeds respectively. Rather than releasing the sinner, the admission of offences committed by 'thought, word and dede' circles round in an agonised dramatisation of the continued need for repentance, but also of the danger latent in a language which seems poised to propagate sin endlessly:

[88] Ester Pietrobon, ''Tam efficaciter utinam quam inculte': Modelli Liturgici e Stile Monastico nei 'Psalmi Penitentiales'', *Petrarchesca,* 7 (2019), 61-62; Roland Greene, *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* (Princeton, N.J.: PUP, 1991).

My words take fire from my inflamèd thoughts,
Which spit it forth like the Sicilian Hill.
They vent the wares, and passe them with their faults,
And by their breathing ventilate the ill. (7-10)

Enclosed by sin and by the circular structure of a confession which seems unable to absolve him, the subject who is coextensive with his own instantiation in the text is destined to keep announcing his own culpability, without hope of release. The penitent's 'double rupture' from his past self and from God emerges once again in this picture of a language which cannot break out of its sinfulness, and which risks merely 'ventilating' the ills it purports to purify. In the opening lyrics of *The Temple*, we witness a similar interposition of sin troubling the performance of confession, in particular in 'The Thanksgiving' and 'The Reprisall'. In both poems the attempt to represent the incommensurability of the divine gift is thwarted by the mundane logic of accounting which the poet applies to the sacrifice of Christ. In 'The Thanksgiving' the speaker's desire to requite the magnitude of the debt he has incurred gives rise to the curiously agonistic strain which runs through the poem's *imitatio Christi*. In answer, 'The Reprisall' offers a confession of sin which would seem to overcome the language of accounting and requital. Yet even here confession continues to partake in a transactional economy, rehearsing the idea of a human sacrifice vying with the saviour's: 'though I die for thee, I am behinde; / My sinnes deserve the condemnation' (3-4). In such a way, as Michael Schoenfeldt remarks, the speaker's remediating confession is revealed to contain 'the same problematic blend of pious intentions and brazen insurgence possessed by imitation, the activity it aspires to replace'.[89] In poems like 'The Sinner', the language of quantification recurs with a vengeance, as the insolvent debtor attempts to scavenge the merest 'shreds of holinesse' (6) from the wasted landscape of the self: 'The spirit and good extract of my heart / Comes to about the many hundred part' (10-11). If the language of confession is subject to the temptations of solipsism and performativity, Herbert's efforts to turn the sinner to account yield at times to the temptation to quantify and 'contractualise' the self. In its objectifying logic, the 'contractualised subjectivity' of the secular sphere is diametrically opposed, as Catherine Pickstock contends, to the 'liturgical subjectivity' which partakes in the divine economy of the gift. In the face of such gift, the 'dregs' of human sinfulness cannot be measured – indeed, even the attempt to measure the self out in verse may bespeak an inescapable, and inescapably culpable state of rupture from the divine truth.

'Longing', one of the most despairing petitions of *The Temple*, is a lyric that turns on the conceit of a voice echoing in the silence:

To thee my cries,
To thee my grones,
To thee my sighs, my tears ascend:

[89] Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship* (Chicago: UCP, 1991), p. 50.

No end? (3-6)

Aching for an answer (the imperative ‘heare’ and the rhyming cognate ‘eare’ are repeated nine times), the echo effect created by the close of each stanza conjures the failure of a dialogic pattern of speech. The sinner questions the efficacy of his confession: ‘Is all lockt? hath a sinners plea / No key?’ (47-8). Perhaps an oblique reference to the sacerdotal ‘power of the keys’ to bind and loose from sin, the image harkens back to the keys held by ‘Gods afflictions’ in ‘Confession’, capable of penetrating the most secret cabinets of the heart, and to the grace of the eucharistic elements which in ‘The H. Communion (I)’

> Knoweth the ready way
> And hath the privie key
> Op’ning the souls most subtile rooms. (20-2)

No such ready way into God’s presence is available to the words of the sinner in ‘Longing’. A marked contrast to the plaintive ‘monologism’ of this poem is represented by the discursive shape of ‘The Method’. Like ‘Confession’, the poem imagines an excavation of the sinner’s breast, the ‘textualisation’ of the subject made explicit by the conventional analogy of the heart as a book. The guilty conscience is extracted in italicised letters from the ‘tumbled’ breast, as the poet enumerates the failings responsible for God’s apparent obduracy:

> What do I see
> Written above there? *Yesterday*
> *I did behave me carelesly,*
> *When I did pray.* (13-6)

The written quality of the confession signalled by the typographical emphasis represents both an intimate truth engraved in the heart and the iterability of the confessional formulae waiting to be read out loud, adumbrating a union of text and voice reminiscent of ‘The Altar’. The language of mortification is finally graced by the promise of deliverance, as God’s decree of absolution rings dramatically in the final line:

> Then once more pray:
> Down with thy knees, up with thy voice.
> Seek pardon first, and God will say,
> *Glad heart rejoyce.* (29-32)

The echo of the psalms in the final line (Ps. 13:5, Ps. 28:7), significantly rhymed with the ‘voice’ raised by the speaker in repentant prayer, gives a scriptural seal to the pronouncement, as the typographical emphasis puts the words of God in dialogue with the previous confessional utterances, antiphonally offering the words of sanctification attendant on those of confession. Human speech in this poem is not erased by intrinsic turpitude or by a divine word that casts into shadow the language through which it becomes manifest; on the contrary, the language of self-indictment is graced by a

promise of deliverance which releases the ascending 'voice', now able to sing and rejoice. Recalling the sacramental poetics of 'conversation' described by Regina Schwartz's reading of 'Love (III)', 'The Method' opens up a dialogue between the speaker and God as well as between the poet and reader.[90] Anticipating the delicate modulation of reciprocity through dialogue in 'Love (III)', the half-ironic catechesis dramatised by 'The Method' coaxes not only the sinner to sit at God's table, but also God to enter under the roof of the sinner, and into human language. Confession, as Jean-Luc Marion writes, can either function autobiographically, or it can become a 'heterobiography' – indeed, in so doing it becomes a 'heterodoxology' which radically decentres a subjectivity made possible by the sacrifice of praise it raises.[91] 'Longing' and 'The Method' emblematise the two strands of confessional speech in *The Temple* outlined by this chapter: one in which the language of liturgy falls (or falls back) into referring to the self autobiographically, and one in which the self is burnished into a 'doxological' sign of grace. As Herbert's 'Confession' shows, however, the language of confession is perhaps especially vulnerable to relapse, testifying to the 'double break' in the subject who must acknowledge a separation from himself as well as from grace. 'Heterodoxology' relapses, in such a way, into an autobiography waiting to be absolved from the sin of self-regard.

[90] Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics*, ch. 3.
[91] Jean-Luc Marion, *Au Lieu de Soi: L'Approche de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), pp. 75-6.

## Chapter Six: Ecstatic Confessions: Richard Crashaw

Confession and the *via negativa*

'Confessional' is a word rarely associated with the poetry of Richard Crashaw. For one thing, the first-person singular makes remarkably few appearances in Crashaw's body of work, affording it an 'impersonal' quality that sets it apart from the introspective orientation of the works considered in this thesis, from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, Lock's *Meditation,* and Southwell's dramatic monologues, to Donne's and Herbert's lyric sequences.[1] For another, the sensuousness of Crashaw's conceits has led to a focus on corporeality over subjectivity, eliciting accounts of his poetics in terms of a markedly feminine devotional experience.[2] If Crashaw's poetic voice is 'self-consuming', the erasure of the speaker's identity seems to owe less to a penitential than to a 'mystical' impulse running through his verse. A dislocation of identity is involved in both the penitential and the mystical devotional traditions of Christianity, but the mystic's willingness to relinquish knowledge and self alike stands in stark contrast to the consolidation of a redeemed individuality enabled by confession's efforts to excavate and render the self communicable. When the confessant steps outside the self, he does so in order to recount and thus necessarily to delimit the subjective experience of an interiority that potentially stretches to infinity, as Mikhail Bakhtin suggests in his account of this valuational, ethical perspective as a prerequisite for an aesthetic 'consummation' of the self. My discussion has posited that a confessional language freighted with the power not only of self-revelation, but also of self-transformation, carries significant implications for literary, and especially for poetic language. Crashaw's 'ecstatic' confessions, in this light, stretch a penitential language of transformation to its furthest reaches, realising the 'mystical' vocation of confession as a speech act which, in delving inwards to bring the self to the surface, ends up gesturing towards unknowable depths.

In a remarkable introductory essay to his anthology of mystical writings, Martin Buber argues that mysticism and confession are joined in 'this most inward of experiences: what the Greeks call *ek-stasis*, a stepping out'.[3] Far from ordering the commotions of the soul into a linear narrative, confession may take on the quality of a language which 'since the beginning of its existence, desires eternally the one impossible thing: to set its foot on the neck of the commotion and to become all

[1] See Richard Strier, 'Crashaw's Other Voice', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 9.1 (1969), 135-151; and Lorraine Roberts, 'Crashaw's Sacred Voice: 'A Commerce of Contrary Powers", in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, ed. John Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), pp. 66-79.
[2] See Paul A. Parrish, ''O Sweet Contest': Gender and Value in 'The Weeper'', in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, pp. 127-39; Maureen Sabine, *Feminine Engendered Faith: The Poetry of John Donne and Richard Crashaw* (London: Macmillan, 1992); ibid., 'Crashaw and Abjection: Reading the Unthinkable in His Devotional Verse', *American Imago*, 63.4 (Winter 2006), 423-443; Gary Kuchar, *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2005), ch. 2.
[3] Martin Buber, 'Ecstasy and Confession', in *Ecstatic Confessions: The Heart of Mysticism*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, tr. Esther Cameron (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996), pp. 1-11, p. 2.

poem – truth, purity, poem'.[4] This chapter will argue that the focus on the body in Crashaw's poetry risks obscuring an appraisal of a 'confessional' subjectivity which conforms both to a mystical and to a penitential brand of Christian spirituality. The convergence of the corporeal and the spiritual in Crashaw's 'erotics' of confession reprises and radicalises sacred parody's attempt to recodify the language of human love for religious purposes. The terms of the recodification, indeed, find themselves inverted in Crashaw's representation of a sensuality that does not so much yearn to transform carnal into spiritual love, as indicate that no genuine eroticism can exist outside its desire for the eternal and transcendent: this chapter will argue that the sexual overtones of many of Crashaw's conceits thus approach an 'apophatic' more than a pornographic eroticism. As the characteristic mode of address of penitent and lover alike, the language of the *via negativa* does not acquire or produce knowledge, but aims at creating a relationship with God. Between the 'epistemological' and the 'ontological' functions exercised by confession, Crashaw's poetry veers decidedly towards self-transformation over self-revelation. Nonetheless, apophatic denial is interwoven with cataphatic affirmation, in the same way that avowal follows quick upon disavowal of the self in the confessions dramatised by Crashaw.

In Foucauldian terms, we might say that in Crashaw the gestural act of *exomologesis* prevails over the verbal act of *exagoreusis*, the 'mystical' strand of Christianity over the juridical enforcement of a discipline of penance. This challenges a number of pre-conceptions about Counter-Reformation piety, including Foucault's picture of an increasingly regimented discipline of 'subjectification' in the post-Tridentine Church sketched by the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*. The two forms of early Christian penance, one concerned with manifesting and 'performing' the condition of sin, the other with disciplining the self through permanent vigilance and self-verbalisation, can be re-formulated on the basis of the workings of *parrhesia*, or 'free speech', delineated by Foucault in his last lecture at the Collège de France. Christianity, Foucault remarks, has a 'parrhesiastic' and an 'anti-parrhesiastic' pole: from the first springs the 'mystical' tradition, in which 'the relation to the truth is established in the form of a face-to-face relationship with God and in a human confidence which corresponds to the effusion of divine love.'[5] The second (and dominant) 'anti-parrhesiastic' attitude is ascetic in nature, giving rise to the structures of the Church designed to enforce obedience to institutional authority, foremost among them the sacrament of penance. The 'free speech' afforded to the mystic, or the 'telling all' of *parrhesia*, is thus according to Foucault the very opposite of a confessional demand to 'tell all' imposed from above. Parrhesiastic self-expression, however, does not diverge so radically from the discursive structures of avowal implemented by the penitential tradition,

[4] Buber, 'Ecstasy and Confession', p. 5.
[5] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-4*, ed. Frédéric Gros, Alessandro Fontana and François Ewald, tr. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave, 2011), p. 337; 'le rapport à la vérité s'établit dans la forme d'un face-à-face avec Dieu et dans celle d'une confiance, confiance humaine qui répond à l'épanchement de l'amour divin.' *Le Courage de la Vérité: Le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres II*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p. 307.

as the convergence of mysticism and asceticism in the history of Christianity demonstrates. And although early Christian *exomologesis* is remarkably similar to mystical and Cynic *parrhesia* in Foucault's description (both, as Philippe Chevallier remarks, rely on 'theatrical' forms of self-dramatisation), *parrhesia* remains primarily an act of self-verbalisation: on these grounds it bears comparison to the verbal act of *exagoreusis*, which in monastic circles replaced (or co-existed with) the gestural representation of penance through *exomologesis*.[6] Indeed, the fundamental union of the two folds of the truth act – confession of faith and confession of sin – poses a problem for Foucault's schematic model of 'parrhesia' and 'anti-parrhesia'.

Foucault himself acknowledges the limits of a dichotomy between free and fettered speech: the Dartmouth lectures notably end on a note of scepticism about the possibility of grounding a new 'politics' of the subject in a positive affirmation of the self (advanced by an overly optimistic brand of humanism), rather than in the sacrificial denial of the self bequeathed by Christian culture.[7] The description of *exomologesis* as the 'ontological' temptation of Christianity, in contrast to the 'epistemological' temptation represented by *exagoreusis*, nonetheless, offers a helpful framework in which to situate the disparate implications of confessional discourse in the philosophical and literary domain. Arising from a coalescence of these two penitential rituals, confession is on the one hand an unrivalled 'epistemological' tool: the knowledge of the self from which all knowledge springs. On the other, it must acknowledge itself redundant as a means of acquiring or producing knowledge, not only due to the seal of secrecy which shrouds the penitent's revelations, but also in the face of divine omniscience.[8] As Augustine writes, the account of his life serves to 'do the truth' (*veritatem facere*), rather than to reveal what is already known to God: 'ecce enim veritatem dilexisti, quoniam qui facit eam venit ad lucem. Volo eam facere in corde meo coram te in confessione; in stilo autem meo coram multis testibus' ('For behold Thou lovest the truth, and *he that does the truth comes to the light*. I wish to do it in confession, in my heart before Thee, in my writing before many witnesses') (*Confessions*, X, 1, 1).[9] As Derrida remarks, this double confession points to an unmistakable kinship between the language of confession and that of apophasis.[10] The aim of both is not to gain understanding, but to 'stir up' love: 'nam confessions praeteritorum malorum meorum […] cum leguntur et audiuntur, excitant cor' ('When the confessions of my past sins […] are read and heard, they stir up the heart', X, 3, 4).[11]

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[6] Philippe Chevallier, *Michel Foucault et le Christianisme* (Paris: ENS Éditions, 2011), p. 319.
[7] Michel Foucault, 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth', *Political Theory*, 21.2 (May 1993), 198-227, p. 222.
[8] Cf. Michel Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, ed. Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt, tr. Stephen W. Sawyer (Chicago: UCP, 2014), pp. 117-8.
[9] PL 32, 779.
[10] Jacques Derrida, *On the Name,* ed. Thomas Dutoit, tr. David Wood, John P. Leavey Jr. and Ian McLeod (Stanford: SUP, 1995), p. 39.
[11] PL 32, 780-1.

Crashaw's poetry, similarly, seems designed to stir up the heart rather than to grant his readers access to an inner truth. In 'The Weeper', it is the somatic response engendered by repentant grief, rather than the tortured interiority of the penitent's soul, which captures the poet's imagination. Yet the motions of self-abasement which seem all but occluded by the effusiveness of the poem's metaphorical sequence on Mary Magdalene's tears remain present not only in the background, but as a central structural principle of the lyric.[12] Echoing previous assessments of the impersonality of Crashaw's verse, Richard Rambuss considers 'The Weeper' notable as a poem about contrition 'without any evocation, much less excavation, of the subjective experience of contrition'.[13] The poem's emphasis on pure materiality is exemplary, Rambuss suggests, of an 'incarnational' poetics. Mario Praz reaches a similar conclusion, deriving from the absence of 'subjective' contrition in 'The Weeper' an impression of Crashaw as the exemplary 'metaphysical' poet, in whose verse baroque flourishes and witty conceits render the purported subject 'matter' superfluous.[14] These two approaches contain all the elements of a contradictory assessment which has afflicted Crashaw's reception history, caught between regarding his verse as viscerally and even grotesquely corporeal, or as too ornate to strike any relation between reality and rhetoric. The fact that an 'excess' of materiality in 'The Weeper' seems to occlude the visibility of the poem's meaning and of its speaking subject, however, does not banish either entirely. For all its sensory exuberance, 'The Weeper' is notably reticent. Indeed, it is not only Mary's interiority that is obscured. If the poem propagates matter upon matter – 'stars, seed, cream, pearls, dew, balsam, flowers, drinking water, wine, April showers, oceans, bath waters, money, perfume, mothers and sons, and so on and so on' – it is a materiality which also casts a veil over itself, shrouding not only Mary's interiority, but also the very substance of her strangely malleable tears.[15]

The lyric constantly measures the supernatural grace accorded to the tears against the contingency of the material conceits the poem draws upon, opening a fissure between the metaphors and the quintessence of the tears they strive to body forth. At the opening of the poem, Mary's weeping thus resists the downwards pull of the flesh: 'It is not for our Earth and us / To shine in things so pretious' (3), an image which sets the tone for the vein of asceticism that runs through the poem, in marked contrast to Anthony Low's characterisation of Crashaw's sensibility as 'never yearning,

[12] On the dialectic between denial and affirmation in Crashaw, see Gary Kuchar, 'A Greek in the Temple: Pseudo-Dionysius and Negative Theology in Richard Crashaw's 'Hymn in the Glorious Epiphany'', *Studies in Philology*, 108.2 (2011), 261-298.
[13] Richard Rambuss, 'Crashaw and the Metaphysical Shudder: Or How to Do Things With Tears', in *Structures of Feeling in Seventeenth-century Cultural Expression*, ed. Susan McClary (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 251-271, pp. 257-8; cf. Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), p. 127.
[14] Mario Praz, *The Flaming Heart* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 226.
[15] Rambuss, 'Crashaw and the Metaphysical Shudder', p. 267.

always, sensuous'.[16] Rather than offering a gratification of the senses, 'The Weeper' is built on a strained and straining stream of figures which veil Mary's subjective experience of grief as well as the workings of sanctification to which her repentance bears witness. What Donne describes as the 'mysterious Art' of confession is best represented, Crashaw's 'Weeper' suggests, not by an excavation of interiority, but by a yearning towards transcendence which overflows the bounds of speech, each figure gesturing onwards to the next stanza and to its next unfathomable superlative. A number of the poem's opening conceits in both the 1646 and the 1652 versions of 'The Weeper' are couched in terms of denial: 'Not the soft Gold which / Steales from the Amber-Weeping Tree' (8); 'Not in the Evenings Eyes / […] Nowhere but here did ever meet / Sweetnesse so sad, sadness so sweet' (10); 'There is no need at all / That the Balsame-sweating bough / So coyly should let fall / His med'cinalbe Teares […]' (12).[17] The language of apophasis mixes in these images with that of worldly contempt, culminating in the rejection of the 'sluttish Earth' by the tears, personified in the final stanza as 'watry Brothers' springing from the 'swolne wombes of sorrow' of Mary's eyes (21):

> We go not to seeke
> The darlings of *Aurora's* bed,
> The Roses modest cheeke
> Nor the Violets humble head.
> No such thing; we goe to meet
> A worthier object, *Our Lords* feet. (23)

The conceit of the speaking tears flows naturally from the lyric's depiction of Mary's tears as matter enlivened by grace (the image of repentance as inanimation, it will be recalled, is also a favourite one of Donne's). Yet the uncanny prosopopoeia also encapsulates the tendency of the poem's metaphors to push the relation between tenor and vehicle to breaking point, and to take, indeed, a life of their own. The personification literalises the central conceit of another poem, Crashaw's elegy on the 'Death of a gentleman':

> Eyes are vocall, Teares have Tongues,
> And there be words not made with lungs;
> Sententious showers, ô let them fall,
> Their cadence is Rhetoricall. (27-30)

The pun on 'cadence' which conflates the plash of the tears falling in 'Rhetoricall' showers with the 'cadence' of the poem itself finds a parallel in the allusion, at the close of 'The Weeper', to Christ's 'feet', which self-reflexively calls attention to the lyric's poetic 'feet'. This metapoetic literalism brings about, according to Gary Kuchar, a coincidence of word and thing, the 'sacramental moment at

[16] I refer here to the first version of the poem in *Steps to the Temple* (1646). Richard Crashaw, *The Poems of Richard Crashaw: English, Latin and Greek*, ed. L. C. Martin, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1957). All further references from this edition. Anthony Low, *The Reinvention of Love* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 115.
[17] Stanza 8 does not appear in the revised version of the poem in *Carmen Deo Nostro*, perhaps due to the similarity between the 'Amber-weeping Tree' and the 'Balsome-sweating bough'.

which figure becomes reality, where metrical foot becomes flesh'.[18] The idea of a literalising streak in Crashaw's poetics has a long history, which can be traced back to an emphasis on Catholic sacramentalism frequently regarded as central to the poet's affective piety.

It is in this vein that Ryan Netzley mounts a defence of Crashaw against the critical tendency to magnify the poet's more outlandish tropes: far from being excessive, Crashaw's poetry strives, in keeping with Catholic orthodoxy, for a sacramental transfiguration of the word into flesh.[19] Yet Netzley's emphasis on an embodiment coincident with literalism does not conform to this incarnational or sacramental paradigm so much as it evacuates signification of meaning altogether, ultimately landing upon the same conclusion reached by Praz: Crashaw's poetry says nothing at all.[20] Tellingly, Netzley concedes that a language that is entirely 'literal' and 'material' is, strictly speaking, no language at all: 'What is one reading, other than guttural cries and aphasic noise, if there is not a thing, idea, or proposition being transmitted?'[21] A 'sacramental' poetics undoubtedly rests on an indistinction between the material and the spiritual, but the suggestion that Crashaw's poetry invites an 'idolatrous' reading would seem to negate the premises of an incarnational poetics, by drawing attention to the carnal over the spiritual (and though Netzley successfully sidesteps a confessional lens, the notion of 'idolatry' easily reinforces the Protestant bias against Catholic sacramentalism to which Crashaw's English readers have so often succumbed).[22] Aside from the theological problems raised by a conflation of sacramentalism (or transubstantiation) with something approaching idolatry, this is where, in literary terms, a model of reading which foregrounds 'surface' over 'depths' starts to show its limitations. As in the case of Southwell's rejection of 'shadows' in favour of the 'shadowed thing', the literal, 'surface' meaning invariably folds back into the tropological. It is clear that the 'confessions of the flesh' solicited from the sinner's body require a hermeneutics able to recognise the *spiritualised* corporeality, and, contiguously, the carnality of the spirit which make up what Augustine describes as the 'synecdoche' of the 'flesh'.[23]

Part of the mystery of the incarnation's intermingling of the spiritual and carnal is that a separation of immanent and transcendent orders must be upheld for its crossing of boundaries to retain its meaning. Likewise, Crashaw's 'radicalisation' of metonymy to erase all distinction between part and whole proposed by Netzley only serves to disable the rhetorical function exercised by the synecdochic figure (how can a metonymy still be a metonymy without a meaningful difference

[18] Gary Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), p. 89.
[19] Ryan Netzley, *Reading, Desire and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011), ch. 2.
[20] Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, p. 91.
[21] Netzley, *Reading, Desire and the Eucharist*, p. 102.
[22] Ibid., p. 94. On the reception of Crashaw, see Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), ch. 2.
[23] Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 2.

between part and whole?).[24] The fact that Mary's tears acquire a voice at the end of 'The Weeper' would seem, from this angle, the strongest proof that repentance in the poem is ultimately not only a gestural, but also a pre-eminently verbal act.[25] The prosopopoeia has the effect of accentuating the poem's rhetoricity, displacing yet again the experience of the impalpable grace symbolised by the tears, which hasten and 'trip so fast away' towards another rhetorical displacement of the salvific body to the 'feet'. Rather than precipitating a collapse of the poem's figurality able, in Kuchar's view, to conjure the real presence of Christ, the metonymy responds to Crashaw's characterisation of 'Hope' in his poetic dialogue with Abraham Cowley as an 'absent presence' and 'future now'.[26]

> Sweet *Hope!* kind cheat! faire fallacy! by thee
> Wee are not where, or what wee bee,
> But what, and where wee would bee: thus art thou
> Our absent presence, and our future now. (77-80)

The 'absence' signified by an ever-yearning and ever-disappointed hope lamented by Cowley is not replaced by an unambiguous 'presence', but by the paradox of a 'sacrament that simultaneously activates and denies the body as a site of devotion', as Kimberly Johnson suggests.[27] In 'The Weeper', the humility of the earthly flowers rejected by the 'wat'ry Brothers' is mirrored by the self-abasement of eyes that cast their gaze down to the lowest part of the body, signalling the unrepresentable glory of a whole which can only be glimpsed through a vision clouded by tears. The ascetic and penitential principle remains central to the poem's strategic absences and presences, and thus to its sacramental structure of signification. The penitent's downcast eyes remind the reader of the proper posture to assume before the mysteries of sanctification, and of the humility which underwrites even a poetry of hyperbolic excess.[28]

'On Hope', the concluding poem in both *Steps to the Temple* and *Carmen Deo Nostro*, fittingly answers and echoes the slipperiness of the earthly figures which seem incapable of containing the elusive grace of Mary's tears in 'The Weeper', the first poem in *Steps to the Temple*: 'the Feild's eyes too WEEPERS be / Because they want such TEARES as we' (XXX). The search for a face 'more fugitive' than all earthly faces can only be entrusted to hope:

> True *Hope*'s a glorious Huntresse, and her chase

[24] On the role of metonymy in Crashaw's poetry, see also Heather Asals, 'Crashaw's Participles and the 'Chiaroscuro' of Ontological Language', in *Essays on Richard Crashaw*, ed. Robert M. Cooper (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1979), pp. 35-49; and Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), ch. 4.
[25] Deneen Senasi also points to a coalescence of visual and verbal in 'A Matter of Words: Aesthetics of Reading and Embodiment in the Poetry of Richard Crashaw', *Religion and Literature*, 36.3 (Autumn 2004), 1-21.
[26] Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, p. 91.
[27] Kimberly Johnson, 'Richard Crashaw's Indigestible Poetics', *Modern Philology*, 107.1 (2009), 32-51, p. 50.
[28] On the ascetic vein of hyperbole in Crashaw, see Katrin Ettenhuber, 'Hyperbole: Exceeding Similitude', in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp. 197-213, pp. 204-9.

The God of Nature in the field of Grace. (89-90)

In the posthumous *Carmen Deo Nostro*, 'The Weeper' occupies a less prominent position, forming part of a sub-sequence devoted to female saints and patrons. This includes the hymns to Saint Teresa, the two odes to a 'Gentle-woman', and the three Alexias elegies, as well as a series of reflections on the religious life and occasional poems. In keeping with the more overtly Catholic character of *Carmen Deo Nostro*, the second, enlarged version of 'The Weeper' enhances the eucharistic overtones of Mary's tears (as well as allowing itself a subtle jab at 'crown'd Heads' in the final stanza): the motif of the tears as wine is thus expanded in stanza XI with its graceful image of blushing water ('This watry Blossom of thy eyn, / Ripe, will make the richer wine'), while the final sequence on tears as time-keeping instruments is preceded by four stanzas in praise of the sacrificial lamb for whose love Mary weeps (XVIII-XXI).[29] The renewed emphasis on the eucharist, however, does not yield a unity of signifier and signified, but produces images which even more emphatically push metaphor to breaking point, including the infamous comparison of the tears to 'foot baths' of stanza XIX. Both the apparent silencing of subjectivity in a purely corporeal form of devotion and the rhetoricity of Crashaw's figures continue to rely on an apophatic register, which relinquishes its representational endeavours as well as its commitment to a fixed and stable subjectivity capable of containing those representations. The revised lyric hails Mary as a 'pretious Prodigall! / Fair spend-thrift of thy self' (XXII): in her incessant showers of tears, the weeper's self-sacrifice mirrors the dissolution of subjectivity operated by the poet's own prodigality of conceits.

Yet confession's paradoxical construction of a self-destructive self means that a coherent and unitary subjectivity remains necessary: indeed, a re-unified self is the outcome of the rupturing of the confessant's identity. The prodigal 'self' that in penance is 'still spending, neuer spent' is thus dissipated at the same time as it is held firmly in place. If the linguistic components of penance are not negated by the affective and corporeal experience of Mary's weeping, the boundaries of the subject are likewise reaffirmed by the attempts to capture an experience of overflowing which takes place, in Derrida's words, at the 'edge of language'. Or rather, ''at the edge as language', in the same and double movement: withdrawing [*dérobement*] and overflowing [*débordement*]'.[30] Another way of putting this would be to say that, just as avowal is attendant on a disavowal of the self, the apophatic language which relinquishes the search for a knowable God is invariably accompanied and subtended, like a photographic negative, by the affirmative theology of cataphasis.[31] This dynamic is apparent in Crashaw's most explicit reference to apophatic theology, which occurs in his choral hymn on the

[29] Cf. Marc Bertonasco, 'A New Look at Crashaw and 'The Weeper'', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 10.2 (1968), 177-188, p. 181.
[30] Derrida, *On the Name*, p. 60. ''Au bord du langage' voudrait donc dire: 'au bord comme langage'', Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le Nom* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 65.
[31] Mary-Jane Rubenstein, 'Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction, and Theology after Ontotheology', *Modern Theology*, 19.3 (2003), 387-417.

Epiphany.[32] The magi, imagined as sun worshippers, repent of their idolatry upon viewing the miraculous infant, the absence of light in midwinter anticipating the darkness which fell during the Crucifixion, said to have converted 'the right-ey'd Aeropagite', or Pseudo-Dionysius (193). Lorraine Roberts points out the limits of reading the poem in terms of the *via negativa*, given Crashaw's emphasis on revelation.[33] Yet it is not despite but *through* darkness that man comes to know God in the poem: as Gary Kuchar shows, the eclipse symbolises the process of entering into knowing through unknowing. Kuchar, however, does not draw out the implications of the poem's depiction of apophasis in terms of a penitential ritual.

> [3.] That forfeiture of noon to night shall pay
> All the idolatrous thefts done by this night of day;
> And the Great Penitent presse his own pale lipps
> With an elaborate loue-eclipse
> To which the low world's lawes
> Shall lend no cause
> [CHO.] Saue those domestick which he borrowes
> From our sins & his own sorrowes.
> [1.] Three sad hour's sackcloth then shall show to vs
> His penance, as our fault, conspicuous. […]
> [2.] And as before his too-bright eye
> Was Their more blind idolatry,
> So his officious blindnes now shall be
> Their black, but faithfull perspectiue of thee. (149-71)

The 'sackcloth' donned by the sun directs us to examine our own faults and 'blind idolatry'. This exemplary cosmological penance would seem to be no more concerned with bringing knowledge to light than apophatic theology, directing the gaze of man inwards via darkness rather than illumination. Yet the eclipse does not forsake the possibility of gaining knowledge of God: it reveals a 'black, but faithfull perspectiue' of the divine. The negative figure of the 'Great Penitent', similarly, remains visible in outline, eclipsed by its encounter with the alterity of God at the same time as its performance of repentance remains highly visible, 'elaborate', 'conspicuous' and 'officious' (reminiscent, indeed, of the ostentatious rituals of self-mortification typical of *exomologesis*).

In confession, what is known about the self is offered up along with the unknown, in a dynamic which approaches negative theology's recognition of the 'edge of language' which cannot be crossed, but which nonetheless continues to express itself 'at the edge' *as* language. As Augustine writes:

> confitear ergo quid de me sciam, confitear et quid de me nesciam, quoniam et quod de me scio, te mihi lucente scio, et quod de me nescio, tamdiu nescio, donec fiant tenebrae meae sicut meridies in vultu tuo.

[32] See Kuchar, 'A Greek in the Temple'.
[33] Lorraine Roberts, 'Crashaw's Epiphany Hymn: Faith out of Darkness', in *'Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse': The Seventeenth-century Religious Lyric*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), pp. 134-44.

> I will confess therefore what I know of myself and what I do not know; for what I know of myself I know through the shining of Your light; and what I do not know of myself, I continue not to know until my darkness shall be made as noonday in Your countenance. (X, 5, 7)

The brightness of a noonday which will flood the confessant mired in the darkness of *agnosia* once again folds knowledge back into non-knowledge in this depiction of an apocalyptic eclipse of the world and of the self. The language of confession is thus one which confesses its unknowing even as it strives to shed light upon the self, and which, by the same token, succeeds both in undermining and in re-asserting the foundations of the subject's identity. In a lecture on the subject of sin given by Georges Bataille in March 1944 (an early draft of *On Nietzsche*), mystical ecstasy is compared to a desire for self-annihilation in the blinding light of noon: 'desire raises the mystic to such a perfect ruin, to such a perfect expenditure of himself, that in him life compares itself to the glare of the sun'.[34] Jean Daniélou, in response to Bataille, remarks that the desire to transcend the self entirely is extraneous to Christian thought. Indeed, idealising a dissolution of identity as the only grounds for genuine communication with God amounts to another form of egotistic self-enclosure: an objectification of one's own self and of other selves, treated as limits to be overcome or conquered. The peculiarity of Christian mysticism and of confession may thus consist in the persistence (and indeed, in the intensification) of the subjectivity whose 'perfect ruin' is ardently desired, but never consummated.

'Effectual Whispers': Lover and Penitent

The notion of the 'edge' of language and the condition of language as 'edge' revealed by mystical theology and confession approaches the 'threshold of the swoon' evoked by Bataille's writings on eroticism.[35] According to Bataille, mystical rapture renders death the 'incandescence of life', simultaneously destroying and intensifying the vitality of the subject.[36] Some of Crashaw's most overtly sensual poems are the three lyrics dedicated to Saint Teresa of Avila, warranting the well-worn comparison with Bernini's sculpture in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. 'The Flaming Heart, vpon the book and picture of the seraphicall saint Teresa' works much as a baroque artwork in drawing the onlooker to step into the devotional scene and become witness to Teresa's miraculous life. Significantly, it is through the experience of reading 'these conquering leaues' (77)

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[34] Georges Bataille, 'A Discussion on Sin', in *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, ed. Stuart Kendall, tr. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 26-74; p. 31. Bataille's lecture is derived from the notes of Pierre Klossowski, annexed to Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 6.2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp. 315-58. The passage appears verbatim in *Sur Nietzsche*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 6.2, pp. 11-205, p. 53.

[35] Derrida, *On the Name*, p. 60; '[…] l'amour n'est pas le désir de perdre, mais celui de vivre dans la peur de sa perte possible, l'être aimé maintenant l'amant au bord de la défaillance: à ce prix, seulement, nous pourrons éprouver devant l'être aimé la violence du ravissement.' Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, tr. Mary Dalwood (London: Boyars, 1987), pp. 241-242; *L'Érotisme* (Paris: Minuit, 1957), p. 267.

[36] 'L'incandescence de la vie a le sens de la mort, la mort celui d'une incandescence de la vie.' Bataille, *L'Érotisme,* pp. 265-6.

that the speaker of the poem and the reader in turn are able to bring about the destruction of 'my self and sin' (90) invoked by the final prayer: 'leaue nothing of my SELF in me' (106). The short 'Song' which follows 'The Flaming Heart' further embellishes the conceit of living death, or *prolixitas mortis*:

> Though still I dy, I liue again;
> Still longing so to be still slain,
> So gainfull is such losse of breath,
> I dy euen in desire of death.
>  Still liue in me this louing strife
> Of liuing Death & dying Life.
> For while thou sweetly slayest me
> Dead to my selfe, I liue in Thee. (9-16)

The paradoxical nature of this 'ruin' of the self leads Bataille to liken mystical rapture to the 'threshold' of temptation and of sin: 'It may well be a desire to die, but it is at the same time a desire to live to the limits of the possible and the impossible with ever-increasing intensity'.[37] Much like Mary Magdalene's prodigal repentance – 'still spending, neuer spent' – the inexhaustible passion of the mystic holds the self on the verge of its own dissolution. As the first hymn to the name of Saint Teresa evokes, the saint's identity is paradoxically shored up by a narrative devoted to capturing a rarefaction of the self and of language:

> Like a soft lump of incense, hasted
> By too hott a fire, & wasted
> Into perfuming clouds, so fast
> Shalt thou exhale to Heaun at last
> In a resoluing SIGH, and then
> O what? Ask not the Tongues of men. (113-8)

While Herbert's 'The Odour 2 Cor. 2:15' sighs with longing for a future communion with God, here the suspension of narrative caught in the exhale of a sighing breath ('and then / O what?') is the result of an ineffable encounter that has already taken place. Bataille considers risible the mystic's attempt to organise the experience of 'disequilibrium' in a 'lasting way' – or, we might say, to crystallise the self-evaporating 'lump of incense' of the soul back into language.[38] Yet, as Martin Buber suggests, perhaps another kind of transcendence is held out by the desire 'to make the unity without multiplicity into the unity of all multiplicity'.[39] The 'penitential' strand of Christianity which re-asserts the singular individuality of the confessant in an autobiographical recital may not conflict with the mystical strand that aims at a self-consuming rarefaction of identity; instead, a confessional *via negativa* may reconfigure the last step of mystical experience as linguistic in nature. It is Teresa's writings, indeed,

[37] 'C'est le désir de mourir sans doute, mais c'est en même temps le désir de vivre, aux limites du possible et de l'impossible, avec une intensité toujours plus grande.' Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 240; *L'Érotisme*, p. 265.
[38] Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 242.
[39] Buber, 'Ecstasy and Confession', p. 10.

which continue to clothe her with glory in heaven: the autobiographical account of her encounters with Love's 'sweetly-killing DART!' (106) is what generates a throng of 'virgin-births' on earth (168). The description of reading as an affective, and indeed as an erotic (even mystical) experience resembles the depiction of penance in the second version of 'The Weeper' as a generative process initiated by the 'well-pointed dart' of love (XVIII) and culminating in the transfiguration of the tears into speaking 'sons'. The passionate love conveyed by Teresa's words thus spills over into the poet's own mutually inflamed and inflaming verse: as he reflects in the 'Apologie for the fore-going hymne', the work of the poem consists in a transfusion of 'the flame / I took from reading thee' (2-3) back to Teresa and to his own readers.

A triangulation of the amatory, the confessional, and the mystical lexicon has emerged so far from the insistently erotic overtones of Crashaw's verse. If Derrida aligns confession with apophasis, in his writings on the 'erotic' phenomenon Jean-Luc Marion outlines the close correlation between negative theology and the lover's address. The force of saying 'I love you', according to Marion, lies in its perlocutionary, rather than constative or illocutionary quality. It is, in other words, a statement which aims to convince, and to elicit a response from its interlocutor, rather than connoting or performing an action: 'By saying 'I love you!' I do not thereby factually or actually love, but I nonetheless radically modify the intersubjective relation between me and my interlocutor; from now on nothing will be the same, for better or for worse.'[40] The statement is in effect a question ('Do you love me?'), as well as an entreaty ('Love me!'). The perlocutionary nature of the confession of love gives rise to an essentially dialogic model of speech, which revises the characterisation of the 'erotic phenomenon' as profoundly egotistical. Yet the dialogue between the lover and his addressee is not one of perfect communion, for it opens a gap of unknowing between the question and the response, thus creating an infinite deferral of meaning: 'If it is a question of deciding whether or not (referentially) I am sincere, or whether or not I understand (semantically) what 'to love' means, neither she nor I know anything at the moment of the declaration – hence the apophasis.'[41] The dialogue thus stretches to infinity, endlessly affirming and unravelling the cataphasis of the affirmation of love in a 'hyperbolic redoubling' responsible for keeping the conversation alive. As Marion shows in his reading of Augustine, the discourse of confession, likewise, takes the shape of an address to God which is in fact already a response: because it is God who provides the grounds for the conversation to begin, confession can never amount merely to a constative utterance about the self.[42] When it does, indeed, confession degenerates into exhibitionism or gossip.

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[40] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, tr. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 110.
[41] Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, p. 114. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *Le Phénomène Érotique*: *Six Méditations* (Paris: Grasset, 2003), pp. 224-34.
[42] Jean-Luc Marion, *Au Lieu de Soi: L'Approche de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), p. 43.

The seemingly inescapable association of confession with seduction and eroticism, in this light, takes two forms. One possibility, sketched by Marion, is that the language of the self is grounded, however precariously and vertiginously, on the call sent by the lover into the unknown, from the unknowability of the soul. The other is that of a confession which, driven by a misdirected desire to grasp the object it strives to know, only succeeds in accentuating the egotistical drive of a subject intent on extracting and coming into possession of a secret. The inevitable result of the latter approach is a paradoxical destruction of secrecy (what the previous chapter defined as a 'banishment of interiority') and therefore of eroticism: not merely because it is in between the veils of figurality (Petrarch's *amena et varia nube*) that the secret retains its abiding seductiveness, but also because it is in the space of a shared reciprocity that the secret lives.[43] In other words, it is already, if ineffably, possessed in the gaps of unknowing through which one comes into knowledge of the other. The 'hyper-visible' voluptuousness of Crashaw's bodies and souls is therefore not necessarily or intrinsically pornographic in nature, as has sometimes been suggested.[44] The recurrent image of the wounding wound consists in a 'hyberbolic redoubling' that is witness to a paradoxical mutuality, rather than to obscenity.

> For in loue's feild was neuer found
> A nobler weapon then a WOVND.
> Loue's passiues are his actiu'st part.
> The wounded is the wounding heart. (71-4)

While Rambuss interprets Crashaw's fascination with wounds in the explicitly sexual terms of bodily 'penetrability', the motif signals an essential *impenetrability* at a linguistic level, conjuring the redoubling of meaning and ambiguous agency represented by the notion of a seduced seducer.[45] To borrow Derrida's formulation, the image captures 'the trace of this wounded writing that bears the stigmata of its own proper inadequation' ('la trace de cette écriture blessée qui porte les stigmates de sa propre inadéquation').[46] The 'inadequation' of sacred parody operates in a similar way, as the third chapter showed: its analogical repetition rehearses and displaces the motions of sin, veiling them in a figural sheen which reaches out towards a constantly deferred significance. In the space between the wounded inadequation of the figure and its attempt to wound and solicit in turn, Crashaw's readers are drawn into the conversation, exposing themselves to the 'great artillery' enclosed in 'each loue-spun line' (56).

[43] See chapter 1, section 2.
[44] Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 18.
[45] Ibid., p. 28.
[46] Derrida, *On the Name*, p. 61; 'Sauf le Nom', p. 66.

In Crashaw's version of the Stabat Mater, Christ's transcription of his wounds in Mary's heart, faithfully copied by the poet, thus aims to open the reader's own stigmata through 'study' of Christ's, Mary's, and the poet's grief in turn:

> By all those stings
> Of loue, sweet bitter things,
> Which these torn hands transcrib'd on thy true heart
> O teach mine too the art
> To study him so, till we mix
> Wounds; and become one crucifix. (X)

The indistinction of Mary's and Christ's blood is held at a remove from the onlooker who must strive to imitate Mary's 'art', copying the wounds that are turned into written signs. The mixing of bodily fluids is described in even more overtly sexual terms in the epigram 'On the wounds of our crucified Lord', in which Christ's torn flesh disconcertingly comes to life to reciprocate the lover's gazes and kisses:

> O These wakefull wounds of thine!
> Are they Mouthes? or are they eyes?
> Be they Mouthes, or be they eyne,
> Each bleeding part some one supplies.
>
> Lo! a mouth, whose full-bloom'd lips
> At too deare a rate are roses.
> Lo! a blood-shot eye! that weepes
> And many a cruell teare discloses. (1-8)

The wonder (or horror?) expressed by the opening stanzas registers the 'inadequation' of the poet's representation of the crucified Christ. The flush of the broken flesh becomes a gestural portent of a body that is eminently unreadable, yet mysteriously eloquent. Perhaps it is only by proving impenetrable to human understanding, indeed, that the uncannily 'wakefull wounds' which return the lover's kisses are able to shadow the mystery of redemption, heralding the resurrection and symbolising a love which conquers death. The poem's *compositio loci* is subordinated to the affective or 'perlocutionary' form of address dramatised by its questions – a de-stabilising iconology which does not primarily aim at reproducing the picture of Christ, but rather aspires to a 'mixing of wounds'. Like the declaration of love in Marion's account of the erotic phenomenon, the speaker's questions solicit Christ, coaxing the wounds into responding to the poet's touch and into 'disclos[ing]' a reciprocated love.

The first section of this chapter suggested that in Crashaw's 'ecstatic confessions' the self is not only dissolved, but also and simultaneously 'disclosed': self-destruction is attended by self-revelation, disavowal by strenuous avowal. The recurrent theme of an active passivity participates in this dialectic of apophasis and cataphasis, but also re-presents the duality of confession as an instrument

apt to solidify as much as to relinquish the self. Crashaw's two poems addressed to a 'gentle-woman' (an unidentified 'Mrs M. R.' in *Steps to the Temple*) and the verse epistle 'against irresolution and delay in matters of religion' addressed to Susan Feilding, Countess of Denbigh and first lady of the Bedchamber at Queen Henrietta Maria's court, present seduction as both an active and passive endeavour. The conceit is not only an elegant rhetorical stratagem for transferring agency to the addressee, but also serves a theological purpose, articulating an understanding of conversion as both a passive reception of grace and a voluntary process of self-creation.[47] The verse epistle insistently calls upon imagery of unlocking the soul. But unlike in Herbert's 'Confession', in which the final gesture of opening the heart to God involves destroying the closeted inner spaces fabricated by the poem, the opening of the 'self-shutt cabinet' of the soul is figured by Crashaw as an active selection of the most appropriate key:

> And 'mongst thy shafts of soueraign light
> Choose out that sure decisiue dart
> Which has the Key of this close heart,
> Knowes all the corners of't, & can controul
> The self-shutt cabinet of an vnsearcht soul. (32-6)

The 'disclosure' of the soul becomes a way of coming into possession of grace as well as being possessed by it. The metaphor of an interiority which is not eviscerated by God's persecuting afflictions, but which gives birth to itself ('why […] choose so long / In labor of your selfe to ly, / Nor daring quite to liue nor dy?', 10-2) re-constitutes the subject in terms of a curiously self-involved subjectivity. Marion's model of the lover's address as fundamentally relational is thus troubled by a self-referential, even onanistic kind of love which holds back rather than reaching out for an answer – a reticence which, as in 'The Weeper', suppresses not only the mystery of sanctification, but also the mysteries of interiority.

Certainly, the self-involvement of a soul that brings about its own delivery (and deliverance) is tempered by the resulting 'controul' asserted by grace once it is allowed to enter, as well as by the fact that the soul remains 'vnsearched' prior to the light shining upon it, but Crashaw's paradoxes of active passivity are liable to produce a precarious balance between God's and the sinner's role in effecting a transformation of the self. Despite the theological gulf separating Anne Lock's from Crashaw's representations of confession, the radical passivity which paradoxically magnifies the power of language to shadow the divine in Lock's *Meditation* comes remarkably close to a confessional speech vested with the power to 'choose out that sure decisiue dart', bringing love down to bear on itself, in Crashaw's epistle. Julia Kristeva sees this as the ineluctable outcome of confession's transferral of power to discourse: the subject in effect acquits himself, in an unforeseen realisation of the proverbial

[47] On Crashaw's representation of conversion in gendered terms see Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), ch. 3.

*qui s'accuse s'excuse*.[48] The previous chapter described this problematic self-referentiality in terms of the alternation between a 'liturgical' and a 'spatialised' poetic subjectivity in *The Temple*. The notion of a liturgical idiom capable of soliciting a desire experienced not as lack but as ecstasy is problematised by the configuration of love in terms of absence and fallenness. The other side of the 'inadequation' of confessional language is thus an utterance characterised by a self-involved circularity. This is the ambivalence of Petrarch's representation of the love object, and of the poetic laurel she allegorises: language is both sinful and redemptive, and so the confession of love collapses into a confession of sin, and vice versa. Does the sinfulness which clings to his avowals lead to a more truthful confession or entrench the speaker further in sin? If, as Marion rightly observes, 'ἀγάπη possesses and consumes as much as ἔρως gives up and abandons', where does sin end and redemption begin?[49]

Crashaw's verse aims to stir up love in the same way as Augustine seeks to excite in his readers an affective, almost physiological response: 'indicabo me talibus. Respirent in bonis meis, suspirent in malis meis' ('To such shall I show myself: let their breath come faster for my good deeds: let them sigh for my ill', X, 4, 5).[50] But what shape does the love for God aroused by the poem take? The question famously posed by Augustine – 'what is it that I love when I love God?' ('Quid autem amo, cum te amo?') – finds two different and parallel answers in the tenth book of the *Confessions*: the first is a posture of ecstasy, the second is one of unfulfilled yearning. At the opening of the book, love is described in terms of an interior delight ('amplexum interioris hominis mei'), a sensuousness in which the senses paradoxically seem to play no part:

> lucem, vocem, odorem, cibum, amplexum interioris hominis mei, ubi fulget animae meae quod non capit locus, et ubi sonat quod non rapit tempus, et ubi olet quod non spargit flatus, et ubi sapit quod non minuit edacitas, et ubi haeret quod non divellit satietas. hoc est quod amo, cum deum meum amo.
>
> the light and the voice and the fragrance and the food and embrace in the soul, when that light shines upon my soul which no place can contain, that voice sounds which no time can take from me, I breathe that fragrance which no wind scatters, I eat the food which is not lessened by eating, and I lie in the embrace which satiety never comes to sunder. This it is that I love, when I love my God. (X, 6, 8)[51]

At the end, however, it is desire as unquenchable thirst that prevails: 'Fragrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelo tibi; Gustavi et esurio et sitio; Tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam' ('Thou didst breathe fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for Thee: I tasted Thee, and now hunger

[48] Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), pp. 153-4. Cf. Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: YUP, 1979), p. 280.
[49] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, tr. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: UCP, 2007), p. 221.
[50] PL 32, 781.
[51] PL 32, 783.

and thirst for Thee: Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace', X, 33).[52] In Crashaw's poem on the prayerbook, the words of the text are also depicted as yearning, rustling with impatience to be enclosed in the embrace of the lady's breast:

> LO here a little volume, but great Book!
> A nest of new-born sweets;
> Whose natiue fires disdaining
> To ly thus folded, & complaining
> Of these ignoble sheets,
> Affect more comly bands
> (Fair one) from thy kind hands
> And confidently look
> To find the rest
> Of a rich binding in your Brest. (1-10)

The words tangled in 'these ignoble sheets' recall the comparison of Mary Magdalene to a rose restlessly 'sweating in a too warm bed' in the second version of 'The Weeper' (XXVII). The metaphor presents the inadequation of the poem's language in terms of a reciprocal desire: language yearns to find a voice and breath, as the reader burns to embrace it in turn, 'rifle & deflour / The rich & roseall spring of those rare sweets' (115-6). Anticipation joins with memory, which, after the consummation of the literary encounter, will spur the desire to read anew:

> WORDS which are not heard with EARES
> (Those tumultuous shops of noise)
> Effectuall wispers, whose still voice
> The soul it selfe more feeles then heares;
> Amorous languishments; luminous trances;
> SIGHTS which are not seen with eyes (65-70)

The allusion to 1 Cor. 2:9 ('But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him') frames a panegyric to the poem's own ability to produce a state of rapture in its readers, in another gesture of a love which turns back inwards as much as it reaches out: its verses become the 'effectuall wispers' capable of converting the lady's affection back from a disappointed earthly love towards God. If Crashaw's rhetoric is designed to make us catch our breath and sigh in unison with the confessant, that is because, as Augustine writes, a confession must be received in a spirit of charity. In another echo of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:7) love is singled out by Augustine as the key for reading and interpreting his *Confessions*: 'dicit enim eis caritas, qua boni sunt, non mentiri me de me confitentem, et ipsa in eis credit mihi' ('The charity by which they are good, tells them that in my confession I do not lie about myself; and this charity in them believes me', X, 3, 4).[53] Love, then, is what finally makes the sinner's whispered revelations 'effectuall'. The question of confession's

[52] PL 32, 795.
[53] PL 32, 781.

fundamental unverifiability is rendered, by the same token, 'ineffectual', even if the doubt persists in the question of truthfulness Augustine is compelled to raise. If, as Luther complains, the 'art of confession' (*ars confitendi*) destroys the 'art of trusting' (*ars confidendi*), the space of literature is perhaps where trust in the 'art of confession' is restored, in the hunt for the elusive truth in between the veils of fiction cast over the self and over 'the God of Nature in the Field of Grace'.[54]

[54] Martin Luther, *Confitendi Ratio*, WA 6, pp. 157-169, p. 166.

## Epilogue

Writing an account of the intersections between confessional practice and the history of the lyric is faced with the same difficulty attendant on the confessant's search for truth: 'the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of confession holds out like a shimmering mirage'.[1] Only a paradoxical disavowal of confession's revelatory function seems able to grasp the truth of confession's inexhaustibility. The paradoxes of confessional language, this thesis has argued, afflict as much as they animate poems concerned with manifesting and bringing about their speaker's absolution from sin. As an exercise in self-mortification which enables the constitution of a coherent and unitary self, it is no surprise that confession should give rise to contradiction. Perhaps, indeed, the language of confession welcomes and even courts an unending and deliberate exposure of its own internal conflicts, at the risk of imperilling its redemptive promise.

The inexhaustibility of confession speaks of boundless love, grace, and forgiveness, but also of the inexhaustible chasms of sin. As Donne writes in the 'Hymn to God the Father', it is a sinfulness which seems to stain the very attempt to remediate it: 'When thou hast done, thou hast not done, / For, I have more.' The linear progression plotted by the three stages of the sacrament of penance (contrition, confession, and satisfaction) is thus continually disrupted. Though critical accounts of confessional writing have often focused on prose, an attention to poetic language proves especially generative in light of confession's ruptured temporalities of conversion: rather than recounting a narrative of transformation, a confessional poetics is constantly in the process of 'converting' its speaker and its listeners. Temporality is not only disrupted, but also transcended by confession. As Jean-François Lyotard's posthumous reflections on Augustine's *Confessions* suggest, the 'plot of confessive narrative' always arises from a time outside of time, transmuting contingency into eternity through a self-allegorisation that turns the works of man (*opera*) into signs (*signa*).[2]

And yet, even as the confessant turns himself into a figural sign of grace, the account he gives of himself enables the emergence of an irremovable, 'autobiographical' individuality. The discursive practice of confession, in equal measure ritual and individuating, is inescapably tied to the history of the lyric. From Petrarch's appropriations of Augustine's *Confessions* to the influence exerted on literary culture by the rapidly changing practices of repentance during the Reformation, the lyric accommodates the parameters of introspective self-regard with confession's performative means of renewing the self – a dialogism only enhanced by the involvement of the readers in the rehearsal of a

[1] 'La tâche infinie de faire lever du fond de soi-même, entre les mots, une vérité que la forme même de l'aveu fait miroiter comme l'inaccessible.' Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1990), p. 60; *La Volonté de Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 80.
[2] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine* (Stanford: SUP, 2000), p. 72.

poem's prayer for repentance. In the experience of reading, the *cum-fateri* of confessional utterance becomes once again a 'speaking together'. The exacting and excoriating language of confession thus tilts back into documenting an unfinished process, the see-saw of an infinitely lapsing man taken apart and put back together again by an ever-lapsing tongue.

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