Transfiguring the Ineffable:
Mysticism and Conversion in Seventeenth-Century England

By

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated

to the memory of my father, Perry Woods (1939-2006),

to the memory of my mother, Frances Woods (1950-2016),

and to Susanne.

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ON TERMINOLOGY

The variegated religious cultures of early modernity have been the object of unfailing scholarly interest. Motivations for this fascination are not far to seek. Surely, it would seem, the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries constitute an age of unprecedented socio-cultural acceleration that rapidly necessitated successive refinements to theological positions and responses to new political exigencies. In many obvious respects, this period has proven endlessly fascinating because it encapsulates, according to one narrative, the fragmentation of Christendom and the advent of robust free thinking, the new science, and theories of tolerance.[1] Another important dimension of this historical time frame involves the inter-related questions of identity and religious experience. Scholars have begun to ask serious questions about what it would have been like to have lived through the sequential national and ecclesiastical regime changes of the sixteenth century or through the various permutations (dissolution to restoration) of monarchy in the seventeenth.[2] With the supposed disintegration of medieval institutions and the confessionalization of churches (Protestant as well as Catholic) after 1534, individual religious consciousness in this age assumes many different discursive forms. This dissertation identifies two particular forms, mysticism and conversion, as being especially useful in understanding seventeenth-century English literary history. It moves across the middle of the century, beginning historically with the tumultuous decade of the 1640s when magistracy and high ecclesiology become definitively challenged within national polity, and ending in

[1] See, for instance, Jonathan Israel's pioneering work, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 197-217.

[2] Outstanding examples include Eamon Duffy, *Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2017); Carlos Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (New Have: Yale University Press, 2016); Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984); Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

the 1670s when the limits of political and religious reform become palpably obvious. Few decades of early modern history witnessed such consequential ideological change, and in what follows I suggest that discourses pertaining to mysticism and conversion were often central to these developments.

One of the most pervasive scholarly enterprises over the last two decades has been the so-called "turn to religion." This academic phenomenon is predicated upon the notion that scholars across multiple disciplines should give greater focus to religion as an instrumental part of political and intellectual history. Although the "turn" toward religion is appearing in studies of nearly all time periods from the ancient to the modern, several disciplines in the humanities have isolated early modernity (c. 1500-1750) as a watershed period when religious culture underwent perhaps one of its most significant evolutions.[3] The advent of print culture, the fragmentation of Christian Europe, the rise of the nation-state, the progression of vernacular languages, the birth of mechanical science, and European engagement with western hemispheric peoples unquestionably had some important relationship to aspects of religious culture, motivation, and practice. Because of the importance of religion in early modernity, scholars studying this time period have been in the vanguard of those theorizing the turn to religion generally. While social and political historians have arguably never questioned the importance of religion in early modern English culture, Arthur Marotti and Ken Jackson have helpfully demonstrated the limits of a typical scholarly convention of approaching "religion and politics as religion *as* politics."[4] Thus, the turn to religion is really an attempt to appreciate and elucidate the multifariousness of religion within any given cultural domain without reducing it to another explanatory matrix. Religion, so the turn to religion urges, is *sui generis*.

[3] See the famous essay by Arthur Marotti and Ken Jackson, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies" *Criticism* 46 (2004): 167-90. Cf. also Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
[4] Marotti and Jackson, 167, with emphasis in the original.

Transfiguring the Ineffable builds on the remarkable work produced by the turn to religion to reflect on the importance of mysticism and conversion in seventeenth-century literary culture. It is important to take a moment to explore the polysemous nature of these terms before proceeding to outline how the project unfolds. On the one hand, both *conversion* and *mysticism* (and the related conception of the *mystical*) are contemporary analytical terms used by scholars to study multiple cultural phenomena throughout history. In this sense, we must be cautious not to use the terms indiscriminately without qualification in analyzing particular historical moments. On the other hand, variations of the terms have been used by individuals at particular historical moments for interesting reasons. One important point of departure for this project is the contention that the seventeenth century represents a period, as Michel de Certeau has so powerfully demonstrated, when the idea of the mystical is developed and recalibrated numerous times within different religious cultural spheres. This phenomenon relates to the concept of conversion in intricate ways, as will become apparent in what follows.

In its normative usage, *conversion* of course entails a seemingly straightforward change, usually religious, from one spiritual commitment to another. Etymologically, the Latinate term "conversion" betokens a "turn" toward or back to something significantly salvific. The Latin *convertere* usually corresponds to the Greek term μετάνοια (metanoia), which signals a transformative change of heart or disposition. Thus, conceptually the idea of conversion can encompass both an outward change in religious practice as well as an internal change of psychological or emotional prerogative. While the idea of conversion has a historical track record in pre-Christian culture (especially in Platonic discussions of intellectual change),[5] it assumes its most common usage following the advent of Christianity and the subsequent conversion of Jewish and pagan figures such as Saul of Tarsus (c. 5-

[5] Cf. Mátyás Szalay, "Metanoia: A Phenomenological Analysis of Philosophical Conversion" *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* I.3 (2013): 484-503.

67 C.E.), the emperor Constantine (272-337 C.E.), and the Manichee Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.). In early modern Europe, one could convert from one religion to another (e.g. in the case of Sabbatai Sevi in 1666), but one could also convert from Protestantism to Catholicism and *vice versa*.

The term *mysticism* is even more polysemous than *conversion*, but has historically entailed one or more of the following: 1) achieving phenomenological immediacy or continuity with a divine principle via devotional meditation or contemplation; 2) the speculative philosophical endeavor to demonstrate what cannot be said or thought about the Absolute (often called negative theology by theologians and negative dialectic by philosophers); and 3) the acquisition of rarified (often esoteric) knowledge through either ecstatic states or ritual observance. Etymologically, the term points toward concealment in the sense of ineffable knowledge or modes of consciousness.[6] With such wide conceptual potential, the term has been applied to such examples as Plato's *Parmenides*, Jewish Kabbalah, Quaker spirituality, Neoplatonic theurgy, and the writings of Spanish thinkers such as Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and John of the Cross (1542-1591). However, this project takes seriously the pioneering work of de Certeau who has revealed the seventeenth century to be completely unique in how the idea of the mystical shaped several different discourses.[7] Indeed, we can find ready evidence of de Certeau's claims by noting Stephen Nye's 1691 work entitled, *An Impartial Account of the Word Mystery*. This work marks a moment in seventeenth-century English history when several decades of debate about mystical experience and mystical theology eventuated in a critical point when the protean nature of the term was investigated and contested.

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[6] Louis Bouyer, "Mysticism: An Essay on the History of a Word," in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Richard Wood (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 42-55.

[7] See Michel de Certeau, "Mysticism," trans. Marsanne Brammer, *Diacritics* 22.2 (1992): 11-25, as well as *The Mystic Fable*, Volume I: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and *The Mystic Fable, Volume II: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith, ed. Luce Girard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015. De Certeau's project focuses mainly on continental forms of mysticism, but his argument can easily be extended to include, albeit with its own idiosyncrasies, early modern England.

CONVERSION AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORKS

The current project approaches conversion and mysticism as cultural vectors that often intersect in the most dynamic of ways, especially in the seventeenth century. In an obvious sense, a mystical experience or a mystical philosophical apprehension (e.g. in the case of Plato's *Parmenides*) can occasion a conversion of sorts toward a newfound understanding of reality. Similarly, a conversion can initiate a process of studious reflection (e.g. in the case of a Christian converting to Judaism and subsequently studying Kabbalah). However, the seventeenth century is a particularly unique period when both broader cultural views as well as personal practices frequently appropriated the language of mysticism and conversion for distinctive ends.

With the increasing fragmentation of Christianity in early modern Europe, it is not surprising to find multiple examples of conversion between different confessions. It is worth noting the sheer pervasiveness of this phenomenon among the most well-known figures of English literary history. Ben Jonson (1572-1637) converted to Catholicism for 12 years before returning, rather dramatically, to the Church of England. John Donne (1572-1631), despite being reared in the Roman Catholic Church and having family ties to Thomas More (1478-1535), converted to the Church of England, becoming a prominent Anglican figure and dean of St. Paul's. When John Dryden (1631-1700) converted to Roman Catholicism in 1685, both his readers and his political allies were mystified. In abandoning the Anglicanism of his birth, Dryden also relinquished his positions as poet laureate and royal historiographer, thus politically and religiously disenfranchising himself. Dryden's life is particularly useful for thinking about conversion's place on England's national stage during the Exclusion Crisis (1678-1681) when poets articulated the country's collective anxiety about the prospect of the monarchy falling into the hands of the notorious Catholic convert James, Duke of York (1633-1701). In all, the seventeenth century was awash in multiple conversions (and re-

conversions) as well as public apprehensions about prominent figures converting in the wrong direction.

Literary, cultural, and intellectual historians have long emphasized both the importance and the elusiveness of conversion in the history of Western culture. In his seminal book, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, A. D. Nock famously mapped the frontiers of ancient religion by noting that Christianity, with its attendant discourses of sin and salvation, fundamentally transformed the idea of spiritual allegiance in late antiquity. As Nock writes, "Genuine conversion to paganism will appear in our inquiry only when Christianity had become so powerful that its rival was, so to speak, made an entity by opposition and contrast. Then we find men returning in penitence and enthusiasm to the faith of the past, now invested for them with a new seriousness."[8] Nock's groundbreaking scholarship revealed how conversion, understood as both a historical transition as well as a personal evolution, became a foundational discourse within Western culture up to the advent of the medieval era.

Building on the remarkable insights of Nock, Karl F. Morrison's scholarship has emphasized that, following the historical watershed of Augustine's famous conversion from Manicheanism to Christianity, new analytical categories were required to understand the development of religious consciousness after the fifth century. In two momentous studies,[9] Morrison has demonstrated that studying religious conversion requires particularly refined hermeneutical methods:

> If we want to enter into the minds of others and reconstruct their hermeneutic patterns, our first step has to be recognizing differences between their way of thinking and ours. […] It is a confusion of categories to use the word *conversion* as though it were an instrument of critical analysis, equally appropriate to any culture or

[8] A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933); reprinted (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), here at 15.

[9] Karl F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992); and *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992).

> religion. The word has a profound, mystical sense in the West for which some great religions and languages of the world have no equivalent. Even in the history of the West, it has displayed different connotations at different moments. Thus, the word is more properly a subject, rather than a tool, of analysis.[10]

Scholars have no access to the minds of individual converts. What remains, as Morrison notes, are texts that demand subtle modes of interpretation. Whereas Nock laid the groundwork for understanding how a cataclysmic change in religious consciousness could alter large-scale dimensions of culture in antiquity, Morrison is quick to stress how conversion throughout the Middle Ages often entailed a life-long negotiation of identity and personal struggle. This understanding of religious change, which many scholars identify as an *evangelical* conversion, involved working within several inter-related paradigms of spiritual development. The most conspicuous characteristic of this mode of conversion is the generation of narratives and texts which dramatize spiritual evolution in poetical and mythographical ways. This discursive practice reaches a high watermark in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when individual patterns of change collectively foster what Morrison identifies as a "poetics of conversion." He argues, "When it is unpacked, as a historical artifact, a variety of models of conversion, some quite incompatible, is found all cobbled together into an ensemble, or repertory, that enabled writers of twelfth-century Europe to explore, interpret, and explain transformations in their world and in themselves."[11]

Morrison's study of the poetics of conversion culminates, quite naturally, with a brief appreciation of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and his *Commedia*. Somewhat serendipitously, Morrison's studies overlap, without engaging, the work of the great medievalist John Freccero. In the collection of essays entitled, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, Freccero convincingly argues that the

[10] Morrison, *Understanding Conversion*, xiv.
[11] Morrison, *Understanding Conversion*, xv.

Commedia is an elaborate conversion narrative.[12] In rehearsing this and other scholarly examinations of conversion, I am following Morrison's contention that the history of conversion is really a history of narrative production serving as an important index to evolving senses of religious consciousness. As Freccero explains, Dante demonstrated that conversion could be engaged through typological, tropological, and Christological interpretations. Of particular interest to the present study is Dante's creative re-dramatization of Pauline conversion:

> Conversion is for him [St. Paul], much as it was for Plato, a turning away from the false light of temporal things, seen with the eyes of the body, to the light of eternity, seen with the eyes of the soul. Above all, blindness and vision are in the Pauline text metaphors for interpretation, the obtuse reading of faithful literalists transformed, by unveiling, into a reading of the same text in a new light.[13]

Dante, following the great paradigmatic converts Paul and Augustine, turns back toward the Divine by re-narrating literary history, and like Paul in particular unveils spiritual truth via new textual productions and interpretations. In undertaking a poetic journey into the afterlife, the Dantean Pilgrim undergoes a symbolic death and is then resurrected as the renewed poet.

Here we see that conversion is rarely a discrete occurrence, but is rather a powerfully elusive discursive phenomenon that generates, as both Morrison and Freccero help us understand, multiple forms of textuality. When we develop these insights into the study of early modernity, it is clear that the historian Michael Questier is absolutely correct when he notes that in this period, "conversion does not generally lend itself to quantitative analysis."[14] Questier's incisive study of confessional allegiance in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries corroborates points made in different contexts by Morrison and Freccero. As a cultural phenomenon, conversion from one version of Christianity to another was often less about a simple isolated change in a person's life and much

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[12] John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1986).
[13] Freccero, 123.
[14] Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

more about the ongoing embodiment of tensions between doctrinal positions, political anxieties, and individual evangelical concerns.

Molly Murray has recently argued that we can still fruitfully use the term "poetics of conversion" to study literature and religious change in early modern England. Murray contends that, "conversion, understood in its early modern sense as movement between churches and not solely as a progression toward grace, profoundly influenced the English literary imagination," and moreover suggests that "conversion influenced poetic style," especially in the cases of William Alabaster (1567-1640), John Donne, Richard Crashaw, and John Dryden.[15] Murray's study differs in unique ways from previous studies of the poetics of conversion and, as will come apparent, from the present study as well. First, Murray's overall contention is that a poet's conversion demonstrably affected his poetic choices and figures of speech. As she explains, in her analysis the "poetics of conversion, in which the particular formal qualities of poetry—its schemes and tropes, its distinctive styles of signifying—are used to confront the unsettling phenomenon of religious change." [16] Second, Murray's study of the correlation between religious change and poetic tropes pivots on the question of biography. Methodologically, this entails starting from the data of a poet's life and change in confessional allegiance and working outward to isolate the poetry as an index of possible transformations, internal as well as external.

While I see the usefulness of Murray's approach to seventeenth-century poetry, I am persuaded by Morrison that biography is an important though ultimately incomplete framework for a robust understanding of conversion. Furthermore, the present study accepts as axiomatic Morrison's astute point that conversion "has a profound, mystical sense in the West."[17] This stems,

[15] Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.
[16] Murray, 7.
[17] Morrison, *Understanding Conversion*, xiv. See p. 8 above.

in large part, from the fact that Christianity's foundational apostolic figure, Paul, was both a convert and a mystic. Indeed, as Alan F. Segal has so persuasively argued, the assimilation of Paul's conversion experience with his mystical experience constitutes the fibrous tissue of so much New Testament theology.[18] Here we can begin to appreciate the intricate conceptual relationship between conversion and mysticism that the current project explores. In the same way that a conversion experience or process is irreducible to historical contingency alone, the various forms of mysticism are not analytically exhausted through the attenuated notion of experience. As Bernard McGinn, the foremost historian of Western mysticism, has written, "Those who define mysticism in terms of a certain type of experience of God often seem to forget that there can be no direct access to experience for the historian. Experience as such is not part of the historical record."[19] The minds of mystics and converts are inaccessible to modern scholars. Moreover, as McGinn argues: "A recognition of the interdependence of experience and interpretation can help avoid some of the false problems evident in scholarship on mysticism." In developing and extending what McGinn terms a "hermeneutics of mystical texts,"[20] the current dissertation proposes that different forms of mysticism and conversion converged in seventeenth-century England to explore larger questions of materiality, the human body, symbolic representation, subjectivity, and historicity.

THE MYSTICAL IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The project's title, *Transfiguring the Ineffable*, reflects the argument that in the seventeenth century conversion and mysticism often intersected at the nodal point of unknowability and inexpressibility. It is worth pausing to reflect on what is meant by this approach. The claim advanced here is not that all converts were mystics (or *vice versa*). To be sure, many converts of the period, such as Richard

[18] Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 34-71.
[19] Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, Volume I of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xiv.
[20] McGinn, xiv.

Crashaw and William Alabaster, displayed very public interests in speculative and affective mysticism. But just as many converts lacked such interests. Neither is the argument predicated upon the notion, distressingly common in modern scholarship, that either Catholicism or Protestantism was more hospitable to mystical reflection. While we can find many new converts to Catholicism in the century who highlight the Roman Church's cultivation of mystic-saints (such as St. Teresa of Avila), Protestantism was just as capable of generating intense mystical thinkers, such as Jakob Böehme (1575-1624), Peter Sterry (1613–1672), and Johannes Kelpius (1667–1708). *Transfiguring the Ineffable* argues instead that specific seventeenth-century writers appropriated the discourses of both conversion and mysticism as a strategy of self-differentiation. Crucially, however, the study stresses that this strategy was rarely, if ever, geared toward biographical self-fashioning. On the contrary, forms of conversion and mysticism allowed writers such as Henry More, Sir Tobie Matthew, Richard Crashaw, and John Milton to explore the porousness of cultural and intellectual boundaries. Thus, far from denoting a transition from one singular identity to another, conversion could call into question fixed identity altogether and facilitate instead a liminal yet ineffable form of existence. Finally, this project illustrates that conversion and mysticism, as both lived cultural experiences as well as heuristic scholarly categories, together share what McGinn helpfully describes as "the interdependence of experience and interpretation."

This dissertation also argues for a particular approach to the study of *mysticism* and its conceptual relationship to other areas of culture in seventeenth-century England. One conventional understanding of early modern mysticism stipulates that the term should be read along lines proceeding from larger trends in religious reform. According to this reading and others like it, the mystical represents foremost attempts by religious dissidents to recede from and evade autocratic forces. Thus, in the words of Rufus Jones, one can make the case that mysticism "had a powerful

influence in bringing democracy to birth in the State."[21] Others argue that since even the great rationalists René Descartes (1596-1650) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) were first identified and denounced as "mystics," the term is too variegated to be of any use to the intellectual historian in categorizing religious movements. The current project eschews both approaches by demonstrating that philosophers and poets of the seventeenth century were not only aware of emerging ideas of the mystical, but also appropriated those ideas as strategies of self-differentiation. It does no good to disregard the term "mystical" since scientists, philosophers, and poets frequently utilized the discourse for discrete ends. One end in particular, the need to dramatize what cannot be known or said (the ineffable), was shared among many English writers of the day. Indeed, in the seventeenth century the speculative form of mysticism, often identified as apophatic (negative) theology, generated the most robust intellectual and artistic responses to the epistemological revolutions of Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Descartes, and Spinoza. I approach the seventeenth century as a period whose radical admixture of philosophy, theology, and literature generated a host of idiosyncratic reflections on the problems of ineffability and apophatic thought. Across the ideological spectrum, writers found common cause in exploring the implications of speculative mysticism. To illustrate this point, this project focuses on four key figures: Henry More (1614-1687), Richard Crashaw (1613-1649), Sir Tobie Matthew (1577-1655), and John Milton (1608-1674).

Transfiguring the Ineffable examines how mystical discourse developed in seventeenth-century England and concomitantly became a central point of contention within emerging national identities, especially in relation to the question of conversion. Heretofore, understanding this process has been complicated by two different, though ultimately related, phenomena. First, literary historians have appropriated the term "mystical" for numerous indiscriminate applications. Labeling certain poets of the period (e.g. Richard Crashaw or Thomas Traherne) as "mystical," without a

[21] See *Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 25.

sustained consideration of the term's synchronic usage (and its larger conception within intellectual history), has conspicuously worked to marginalize many writers as well as to distort the careers of several others. Second, a scholarly tendency to conflate radical religious groups (e.g. alchemists, millenarians, enthusiasts, et al.) into a single category of esotericism or mysticism has ignored the lengths to which writers of the period went to differentiate themselves from others who nonetheless shared a preoccupation with highlighting what is ultimately ineffable or beyond rational comprehension. The present project endeavors to scrutinize more clearly how the idea of the mystical was received, contested, and recalibrated in seventeenth-century English culture, and it further seeks to delineate how such contestation influenced larger national developments on the eve of the Enlightenment.

An underlying premise of this intervention is that by understanding how the notion of the mystical evolved through the century we can reconceive the relationship between important cultural domains: the religious, the scientific, and the politico-national. Thinkers of this period witnessed the intellectual ground beneath their feet shift in violent ways. As movements toward reform took shape across the spectrum of culture, the idea of the mystical emerged as a nodal point at the intersection of factional religious dispute, scientific discovery, and political crisis. From Francis Bacon's pioneering scientific (and epistemological) paradigm to sectarian debates over extreme religious zealotry ("enthusiasm" in the 1650s-1670s), English writers frequently became engrossed (directly or indirectly) in discussions of the unknowable, the incomprehensible, and the inscrutable. Such a point of contention stemmed naturally from larger interests in the prospect of developing a comprehensive body of knowledge, forming rational dogmatic theological positions, and distilling an authentic national self-consciousness. On the continent, various mystics (e.g. Teresa of Avila and Jakob Böehme) informed the popular imagination on a grand scale. While several scholars have noted the sporadic interest of English writers in these Continental analogues, no study to date has

offered a fully developed explication of how these currents of thought evolved in their own idiosyncratic fashion within the English context or how they contributed to early stages of Enlightenment culture.

Throughout this study of seventeenth-century mysticism and conversion, I emphasize the limits of existing models of periodization. Indeed, this emphasis is crucial to the larger intervention being made. Conventional tendencies that locate the terminus of seventeenth-century literary culture in 1649 or 1660 have established a precedent whereby several historical progressions are ignored or otherwise undetected. The 1650s constitute a significant decade in which writers take up in a radical manner the issue of the mystical in polemical disputes, but also a time when several important writings are printed and circulated for the first time. In many instances, these writings were composed decades earlier, but their emergence in the 1650s allowed the mystical to assume multiple resonances after the fallout of the English Civil Wars (1642-1651). A figure such as Meric Casaubon (1599-1671) was inclined to subsume several writers, from Plato to Descartes to Quakers, into the category "mystical," while the Catholic convert Serenus Cressy expressed horror at the notion that radical Protestants (many of whom self-identified as mystics) were appropriating the writings of Catholic mysticism for their own causes. As an alternative proposal for chronological frameworks, I argue in this project that we must be willing to traverse the English Civil Wars in charting patterns in intellectual history, especially when seeking to understand how the mystical informed wider aspects of culture. Mysticism's emphasis on the ineffable and the unknowable should be read against a historical backdrop riven with violence occasioned by too much religious certitude.

For the narrative canvassed here, I stress vital semantic distinctions, and in many important respects the present study differs markedly from its predecessors. Beyond the limits of periodization, several scholarly categories have collectively conspired to obscure the mystical as a problem of intellectual culture. For instance, studies of the occult, magic, esotericism, and radicalism (all broadly

established categories within existing scholarship) have too easily conscripted several authors and notions into their ranks. However, in the present study I acknowledge the mystical as an intellectual preoccupation explored across many different traditions of inquiry ranging from ancient Neoplatonism through the Middle Ages into early modernity. Crucially, I note that even the culture of the early Enlightenment had a healthy regard for currents of speculative mysticism.

In the seventeenth century, Europe witnessed the mystical become a conduit for various expressions of religious orientation, as evidenced in the international acclaim achieved by Teresa of Avila. There are, however, critical differences between Teresa and, say, figures such as John Dee and Giordano Bruno. While their respective writings, replete as they are with shared metaphors of darkness, interiority, and ecstatic events, would seemingly find common affiliation in a single genre, there are important reasons for maintaining their distinction. One rationale will bring this point into sharper relief. It is too often assumed that early modern interest in the mystical developed almost universally out of attempts to question governing ideologies (such as religious orthodoxies or various cultural constraints).[22] This project takes as its point of departure the claim that mystical thought achieved a significant discursive function amidst religious, political, and cultural ambiguity, tension, and conflict. However, it stresses that the mystical could be invoked for radical and institutional, personal as well as authoritarian means.

Concerns about the mystical span the whole of the seventeenth century and were concomitantly enmeshed with many forms of literary practice. As an incipient discourse of the period, the mystical was inextricably linked to specific notions, such as the hiddenness-manifestation dialectic, the power of language to both conceal and reveal, the prospect of genuine spiritual

[22] Witness, for example, the recent international consortium formed with the name "Research Group in Early Modern Religious Dissents and Radicalism." Its stated goal is to "promote research on the social networks of individuals and specific groups, as well as on the dynamics involved in constructing socio-cultural identities" *vis-à-vis* the heuristic of "dissent." See: http://www.emodir.net.

discernment, individual agency, and authentic religious conversion. A central issue surrounding these discourses was the question of sociality. Any putative endeavor into a secretive world or arcane system of reflection invariably had social consequences. Mysticism's potential to foster novel claims of privileged, individualized insight threatened both the Republic of Letters and the various institutions of orthodoxy. Throughout the 1620s, 1630s, and 1640s, multiple writers, from Ben Jonson and William Alabaster to Thomas Vaughan and Joseph Beaumont, invoke the mystical for widely divergent purposes. Beginning in the 1650s, the term becomes for many writers as insidious as it was capricious. When radical Protestants such as John Everard and enthusiasts take up the term as a cause of celebration, members of the English intelligentsia like Meric Casaubon and Henry More seek to prune the idea of its aberrant associations. By the 1670s, such a preoccupation achieves new vitality in Milton's poetry, especially in *Paradise Regained*.

OUTLINE OF FOLLOWING CHAPTERS

Chapter II addresses the most prolific of the so-called Cambridge Platonists: Henry More. A thorough examination of More's literary and philosophical writings is extremely overdue. In addition to being the first philosopher in England to respond publicly to Descartes' New Method, More was an extremely important original thinker who collaborated with the first major woman philosopher of the period (Anne Conway) as well as Isaac Newton (whom More tutored). As a philosopher, More's achievements are demonstrable. However, this chapter notes that More's first widely regarded publication was a long poem, *Psychozoia Platonica: or, a Platonicall Song of the Soul* (1642). This work, which has received scant attention from literary scholars, assumes the form of an elaborate allegory of how to achieve "a most Joyous and Lucid State of mind, and such plainly as ineffable." More's poem is important for cultural and literary historians because it is published at the beginning of the turbulent Civil Wars, and in spite of this challenging context manages to articulate a strikingly original and novel philosophical manifesto. Following what he calls his "conversion" to a form of

Neoplatonism, More endeavors to present a mythopoetic framework for approaching the material world. As a means of overcoming the alienation from nature (brought about by Baconian science), More re-read ancient philosophy, especially the work of the Neoplatonist Plotinus (204-270 C.E.), with the intention of developing a more nuanced monistic philosophy that emphasized humanity's sensuous continuity with nature. More's poem, *Psychozoia Platonica* (and especially the first canto), provides an aesthetic framework for developing his own unique form of speculative mysticism. The ideas first aired in this poem would lead More eventually to confront Spinoza's philosophy directly, helping him revitalize notions of materiality and individual religious experience.

Chapter III concentrates on Sir Tobie Matthew (1577-1655) and his residual legacy in the figures of Richard Crashaw (1612-1649) and Serenus Cressy (1605-1674). Matthew has received some attention from historians, but literary scholars to date have not appreciated his extensive influence in the period. Matthew was a very important figure within Stuart politics, and as a convert to Catholicism he enjoyed a status within the English intelligentsia that few other Catholics in the period achieved. This chapter canvasses important details of Matthew's life, but also suggests that the most important index of his significance lies in how later writers, most importantly Crashaw and Cressy, echoed his achievements in corporeal mysticism. These specific figures were all converts to Catholicism and shared a pronounced interest in mystical writings, especially those authored by the mystics St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and Julian of Norwich (1342-1416). Through the combined discourses of conversion and mystical ecstasy, Matthew's life represents a baroque aesthetics of exile following his expulsion from England numerous times. This chapter thus explicates the discursive correlation between the Catholic's exile (i.e. his bodily dislocation) and his interest in mystical literature, and underscores the thematic importance of the body within this discursive relationship. My overarching contention is that the cultivation of mystical literature among these convert-writers supplied unique resources for resistance to Protestant negations of bodily religious practice. Mystics

like Teresa and Julian claimed in their writings to have experienced divine revelations through affective sensual states of ecstasy and rapture. Matthew, Crashaw, and Cressy all oriented themselves around the mystics' texts, and their tales of ecstatic devotion, in suggestive ways. Of the many characteristics of mystical literature, I argue that what appealed to these writers most was the prospect of envisioning the body as a *locus* of divine disclosure.

Chapter IV addresses the baroque English poet Richard Crashaw. Like More, Crashaw published his most controversial poetry in the fraught decade of the 1640s. As a convert to Roman Catholicism and an enthusiast for Spanish mysticism (e.g. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross), Crashaw occupied a liminal place within Protestant England. While his poetry is often anthologized, it is also bracketed as too mystical and too excessive to be made intelligible in the ideas of his time or ours. In this chapter I advance the novel claim that Crashaw's radical poetic aesthetics coupled with his intense mystical fervor represent an exceptionally imaginative reworking of mystical theology. I contend that what many scholars discern as Crashaw's ostentatious imagery is in reality an attempt to overcome a perceived alienation from national loyalty and the human body through tropes of excess and mystical perception. If Baroque culture represents, in Erwin Panofsky's famous phrase, the confrontation of the "inherent conflicts"[23] coming from the Renaissance, Crashaw's poetry should be reassessed as mitigating these conflicts through poetic revision. Locating the poet in a larger network of seventeenth-century thinkers, I demonstrate that Crashaw was well versed in the various traditions of mysticism (ancient, medieval, and early modern). Moreover, I stress that his poetry constitutes a major advancement in the aesthetic theorization of immanence and transcendence, and that it should be understood as a literary embodiment of trans-national devotional cosmopolitanism.

[23] Erwin Panofsky, "What Is Baroque?" in *Three Essays on Style* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1995), 88.

The fifth and final chapter argues that in *Paradise Regained* Milton re-appropriates the mythographic framework of ancient Jewish culture in order to present a poetic exploration of apophatic theology that registers the poet's individual concerns about identity, revelation, and the experience of God. Developing insights from recent scholarship that the poem signals interests in both conversion and pietistic mysticism, this chapter resists the temptation to refract the poem through the lens of seventeenth-century politics. Instead, it argues that the poem operates on the more transcendent level of consciousness generally. Milton was aware of how ancient analogues of his narrative were governed by a mythological emphasis on divine inaccessibility. *Paradise Regained*, a story about the formation and trials of the Messiah, is replete with the mythographic vocabulary of ancient culture. The poem's narrative unfolds according to well-established antimonies: concealment and revelation, hiddenness and manifestation. As this chapter illustrates, Milton reintegrates and recalibrates apophatic concepts into the Jewish apocalyptic stories regarding the forbidden glory of God. This represents a poetic recasting of philosophical concepts through symbolic expressions. The principal achievement of this chapter involves countering longstanding scholarly claims that *Paradise Regained* (Milton's final poetic masterpiece) dismisses speculative philosophy in favor of the Protestant piety and quietism of this day. I show that Milton ventured beyond conventional apophatic theology and Protestant orthodoxy in a manner that is both philosophically grounded and religiously nuanced. Milton opted to incarnate his own idiosyncratic Messiah figure in *Paradise Regained* who would poetically encapsulate the importance of ineffability all the while repudiating any form of radical solipsism, political control, and historical contingency. In this respect, the Messiah of *Paradise Regained* projects a model of genuine (i.e. Miltonic) spiritual discernment that, through its emphatic inexpressibility, navigates between the Scylla of authoritarian power and the Charybdis of religious radicalism. Accordingly, *Paradise Regained* represents a telescoping of historical consciousness. I demonstrate that Milton's Messiah refuses to be converted into the categories of

ancient or early modern civilization. This Messiah disavows the fervent madness of radicalism and imperial control, and by receding into himself he ultimately re-enters the community afresh with a form of consciousness unparalleled in seventeenth-century literature.

Taken collectively, the chapters of this project reveal how the discourses of conversion and mysticism intersected in vibrant ways throughout the seventeenth century. One important implication of this study is that the reification of categories and the rigidity of historiographical boundaries have conspired to dull our appreciation of the complexities of religious culture in this period. The studies of Morrison and Freccero have convincingly demonstrated that conversion involves complex modes of textual production, while McGinn and others have established that mystical discourse requires very refined hermeneutical methods. Some of the figures (Matthew, Crashaw, and Cressy) in this study were confessional converts, while others (More, Milton, and Milton's Messiah) approach the discourse of conversion speculatively. In none of the cases does the problem of biography become the sole governing framework for analysis. Rather, the writings produced by these figures explore in different ways the porousness of identity and at times even evacuate identity of any historical meaning.

Indeed, the intersection of conversion and mysticism provides new avenues of approach for developing and perhaps thinking beyond Renaissance self-fashioning. While there is precedent within historical studies of the period to view mysticism as an important feature of England's developing national ethos, literary studies has yet to wander down the pathways I have begun to map here. Arbitrary historiographical strictures (e.g. 1649 or 1660), as well as a tendency to trace single traditions (e.g. Neoplatonism, alchemy, Catholic mysticism, or radical Puritanism), have perhaps prevented a deeper understanding of how the emerging discourses of mysticism and conversion found aesthetic representation throughout the seventeenth century. Frances Dolan has helpfully identified what she terms the "heightened sense of urgency and self-consciousness regarding the

contingency of truth claims" endemic to this period.[24] *Transfiguring the Ineffable* attempts to show that the discourses of mysticism and conversion in seventeenth-century England could together be utilized to explore questions of indeterminacy and ineffability as they pertain to nationality, symbolism, materiality, and self-reflexivity. Conversion and mysticism in this period frequently intersect to form what we may legitimately call an apophasis of the self.

[24] Frances Dolan, *True Relations: Reading, Literature, and Evidence in Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 5.

CHAPTER II

Turning Toward Matter:
Henry More and the Philosophical Form of Mystical Experience

> At the center of Neoplatonism is the question of the superlative as a dynamical concept. And one of the challenges that this concept of the superlative brings with it is the following: between the world—contingent, always changing, finite—and the divine—conditioning, eternal, and infinite—there must be some relation that does not either *simply* deify the world or naturalize the divine.
>
> -Eugene Thacker

> In other words, philosophy is explanatory of abstraction, and not of concreteness. It is by reason of their instinctive grasp of this ultimate truth that, in spite of much association with arbitrary fancifulness and atavistic mysticism, types of Platonic philosophy retain their abiding appeal; they seek the forms in the facts.
>
> -Alfred North Whitehead[1]

INTRODUCTION: A POET AMONG THE PLATONISTS

The seventeenth century was theologically riven with debates about the nature, efficacy, and dangers of mystical theology. As we now know, the connotations of *the mystical* were all too protean in the fraught middle decades of the time. In his vicious 1654 polemic, *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme*, Meric Casaubon (1599-1671) for example alleges that seventeenth-century Europe, and more precisely England itself, had become besieged by what he terms "*mysticall* art." He traces the undue influence of mystical thought back to Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, but he claims rather surprisingly that the most egregious exponents of "*Mysticall Theologie*" in his own time include (he identifies each) Jesuits, Calvinists, Alchemists, Ecstatics, *and* Descartes.[2] What united members

[1] Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 29 (emphasis added). Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay on Cosmology* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 20.

[2] Meric Casaubon, *A treatise concerning enthusiasme, as it is an effect of nature, but is mistaken by many for either divine inspiration, or diabolical possession* (London: 1654), Chapter 3, "Of Contemplative and Philosophicall Enthusiasme" (*passim.*); 130 here. Casaubon's polemic proved so popular in 1654 that

of this motley group, so the argument goes, was their claim to possess a form of privileged perspicacity (which the author glosses as solipsism): through union with God, direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit, bodily rhapsody, speculative apophaticism, the discernment of Nature's opaque workings, or (in the case of Descartes) an immediate, absolute apprehension of rationalizing subjectivity. As Casaubon explains, print had enabled the widespread readership of esoteric and metaphysical ideas which engendered a framework of meanings seemingly shared among these thinkers. In response to these widely available books, Casaubon is perhaps one the first scholars in English culture to fashion a genre of written works called "mystical," albeit for denunciatory purposes. While we must recognize that views like Casaubon's (and there were many like his) represent aggregation without interpretation, we must equally acknowledge that his perspective is illustrative of the evolving and overlapping forms of mystical thought patterns in the period.

As Casaubon's concerns testify, the problems of the mystical were manifold. Can a mystical experience validate itself as a distinctive mode of apprehension? Are theologians and philosophers obliged to view mystical ascents toward higher principles as enterprises always undertaken in good faith toward advanced epistemic dimensions? Are there values or hazards in taking refuge in the supposed ineffable nature of performative mystical experience that escapes language? These and

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it was reprinted in 1655 and 1656. He refers throughout this treatise to Descartes, the "author of the New Method" (i.e. *Discours de la méthode* [1637]), as an exemplar of the "Mysticall Theologie." At one point, Casaubon uses the occasion of his attack against Descartes to make a pun on the idea of mystical theology's emphasis on unsaying (i.e. apophaticism): "But his [i.e. Descartes] abilities I question not: his *Method*, having so much affinitie with this *Mysticall Theologie*, against which I think too much cannot be said, I could not passe it without some censure" (130; I cite here the 1655 edition because it is has useful pagination whereas the first edition does not). It is worth pointing out that the citation of the Jesuits as mystics probably had as its motivation the fact that the founder of the order, Ignatius of Loyola, claimed to have had a mystical experience which in turn led to the founding of the Jesuits. Importantly, through his taxonomy of the mystical, Casaubon also identifies what he calls "Poetical Enthusiasm." The latter category would prove especially important for Henry More. It should be noted as well that Meric Casaubon's father and fellow humanist, Isaac, published in 1614 his work *De rebus sacris et ecclesiastis exercitationes XVI*, which traced the history of the word μυστήριον (musterion; mystery) in early Christianity.

other concerns, when refracted through the lens of confessional conflict, provided added urgency to Casaubon's suggestion that all members of his mystical catalogue were united in a shared cultural grammar of "mysticall art." What is more, in this embryonic stage of the early Enlightenment, which increasingly demanded a shared exoteric world of intellectual exchange, the fugitive forces of esoteric communication through mystical theology jeopardized cultural stability in pressing ways. Variegated as they were, the assorted forms of mysticism were united in being incommensurable with rational reflection and a cohesive polity (or so the argument maintained).[3]

In the decade before Casaubon's polemical treatise we can already see these issues coming to a critical point, though manifest more in poetry than in the wider circulation of polemical prose (and thus escaping broader examination by intellectual historians). The devotional cosmopolitanism of Richard Crashaw, for instance, had afforded the poet the ability to study earnestly the most elaborate forms of Roman Catholic mystical writing, which would eventually lead him to, and possibly through, the speculative apophaticism of Pseudo-Dionysius as seen in his 1648 poems. Crashaw's fellow Catholic convert Sir Tobie Matthew (1577-1655), who would have found a solid place on Casaubon's list of mystical deplorables, argued passionately that through a greater appreciation of mystical theology, one would easily understand how the Divine could "speak to the body" through enlightened rapture.[4] Crashaw's eloquent poetic testament to this reality emerged at the cultural intersection of confessional-military conflict and new articulations of dualistic metaphysics (e.g. Descartes' philosophy), which corroborated even further Casaubon's diagnosis that the cultural

[3] A point judiciously canvassed by Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 11-94.

[4] Tobie Matthew, *The Flaming Hart, or The Life of the Glorious S. Teresa, Foundresse of the Reformation, of the Order of the All-Immaculate Virgin Mother, our B. Lady of Mount Carmel* (Antwerp: Iohannes Muersius, 1642), 31-32. Matthew writes in his preface that the mystic "consisting both of a Bodie, and a Soule, his Diuine Maiestie is also gratiously pleased, manie times, to affect both the Bodie, and the Soule, togeather, with *a sensible kind of feeling of that grace*; Those outward demonstrations (*which speake, but, as it were, to the Bodie*) serving chiefly, but to denote, and describe, in that sort, to the whole man, the influences, and impressions, which then are made, and powered out, into the Soule."

climate was sweltering with egregious presumptions of unmediated knowledge.[5] In the turbulent years of the Civil War, mystical ecstasy would usually lead to cultural exile, as the lives of Crashaw and Matthew attest, in one way or another. The role of the physical body in devotional practice, the relationship between the mind and the material world, and the promulgation of private religious experience were all issues that, paradoxically, found more dynamic expression in the English mystical poetry of the 1640s than in other arenas of culture.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the poetry of Henry More (1614-1687), one of the leading figures of so-called Cambridge Platonism. Like his compeers Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688) and Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), More is most well known as an early respondent to Cartesianism, a liberal Latitudinarian opponent of fanaticism as well as an early adversary of both Hobbes and Spinoza. While More's philosophical writings, especially *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659) and *Enchiridion Metaphysicum* (1671), testify to his importance within seventeenth-century intellectual history, it is his poetry (first published and revised in the 1640s) that so robustly reveals the shared world of mystical frameworks within this period. Indeed, More's first philosophical attempt to grapple with the combined forces of metaphysics and mystical theology was his 1642 collection of poetry *Psychodia Platonica*, of which the first part, *Psychozoia, or the Life of the Soul*, is of significant value for literary historians in the enterprise to map more incisively the age's nuanced forms of mysticism.

In the past two decades, scholars have started to appreciate More's significance as a *sui generis* philosopher whose import goes beyond being merely a transitional figure in a burgeoning age of

[5] René Descartes' *Meditationes de prima philosophia* were first published in 1641. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, "The Idea of God," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* eds. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers. Two Volumes. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 265-304: "The seventeenth century marks a significant moment in thought concerning the definition of God. This is the period in which the radical position of subjectivity is replaced by the impersonal recognition of transcendence as a point of departure of philosophical reflection" (265).

speculation.[6] While historians are still more apt to approach More *vis-à-vis* his reactions (polemical and philosophical) to Descartes, Hobbes, Böhme, or Spinoza,[7] other scholars such as Robert Crocker, Sarah Hutton, Daniel Fouke, Jasper Reid, and David Leech, have made serious strides in securing for More a high regard as a metaphysician.[8] As Reid remarks, "More's overall project did traverse most branches of philosophy and theology, both pure and applied…But at the heart of More's thought, and the central hub where those various branches all met, was a metaphysical system that was an innovative, a widely discussed and, at least partially, an influential contribution to seventeenth-century philosophy."[9] Several of the scholars mentioned above have acknowledged the importance of reading More's poetry alongside his philosophy and polemics from later in the century, though often by reading the former via the latter. Indeed, perhaps one of the most noteworthy aspects of Cambridge Platonism generally is that its first manifestation in print was precisely More's enigmatic poem, *Psychozoia*. As Crocker notes, More "delineated in the first canto of *Psychozoia* (1642) what might be described as the first philosophical production of Cambridge Platonism, a first 'manifesto' of considerable intellectual sophistication, for nothing else produced in

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[6] Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans. James P. Pettegrove (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953), 201, notoriously suggested long ago that the school of seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonists, and particularly their most prodigious member (Henry More), functioned as "one of the piers of that bridge linking the Italian Renaissance with German humanism in the 18th century." C. A. Patrides, in his highly regarded edition and introduction to Cambridge Platonism, *The Cambridge Platonists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), did much to correct Cassirer's consignment of Henry More to secondary status. He is finally now being studied on his own terms, thankfully.

[7] When More is acknowledged by historians (literary or cultural), he is noted largely for his later polemical engagements rather than his philosophy and certainly not for his poetry. See, for example, Paul Kléber Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 42-44.

[8] Sarah Hutton, ed. *Henry More (1614-87): Tercentenary Studies* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990); Daniel C. Fouke, *The Enthusiastical Concerns of Henry More: Religious Meaning and the Psychology of Delusion*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997); Robert Crocker, *Henry More, 1614-1687: A Biography of the Cambridge Platonist* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003); Jasper Reid, *The Metaphysics of Henry More* (New York: Springer, 2012); David Leech, *Hammer of the Cartesians: Henry More's Philosophy of Spirit and the Origins of Modern Atheism* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013).

[9] Reid, 10.

the 1640s by the Cambridge group comes close to the breadth and scope of its arguments."[10] The origins of More's (and possibly Cambridge Platonism's) speculative enterprise reside in a densely packed poem, the full scope of which has not been fully appreciated as of yet.

Due to its early date in More's life and its archaic Spenserian language, scholars continue to struggle to elucidate the mystical idiom of *Psychozoia*. Robert Crocker and David Dockrill are united in the view that More's poem, which evinces clear homologies with certain forms of patristic and medieval mysticism, nonetheless eschews the so-called *via negativa* (or negative way) of much conventional mystical theology because of (so they argue) pious apprehensions about the radical transcendence of the Absolute.[11] There are several potential problems with this reading of the poetry. First and foremost, Crocker and Dockrill are reading comments by More that were first published in 1659 after an arduous decade of polemical battles against radical enthusiasts who took refuge in (and political warrant from) the *Deus absconditus*.[12] We cannot thus assume that the 1642 poem *Psychozoia* anticipated such sentiments in any significant way. Second, isolating the so-called radical *via negativa* as something the Cambridge Platonists shunned overlooks, on the one hand, the intricacies of negative dialectic (which theologians call negative theology) in More's poetry, and on

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[10] Crocker, 29.

[11] Crocker writes, "More, like his friend, Ralph Cudworth, was wary of the proponents of the *via negativa* who claimed that the Godhead or the Platonic One 'transcends the realm of knowledge and intelligibility in every respect,' for this seemed to them to contradict the apologetic and rational explanatory value of Platonism as a philosophic handmaid to Christianity" (17). In this he agrees with David Dockrill, "The Fathers and the Theology of the Cambridge Platonists" *Studia Patristica* 17, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982), 427-39; "The Heritage of Patristic Platonism in Seventeenth-Century English Philosophical Theology," in *Henry More (1614-87): Tercentenary Studies*, ed. Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990) 55-77, esp. 58-60.

[12] Crocker cites only More's work *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659) to substantiate his claim about negative theology. Reid, 16, draws attention to the fact that More frequently referred to his poetry later in life "either to indicate his continuing endorsement of views that he had expressed therein; or, where he had changed his mind, to indicate that he had indeed changed *his* mind" (emphasis in original). I suspect Crocker has not fully understood More's vision of negative theology. Cf. Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Nicholas McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. 22-49.

the other, the relationship of such negative dialectic to imaginative myth-making. Of the three cantos comprising the poem, the first is a Neoplatonic protological myth on the emanation of the cosmos from the One, while the second and third cantos detail an allegorical ascent of More's protagonist persona (Mnemon, meaning *Mindful*) back to the One through all the trials of sectarian and confessional dispute. Crocker is absolutely correct to observe that the first canto is a robust manifesto of More's metaphysics, but in dismissing negative theology as an explanatory matrix, he risks highlighting some aspects of More's Neoplatonism at the expense of others and delineating too neatly the boundaries between the poet's philosophy and theology generally.

In this chapter I will attempt to clarify the mythic logic, poetic epistemology, and praxis of negation in the first canto of *Psychozoia* by suggesting that apophatic theology is central to More's philosophy in a manner overlooked by almost all scholars. Specifically, I will argue that More availed himself of what Stephen R. L. Clark has helpfully termed the "Plotinian imaginary": the unfolding of metaphysical principles through a myth which "expresses synchronic realities in a diachronic narrative form."[13] What this entailed for More was an exercise in mythopoeia that was apophatically dynamic: he uses language, specifically the language of *mythos*, to gesture beyond philosophical and linguistic constraints. This in turn allows him to demonstrate, following the metaphysical logic of Plotinus but the soteriological impetus of St. Paul, that transcendence is never fully understood except through the intermediations of the immanent world and its representation in the intellectual imagination. Thus, what makes More's poem truly exceptional is that for him one cannot study cosmology or ontology without considering the question of eschatology (which is ultimately salvation through union with, via a return to, the ground of Being), and further that Plotinian

[13] Stephen R. L. Clark, *Plotinus: Myth, Metaphor, and Philosophical Practice* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016), 149. I borrow the quoted phraseology from Peter Struck's helpful overview: "Allegory and Ascent in Neoplatonism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, eds. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58.

philosophy itself constitutes a legitimate form of mystical experience—though one perhaps better expressed through poetry than syllogisms. More's mythopoetic project was occasioned by his self-described conversion to Platonism, which was also, paradoxically though it may seem, a turn back to the material world following the Cartesian philosophical revolution.

MORE'S VARIETY OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

The intellectual biography of Henry More leading up to the composition of his early poetry is useful in grounding the discussion of deeper metaphysical concerns. Although Richard Ward would provide the world with a detailed biography of More in 1710, almost all the significant data therein originates in More's own Latin narrative of his life in his *Opera Omnia* of 1679. More's vantage point in this work affords coherence to a difficult life plagued by uncertainty, rivalries, and misunderstandings, and moreover a life lived in conscious rebellion against the stern Calvinism of his youth. Literary scholars should be cautious in taking More at complete face value, but his overview of his "Platonic conversion" is instructive for at least familiarizing ourselves with the idioms of philosophy and mystical theology that informed More's education.[14] Indeed, More proves himself, both in the first poetic writings as well as the later summation of his life, to be fluent in multiple confessional and intellectual vocabularies. Exhaustive treatments of More's biography have been done by Fouke and Crocker,[15] but it is helpful here merely to recount how the early interest in speculative mysticism served as a catalyst for the young thinker to become a philosopher-poet.

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[14] Crocker notes: "it should be recognized that More's later apologetic account of his early life in his *General Preface* echoes an anti-Calvinist rhetoric that had become popular amongst many Anglicans following the Restoration. More's account was therefore addressing a very different audience to the readers of the poetry he published in the turbulent 1640s" (2).

[15] See especially Crocker, 1-27 but also C.C. Brown, "Henry More's 'Deep Retirement': New Material on the Early Years of the Cambridge Platonist" *Review of English Studies* 20 (1969): 445-54. A comprehensive overview of More's early life is not necessary for the argument I am making. What is important is underscoring how various aspects of Neoplatonism not only resonated with the young More (for personal as well as professional reasons) but also exemplified the philosophical form of mysticism that would, as it were, inoculate More from other radical forms of mystical experience.

Ward's biography makes it clear that while More shared with his contemporaries a genuine attraction to mystical experience (in common with enthusiasts across the spectrum), he was also profoundly animated by the prospect of a robust metaphysical superstructure of mystical theology. Personal religious experience was insufficient to safeguard against the more alienating characteristics of the extreme Calvinism of his youth, and the genuine pietism of his early education could also not supply a sufficient interpretative framework.[16] As the *General Preface* to the later collected works avers, More was intent, like Augustine in the *Confessions*, to narrate his "conversion" to Platonism before finding a larger philosophical integration into religious faith. More writes that the so-called "Platonick Writers" paved the way for his awakening:

> Marsilius Ficinus, Plotinus himself, Mercurius Trismegistus; and the Mystical Divines, among whom there was frequent mention of the Purification of the Soul, and of the Purgative Course that is previous to the Illuminative; as if the Person that expected to have his Mind illuminated of God, was to endeavour after the Highest Purity.[17]

The references here to the conventional forms of medieval mysticism (e.g. the purgative and the illuminative ways) should not obscure More's emphasis that he had encountered "Plotinus himself."[18] Well before the writing of the *General Preface* to the *Opera Omnia*, More had written in a letter of 1673 about his first acquisition of a copy of Plotinus's *Enneads*: "I bought one when I was

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[16] More confesses later in his life that he, too, was prone to ecstatic visions, "which if it were my power to relate would seem to most men incredible." See More, "Mastix his Private Letter to a Friend," in *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (London: J. Flesher, 1656), 315.

[17] Translated from More's Latin in Richard Ward's *The Life of the Learned and Pious Dr* (London: 1710), 17-18. A modern edition of this biography is available in Sarah Hutton and Richard Crocker, eds. *Richard Ward: Life of Henry More, Parts 1 and 2* (Dordrecht, Kluwer, 2000).

[18] See Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)*, vol. 3 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 155. For a detailed treatment of Augustine as a "founding father" of Christian mysticism, see chapter 7 of McGinn's first volume, *The Foundations of Christian Mysticism*, 228-262. As McGinn makes clear, while the Neoplatonic idiom often informed the history of Christian mysticism in the Middle Ages, this often occurred via the intermediaries of theologians and philosophers rather than through direct impact of actual Neoplatonic texts. Plotinus' *Enneads* were not available to most medieval Christian mystics, though Plotinian ideas were.

Junior Master [i.e. just before 1639] for 16 shillings, and I think I was the first that had either the luck or courage to buy him."[19] More's experience with what was likely the 1615 printing of Ficino's edition of the *Enneads*[20] makes the enterprise of understanding his Neoplatonism less conjectural and more firmly based on the solid proof that he had, in fact, integrated Plotinus completely into his world-view.[21] Further, More's biographical comment is significant because, as the scholar Sears Rayne demonstrates in his study *Plato in Renaissance England*, the Caroline era marked the beginning of authentic engagement with the corpus of Platonic thought (including Plato and Plotinus specifically). Platonism was more of an idea, or ethos, than a real *textual* phenomenon in the England of Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare (with a few exceptions), and we can reasonably argue that serious Platonic scholarship in England developed at relatively the same moment that other new forms scholarship and intellectual development started to flourish. Even more significantly, Plotinus was often read before Plato, if the latter was read at all.[22] Thus, More's authentic engagement with Plotinus would provide a philosophical mode of speculation that not only accommodated (by his

[19] *Letters on Several Subjects*, 27 (More to Edmund Elys, 27 December 1673).
[20] Cf. Kurt Spellmeyer, "Plotinus and Seventeenth-Century Literature: A Prolegomenon to Further Study" *Pacific Coast Philology* 17.1/2 (1982): 50-58.
[21] Reid helpfully writes, "By the time of the publication of *Psychodia Platonica* in 1642, he had already thoroughly digested Plotinus's version of Platonism" (16).
[22] Sears Jayne, *Plato in Renaissance England* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995): "By dint of very long searching I have found allusions to Plato in a number of Tudor books, but by comparison with the interest of Plato at the same time in France and during the Stuart era in England, these few allusions of the Tudor period constitute little more than a quiescent interlude; the main advances of the Renaissance revival of Plato in England occurred during the sixty years that immediately preceded the Tudor era, and during the Stuart era that following it" (139-140). As Jayne also notes, Plotinus was not widely read before More's generation. The philological revival of Platonic studies corresponds in interesting ways with that patristic scholarship of the same period. See Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP: 2009), 299-311. See also Sarah Hutton, "Plato in the Tudor Academies," in *Sir Thomas Gresham and Gresham College: Studies in the Intellectual History of London in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis (Aldershot: Routledge: 1999), 122-3.

own account) his personal mystical sensibility, but also went far beyond the rudimentary nature of Platonic ideas found in his great poetic model: Spenser.

More's autobiographical remarks in the *General Preface* also make clear that he composed *Psychozoia* in 1640 immediately after reading and intellectually absorbing Plotinus. This led him, in the address to the reader of the 1647 re-printing of the poem, to clarify: "even in the middest of Platonisme...I cannot conceal from whence I am, *viz.* of Christ....To which *Plato* is a very good subservient Minister; whose Philosophy I singing here in a full heat; why may it not be free for me to break out into an higher strain, and under it to touch upon some points of Christianity."[23] More goes on to identify Plotinus as the most qualified explicator of Plato's metaphysics. What, then, was the precise relationship between More's Neoplatonism and his Christianity? Crocker is correct to point out that decades of scholarship identifying More as a straightforward translator of Plotinus into Christianity neither clarifies his poetry nor appreciates his idiosyncrasies as a thinker.[24] However, we need not presume that one mode of thinking was superior to another in More's writing, especially his poetry.[25] After all, both Christianity and Platonic philosophy (from Plato [428

[23] I cite here Alexander Grosart's edition *The Complete Poems of Dr. Henry More* (New York: AMS Press, 1967). The address "To the Reader", here at 10. Unless otherwise noted, all references to More's poem are to this edition. More made substantive changes to cantos II and III in the 1647 edition, but nothing significant was altered in canto I.

[24] Crocker comments: "While it is certainly true that the influence of Plotinus' metaphysics, Origen's theology, and Ficino's extraordinary Renaissance redaction of these is visible in his *Psychodia Platonica*, this lineage in itself cannot explain the genesis or peculiarities of More's Platonism, or its often subtle differences to that of a number of contemporary Platonists" (7). He is correcting the older view expressed by Marjorie Nicolson, "More's *Psychozoia*" *Modern Language Notes* 37 (1922): 141-8, "Written when More was about twenty-five years of age, the poem is a combination of frequently undigested learning based on the scholastic training of Cambridge, and a youthful enthusiasm for the newly discovered Plotinian philosophy in which More at that time believed that all contradictions were to be finally resolved. In the midst of what is admittedly a metaphysical study, sometimes nothing but a versification of portions of the *Enneads*" (141).

[25] More's comment that "*Plato* is a very good subservient Minister" to Christ should not be taken too straightforwardly for several reasons. First, More is attempting here to walk back his enthusiasm for Plato after his own personal reputation in Cambridge as a "merry Greek" had snowballed out of

– 348 B.C.E.] himself through Damascius [458 – 550 C.E.]) shared a devotional commitment to acknowledge the realities of divine inaccessibility and ultimate transcendence.[26] Furthermore, Plotinus had legitimated the creation of new hermeneutical strategies to interrogate the various levels of Being, and these new intellectual strategies could often venture beyond their original Neoplatonic provenance to generate even more unique modes of theorizing.[27] It would be incorrect to say that More found a ready-made system in Plotinus that he then merely distilled into poetic expression. Rather, it would be more accurate to view More's *Psychozoia* as a mythographical experiment with Plotinian conceptual grammar that facilitated a novel discourse for exploring ineffability through cosmogonic narrative. As Plotinus explains in the *Enneads*:

> 'Our way of speaking' – for myths, if there are to serve their purpose, must necessarily import time-distinctions into their subject and will often present as separate, Powers which exist in unity but differ in rank and faculty; and does not philosophy itself relate the births of the unbegotten and discriminate where all is one substance? The truth is conveyed in the only manner possible; it is left to our good sense to bring all together again.[28]

Conveying the truth "in the only manner possible" was extremely important for More, who confessed later in life that the time in his student days leading up to the encounter with Plotinus was

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control. Second, in spite of these comments, More is still using Platonism to explicate Christianity, not *vice versa*.

[26] On the devotional aspects of pagan Platonic philosophy, see Marilena Vlad, "Damascius and Dionysius on Prayer and Silence," in *Platonic Theories of Prayer*, eds. John Dillon and Andrei Timotin (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 192-212.

[27] This much is clear from the diverse history of Neoplatonism (in Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascius) that followed the death of Plotinus in 270 C.E. Cf. Clark, *Plotinus: Myth, Metaphor, and Philosophical Practice*, 194-208.

[28] *Enneads*, III.5.9. All references to Plotinus, unless otherwise noted, are to Stephen MacKenna's famous translation of *The Enneads* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1969). As Plotinus notes, "our way of speaking" refers to his school's methodology of reading ancient literature allegorically to establish the rudiments of theology and philosophy. Cf. Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and Luc Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 187-206.

consumed with exploring the ineffable nature of his metaphysical intuitions.[29] *Psychozoia*, especially in the metaphysical charter of the first canto, provided the outlet to experiment with conceptual language that was geared toward articulating an ontology through myth. Here, More was inspired to follow Plotinus to "bring all together again" for serious reflection, and this would suffice as the only form of mysticism that he found self-validating.

PSYCHE AND THE UNFOLDING OF MORE'S POETIC METHOD

Psychozoia presents the reader with several interpretive hurdles, the first of which is how to relate the first protological canto to the more straightforwardly allegorical (and at times satirical) narratives depicted in cantos II and III.[30] Whereas the last two cantos detail the adventures of Mnemon (a figure who may represent More himself or at least a pious Everyman) as he confronts various temptations which correspond directly to specific confessional options of seventeenth-century England, the first canto is a complex overview of matter's origin in the Absolute. More's protological account in canto I is remarkable because it explores "the religious implications of the theory of immanence"[31] by positing a divine Triad that is not quite Trinitarian and not quite

[29] As he recounts: "But here openly to declare the Thing as it was; When this inordinate Desire after the Knowledge of things was thus allay'd in me, and I aspir'd after nothing but this sole Purity and Simplicity of Mind, there shone in upon me daily a greater Assurance than ever I could have expected, even of those things which before I had the greatest Desire to know: Insomuch that within a few Years, I was got into a most Joyous and Lucid State of Mind; and such *plainly as is ineffable*; though, according to my Custom, I have endeavoured to express it" (translated in Ward, 20, with emphasis added).

[30] Here I appropriate the term "protology" advisedly to refer to the general theory of origins and first principles of the cosmos. The term was wildly used in late antiquity (*πρωτολογία*), but only entered English usage in this sense in the nineteenth century. Still, I keep with scholarly precedent in other fields (esp. patristics and ancient history) by using it as a descriptive term for a method of speculation about the origin of the cosmos.

[31] This is how Geoffrey Bullough describes the first canto in his edition *The Philosophical Poems of Henry More, Comprising Psychozoia and Minor Poems* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), xli.

Neoplatonic, but synthetic of both systems.[32] In the "Preface to the first Canto", More explicitly comments on "a strange concordance and harmony betwixt the nature of the each Hypostasis in either of their order."[33] The first principle or hypostasis of this Triad is identified in Hebraic terminology as Hattove (the Good) and Ahad (the One). Clearly modeled in part on the Father, this figure's creative energy is manifest as love, which emanates and sustains the cosmos. The second principle, which loosely corresponds to the Son, is Aeon or On (Being). "He is the universe as eternally conceived in intellectual forms, the intellectual principle emanating from the Father and existing in the contemplation of his own multiple unity."[34] More identifies as the third reality Psyche or Uranore, who is understood as the World-Soul of conventional Neoplatonic speculation (amalgamated at times with conventional theories of the Holy Spirit). Psyche confers form to the material world intentionally through her desire to unite individual believers with the One (Ahad) through contemplation of eternal Ideas (the realm of Aeon). We can begin to understand how all three cantos cohere if we understand that, for More, ontology was connected to eschatology and soteriology, and cosmology came before all. However, I take here as my point of departure Crocker's and Bullough's astute point that the first canto stands alone as a philosophical manifesto of sorts.[35] The canto functions this way because, irrespective of its deeper conceptual relationship to the second and third cantos, it goes beyond mere allegory or satire to ground the whole enterprise in apophatic mythopoeia.

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[32] In More's address "To the Reader," he writes: "Ahad, Aion, and Psyche are all omnipresent in the World, after the most perfect way that humane reason can conceive of. For they are in the world all totally and at once every where. This is the famous Platonicall Triad: which though they that slight the Christian Trinity do take for a figment; yet I think it is no contemptible argument, that the Platonists, the best and divinest of Philosophers, and the Christians, the best of all that do professe religion, do both concur that there is a Trinity. In what they differ, I leave to be found out according to the safe direction of that infallible Rule of Faith, the holy Word" (in Grossart, 10).

[33] Reprinted in Grosart, 10.

[34] Bullough, xlv.

[35] Cf. Crocker, 29 and Bullough, xlv.

Here More's method is as important for its innovation as it is for its imitation of its Plotinian analogue. As we noted above, Plotinus justified the endeavor to read the inherited mythology of his day allegorically to "bring all together" the latent philosophical ideas embedded in the narratives. Upon one occasion, this entailed viewing the deities Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus as hypostases corresponding to the Plotinian Triad (Soul, Intellect, and the One, respectively).[36] As Pierre Hadot has pointed out, Plotinus was inclined to use this method against his Gnostic interlocutors who wrote their own myths (with the admixture of Platonism, Jewish Scripture, and early Christian apocalyptic) to explain the origins of the material world.[37] The latter point relates to More's poem in an important way. While's More's philosophy in *Psychozoia* is demonstrably Plotinian in many respects, his method of articulation has perhaps more in common with the elaborate myth-making of Plotinus' intellectual enemies: the Gnostics. Indeed, in 1670 Edward Fowler, in his assessment of the Cambridge Platonists' heterodox theology, remarked: "I have heard them represented as a Generation of people that have revived the abominable principles of the old Gnosticks."[38] Putting aside whether More felt any solidarity with those ancient "heretical" groups (which would be difficult to prove in any case), we can still note an obvious point. Plotinus licensed the allegorical reading of already established myths. He did not encourage his students to generate new myths by reworking existing religious narratives and philosophical ideas. In this More used Plotinus to venture

[36] See, for example, *Enneads* III.5.2-9.
[37] Pierre Hadot, "Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus in Plotinus' Treatise Against the Gnostics," in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought* eds. H. L. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus (Aldershot: Variorum Press, 1981), 124-137.
[38] Edward Fowler, *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England* (London: Lodonick Lloyd, 1670), 7. It is worth noting in passing that More himself is listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the first person to use "Gnosticism" as a general term in English. "Gnosticism, n.". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press.

beyond the strict hermeneutical patterns that the ancient philosopher had established.[39] This is also what makes the first canto so imaginatively robust and difficult to interpret.

As will become clear through a close reading of the first canto, More is invested in protecting the absolute transcendence of Ahad (the One), but this is not even possible without a full appreciation of Psyche, whose song the poet sings:

> Or Ladies loves, nor Knights brave martiall deeds,
> Ywrapt in rolls of hid Antiquitie;
> But th' inward Fountain, and the unseen Seeds,
> From whence are these and what so under eye
> Doth fall, or is record in memorie,
> Psyche, I'll sing. Psyche! From thee they sprong.
> O life of Time, and all Alterity!
> The life of lives instill his nectar strong,
> My soul t' inebriate, while I sing Psyches song. (1)[40]

More distances himself from his Spenserian analogue to open his poem in almost ecstatic mystical bliss.[41] The poet helpfully provided explanatory notes to *Psychozoia*, and immediately upon commencing his poetic vision one note provides a gloss: "The fittest station to take a right view of the *Song of the Soul*, is *Psyche*, or the soul of the Universe. For whatsoever is handled in *Psychozoia*, and the three other parts of this song hath a meet relation to *Psyche* as the subject of the whole poem."[42] Plotinus' philosophy involved a complex hermeneutical reading of Plato's erotic dialogues, the

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[39] Recent scholarship had demonstrated how close the so-called Gnostics were to Plotinus' own philosophy. Many were at one time his students. See most recently the innovative study of Dylan M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). Cf. *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed. Richard T. Wallis (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992). Clement of Alexandria (150-215 C.E.), who is not usually classified as a Gnostic but rather "proto-Orthodox," also used the term "Gnostic" to characterize the true Christian. Both Clement and Origen made comparisons between the Platonic Triad and the Christian Trinity.

[40] Parenthetical citations refer to stanza numbers in Grossart's edition. Each stanza is comprised of nine lines, which could be numerically symbolic since the term "ennead" in Greek means "nine," a number charged with metaphysical meaning for Neoplatonists. More may have also found Spenser's nine-line stanzas in *The Fairie Queen* providentially harmonious with Neoplatonism.

[41] Bullough comments that "In form More owed almost everything to Spenser" (xlii). Nonetheless, More makes it clear that the meaning of his poem is not exhausted by his aesthetic model.

[42] The notes are presented in Grossart, 136-148, here at 136.

Symposium and the *Phaedrus*. In the latter, the soul's ecstatic journey homeward was classified as a sort of inebriation or madness (since it ventured beyond discursive reasoning), and here More continues this mode of thinking. Importantly, More does not ground his myth in the second, Son-like figure (Aeon) of his Triad, which would have perhaps been useful given the tradition of viewing the Incarnation of Christ as somehow sanctifying the material world. Rather, the unifying principle of the cosmos, Psyche, is that which not only holds the material world in place but also the means by which More's own poetic vision can collapse subject/object distinctions in something analogous to an inebriated state of knowing through unknowing. This last point will become more manifestly clear as the poem progresses.

Moving through the second stanza, we witness the speaker addressing the reader apologetically, noting that one reads "these rythmes which from Platonick rage / Do powerfully flow forth, dare not to blame / My forward pen of foul miscarriage" (2). It is important to appreciate that More's speaker self-consciously identifies as a Platonist, but this should not exhaust the interpretation. Platonism has supplied a currency which More utilizes to purchase intellectual wares that the Greek philosophers could neither envision nor desire. Thus, the speaker intones: "My task is not to try / What's simply true. I onely do engage / My self to make a fit discovery, / Give some fair glimpse of Plato's hid Philosophy" (2). The speaker's "Platonick rage" is not geared toward some discursive elaboration of syllogistic certainty but toward a revelatory mode that renders the seemingly esoteric elements ("Plato's hid Philosophy") of Plato more imaginatively intelligible. In addition, as Bullough has helpfully suggested, More makes it abundantly clear that he is not presuming any theological orthodoxy or dogmatic certainty.[43]

What, then, is the nature of "Plato's hid Philosophy"? The question is important because More is not trying to expound any specific religious doctrine of his age (be it Catholic, Anglican, or a

[43] Cf. Bullough, xliv.

radical hybrid) simply with the aid of ancient ideas. The issue at hand is whether More is purporting to translate something ineffable into a poetic presentation or whether the ensuing mythical narrative is somehow integral to the Platonic mystical ("hid") philosophy as he envisions it. More's mythographical depiction of Psyche as the organizing principle of the cosmos constitutes, as I will argue, a philosophical form of mystical experience that locates illumination in poetic revelation.[44]

REVEALING THE UNKNOWABLE THROUGH MYTH

The speaker of the first canto goes to great lengths to assure the reader of the Platonic pedigree of the poetic vision. In the fourth stanza, for example, we are informed:

> So if what's consonant to Plato's school
> (Which well agrees with learned Pythagore,
> Egyptian Trismegist, and th' antique roll
> Of Chaldee wisdome, all which time hath tore
> But Plato and deep Plotin do restore)
> Which is my scope, I sing out lustily:
> If any twitten me for such strange lore,
> And me all blamelesse brand with infamy,
> God purge that man from fault of foul malignity. (4)

While this stanza may appear straightforward in its purpose, it is important to understand that here More is beginning to position himself as a novel interpreter of the mystical traditions he lists. As Charles Schmitt and Guy Stroumsa have documented, Renaissance theories of the esoteric and mystical, exemplified in figures such as Pico della Mirandola as well as Marcilio Ficino, were predicated upon the belief that the most profound wisdom was imbedded in the various myths of different ancient cultures and religions (especially the Jewish Kabbalah).[45] This engendered a belief in a *theologia pristina*, an original deposit of theological knowledge that was discernable to any who,

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[44] This feature of More's poetry, free as it is of overarching concerns for religious orthodoxy, may have been what inspired Edward Fowler to impute Gnostic thinking to the Cambridge Platonists.

[45] See Charles Schmitt, "Prisca Theologia e philosophia perennis: due termi del Rinascimento Italiano e la loro fortuna" in *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento e il tempo nostro*, ed. Giovannangiola Tarugi (Florence: Olschki, 1970), 211-236; and Guy Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 147-165.

like Plato or Plotinus, Pico or Ficino, could unfold the underlying conceptual nature of the stories. Even if, as More's speaker suggests in passing, the infelicities of time had obscured this universal and pristine theological message, those "consonant" with Platonic thought could restore it. However, whereas for the existing tradition of Renaissance Platonism the endeavor involved extrapolating philosophical arguments from existing myths, More's enterprise followed the reverse trajectory. Indeed, the song of Psyche, which the speaker sings so ardently ("I sing out lustily") amounts to the "strange lore" of the myth which ensues.

Immediately following the announcement of More's "strange lore" comes a testament to Ahad's absolute unknowability and transcendence: "Th' Ancient of dayes, Sire of Eternitie, / Sprung of himself, or rather no wise sprong: / Father of lights and everlasting glee, / Who puts to silence every daring tongue" (5). One of most salient features of canto I is the ongoing paradox whereby the speaker insists on the absolute transcendence of Ahad and yet seems to emphasize the worthy pursuit of knowledge of this unknowable hypostasis. Indeed, later it will emerge that Aeon's marriage to Psyche, and their subsequent generation of Being, is all geared toward revealing the un-revealable. Continuing in the same stanza, however, More writes of this hypostasis (i.e. Ahad) as "shrowding himself among / His glorious rayes" (5), thereupon declaring: "Now can I not with flowring phantasie / To drowsie sensuall souls such words impart" (6). Here the speaker is performing a dynamic move: he is presuming to reveal the process by which the unknowable divine hypostasis retains his hiddenness but becomes manifest to those who are primed to discern the workings of Psyche (the third hypostasis). Importantly, More seems to accept, as the lines on love in stanzas six and seven suggest, Augustine's revolutionary hermeneutical principle that the disposition of the reader is the most significant aspect of the interpretative act.[46] More's "strange lore" has now

[46] Augustine writes, "dicit enim eis caritas, qua boni sunt, non mentiri me de me confitentem, et ipsa in eis credit mihi" (*Confessiones*, X.3). "The love with which they listen will lend it credit."

become a "flowring phantasie" that will never be fully understood by those who retain a false orientation to the material world. Even the poet's limited ability to testify about Ahad's transcendence cannot overcome those without ears to hear.

Aeon, as the Christ-like Son figure, is a mirror of the infinite Ahad, and as such he also remains ultimately indefinable though inexplicably resplendent.

> This Ahad of himself the Aeon fair
> Begot, the brightnesse of his father's grace:
> No living wight in heav'n to him compare,
> Ne work his goodly honour such disgrace,
> Nor lose thy time in telling of his race.
> His beauty and his race no man can tell:
> His glory darkeneth the Sunnes bright face;
> Or if ought else the Sunnes bright face excell,
> His splendour would it dim, and all that glory quell. (8)

As the imageless image of the unknowable Ahad, the figure of Aeon in canto I makes it clear that More is clearly practicing apophatic theology in *Psychozoia*.[47] This stanza is replete with theological negations that will become, in some respects, the hallmark of More's negative dialectic in his later philosophical writings. As several commentators have noted, even if we grant the natural homology between Ahad-Aeon and the Father-Christ relation of the Christian Trinity, there remains a tantalizing uncertainty about how the offspring is generated from his parent. It seems that Aeon, as the ineffable sounding of the unsayable Ahad, is still the focal point of all created Being. Aeon has

[47] Here I must take further issue with Crocker's reading of *Psychozoia*. He reiterates his stance on negative theology: "But rejecting the *via negativa* version of God the Father as utterly transcendental and unknowable - a view suggested to several other contemporary Christian Platonists by a Neoplatonic reading of the Trinity - More, like Ralph Cudworth, opted for a simpler, more familiar all-knowing and all-loving Supreme Being, in this way converting the 'cloudy transcendental expressions in Plato and Plotinus into "relative" and poetic' but more orthodox Christian terms" (*Henry More*, 30). Citing Dockrill, Crocker misses the points that 1) More's depiction of the three hypostasis is anything but orthodox; and 2) the intricacies of apophatic theology often encompassed an integral tension between the hiddenness of God and positive descriptions of the unknowable God through poetic or mythic utterance. Crocker's comments fly in the face of the lines of canto I already canvassed here.

the "brightnesse of his father's grace" but this brilliance is a luminous darkness of sorts, as it escapes the descriptions stemming from the material world.

In stanza nine, More makes it clear the material world (labeled "Hyle old hag") "cannot come near" an approximation of the glory of Aeon's reflection of Ahad. This reiterates the point made in stanza eight that Aeon's "glory darkeneth the Sunnes bright face." But More maintains the paradoxical tension that while the material world cannot of itself compare to the ineffable Aeon, the "shadows" of the material world provide traces of Aeon's presence. Once more, we are reminded that the disposition of the seeker/thinker is of paramount importance to achieve "true Cognizance":

> And this I wot is the Souls excellence,
> That from the hint of every painted glance
> Of shadows sensible, she doth from hence
> Her radiant life, and lovely hue advance
> To higher pitch, and by good governance
> May wained be from love of fading light
> In outward forms, having true Cognizance,
> That those vain shows are not the beauty bright
> That takes men so, but what they cause inhumane spright. (12)

Bullough notes that later in the poem, "More's object is to emphasize the immanence of the deity."[48] Canto I sets up this later preoccupation by theologically positioning the material world (Hyle) in relation to Ahad and Aeon. Here, the topic has not quite reached the fever pitch it would later in the century when More would become increasingly fearful that Cartesian and Spinozistic theories only alienated the mind from the immanent world (the one through an unbridgeable gab and the other through a dangerous conflation). Rather we see More emphasizing in this stanza the need to have a rational focus on the supra-rational, and conversely a supra-sensuous coherence of the sensible world.[49] The material world is only an "old Hag" to the extent that "she" is not contemplated in

[48] Bullough, xlix.
[49] Bullough's *précis* of this dynamic is helpful: "He [Aeon] is the universe as eternally conceived in intellectual forms, the intellectual principle emanating from the Father and existing in the contemplation of his own multiple unity. His sphere is the realm of suprasensuous patterns" (xlv).

relation to Aeon, who bespeaks Ahad. If the seeker is to "advance / To higher pitch" and understand this relation, he must attune himself to the song of Psyche, which the poet sings.

REVEALING PSYCHE

As we have seen so far, canto I of *Psychozoia* begins already in an eminently apophatic register. The speaker, through several artful negations, makes it clear that Ahad is beyond finite categorization. This leads the reader to note a seeming incongruity: the poem seems to narrate the unknowable. More's Neoplatonic idiom predicates this paradox upon a notion of emanation that is highly imaginative. Speaking of Aeon:

> On that abysse of good eternally,
> The youthfull Aeon,[50] whose fair face doth shine
> While he his Fathers glory doth espy,
> Which waters his fine flowring forms with light from high (13).

Following Plotinus, More's apophatic logic can maintain the absolute transcendence of the One while simultaneously outlining a continuous progression of thought through levels of Being. As More had written in stanza seven, "Love all did make: / And when false life doth fail, it's for the sake / Of better being." Thus, the portrayals of Ahad and Aeon operate imaginatively, not descriptively, having no correspondence in finitude. Indeed, the finite, material world assumes intelligibility only through the animating force of Aeon's consort, Psyche.

Psyche represents the most experimental dimension of More's philosophical mysticism. In Psyche, the poet delicately assimilates the Plotinian World-Soul to the Holy Spirit, making her, astonishingly, the principle of physical life.

> That virgin wife of Aeon, Uranore.
> She Uranora hight, because the fire
> Of Aethers essence she with bright attire,
> And inward unseen golden hew doth dight,

[50] The term "youthful" perhaps further corroborates the view that More held to a subordinationist Christology, which is even more evidence of his heterodox (or rather ante-Nicene, i.e. second and third centuries) theology.

> And life of sense and phansie doth inspire.
> Aether's the vehicle of touch, smell, sight,
> Of taste, and hearing too, and of the plastick might. (15)[51]

Like Plotinus before him, More must find a path between the absolute denigration of matter and the designation of matter as the Divine itself (pantheism). The correlation of Psyche with the senses in the stanza above points to the deeper Neoplatonic emphasis on intelligibility. Plotinus inherited a cultural tendency to view matter as "evil" (κακά, kaka, "bad") which largely meant something like *tending toward decay and away from permanence (eternity)*. Stephen R. L. Clark concisely explains Plotinus' view of the material world:

> The materiality of any substance rests only in the possibility of its being something else: it does not follow that there is any independently existing stuff whose essence it is to have no actual essence…Matter as a universal stuff and Matter as the universal Void itself, in brief, are both metaphors: extrapolations from intelligible relations within an ordered Cosmos, but themselves having no prior existence, either logically or chronologically.[52]

Psyche inspires "the life of sense" (15) by affording coherence to a world that would otherwise be a pure chaos of perpetually transforming "stuff." Psyche reveals, for More, that existence is not exhausted by materiality, but equally one's proper orientation to the material world is the prerequisite for a greater apprehension of Being in its fullness. As More writes in stanza 15 Psyche is thus a unitive principle, both in her function in More's philosophy and in her benevolent nature as the consort of Aeon.

In stanza 16, the speaker claims through "happy chance!" to have glimpsed the radiant beauty of Psyche: "I spi'd her, but, alas! with slighter glance / Beheld her on the Atuvaean shore." Though Spenserian in form, these lines represent More's revelatory mode: the philosophical density of the poet's Neoplatonism is transformed via a visionary experience into a phenomenal encounter

[51] It should be remembered that Psyche is also called Uranore ("the beauty of heaven") throughout the poem.
[52] Clark, *Plotinus: Myth, Metaphor, and Philosophical Practice*, 236-237.

with the organizing principle of the cosmos herself. Again, the embedded paradox of this narrative point defies easy elucidation. Stanza 15 speaks of Psyche's "inward unseen golden hew," which, when coupled with stanza 16, makes clear that though she is invisible she is responsible for all visible things.

> She stood the last; for her did stand before
> The lovely Autocal. But first of all
> Was mighty Atove, deeply covered o're
> With unseen light. No might imaginall
> May reach that vast profunditie[.] (16)

This "unseen light" perpetuates the apophatic idiom, but this morphs into a performative description of Psyche's "dress," which signifies the material universe.

More's speaker is bearing witness to a deep metaphysical *relation*, not a discrete description of how materiality operates by itself. The significance of this dynamic has been overlooked in the scholarship on Cambridge Platonism. Scholars have tended to telescope More's life in such a way that they discern in his poetry ideas which only surfaced later in the century. While this is understandable, it risks occluding the fact that the poetry of the 1640s represents More at his earliest stage of engagement with philosophical mysticism. While he would experiment with many thought systems later in life, especially the Kabbalah, More's later thinking is almost always reacting against volatile patterns of thought (e.g. the mysticism of Jacob Böehme) that seem more dangerous than helpful in articulating the mystical sensibility that he shared with many of his theological adversaries. Thus, the description of Psyche as the invisible testament of the visible cosmos should not be saddled with the added problem of pre-empting Cartesian theories of the body or anticipations of the new mechanical science (e.g. that of Isaac Newton, whom More would later tutor).[53] More's problem was the same as Plotinus': how does one understand the metaphysical relationship between

[53] More would go to correspond with Descartes after 1647, but this should not be read back into the poetry. On More's relationship to Newton, see J. E. Power, "Henry More and Isaac Newton on Absolute Space" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31 (1970): 289-96.

the absolutely transcendent origin of Being (the One) and the complicated facets of the material world?

Given the metaphysical intricacies of this question, More's speaker cautiously notes: "her fourefold ornament / I there observ'd; and that's the onely thing / That I dare write with due advisement" (17). This combines with the poet's invocation of his Muse in stanza 18 to help in the endeavor of describing Psyche. We read:

> For no man can unfold
> The many plicatures so closely prest
> At lowest verge. Things 'fore our feet yrold,
> If they be hard, how shall the highest things be told?" (18).

I would submit that More is not simply engaging in the common Renaissance practice of using the weight of secrecy to substantiate some putative access to hidden wisdom.[54] When he writes, "Its [i.e. Psyche's] unseen figure I must here omit" (19), he immediately confesses:

> …if eye not compasse it,
> The extreme parts, at least some, hidden lie:
> And if that they lie hid, who can descry
> The truth of figure? Bodies figured
> Receive their shape from each extremity. (19)

More is framing the speaker's glimpse of Psyche's body as something that must be conveyed through a delicate dialectic of secrecy and revelation, which achieves an elusive fusion through myth. He does this not to be obscurantist but rather to dramatize the interplay between the immaterial and the material aspects of Being.

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[54] Addressing the epistemological paradigm shifts in Renaissance cultures of esotericism and print, Kochu von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 55, has observed, "It is the social structure or form, not the content that defines the *function* of secrecy in communicational processes." In a similar line of reasoning, Hugh B. Urban, "The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions," *History of Religions* 37 (1998): 210, has suggested that, "secrecy is a discursive strategy that transforms a given piece of knowledge into a scarce and precious resource, a valuable commodity, the possession of which in turn bestows status, prestige, or symbolic capital on its owner."

Importantly, however, More's poem does not simply suggest that Ahad (the One) is the only hypostasis that is ineffable and beyond human understanding. We saw before that Aeon is equally, in his reflection of the imageless, an inscrutable principle, but here too we are informed that the very organizing principle of the material world is impenetrable and "unspeakable":

> Lo what delightfull immutations
> On her soft flowing vest we contemplate!
> The glory of the Court, their fashions,
> And brave agguize with all their Princely state,
> Which Poets or Historians relate
> This farre excels, farther than pompous Court
> Excels the homeliest garb of Countrey rate:
> Unspeakable it is how great a sort
> Of glorious glistring showes, in it themselves disport. (23)

In the mythical sense that More's speaker apprehends Psyche, she is portrayed as having a dress of several diverse garments which signify the various aspects of the material cosmos. The poem's revelation of Psyche entails using her inherent sensuousness and corporeal complexity as a means of demonstrating her ultimate "veiled" nature. While her garments (i.e. the physical world) *present* her to the minds of the lower realms, they occlude infinitely more than they disclose, even if such disclosure seems breathtakingly opulent and abundant.

UN-VEILING PSYCHE: FROM MATTER TO IMAGINATION

Stanzas 33 – 39 roughly narrate Psyche's marriage to Aeon. It is the marriage itself that facilitates a connection between the eternal realm of Ideas (Aeon's domain) and the lower realm of phenomenal, material reality (Psyche's province). The significance of the marriage for all Being is nicely summarized by Bullough: "Since the World-Soul is united to the Intellectual Principle, informing all things after the pattern of the eternal Ideas, every creature participates in the life of God."[55] While it may be somewhat problematic to ascribe the term "God" to More's conception of Ahad (even

[55] Bullough, xlvi.

Plotinus chafes at calling the One *theos*),[56] we do see this ineffable hypostasis "bless" the union of his son with Psyche:

> Ahad hight, and Ahad onenesse is:
> Therefore be one (his words do never misse)
> They one became. I Hattove also hight,
> Said he; and Hattove goodnesse is and blisse:
> Therefore in goodnesse be ye fast unite:
> Let Unity, Love, Good, be measures of your might. (34)

Ahad's comments here are important for understanding the interplay of unity and multiplicity in Neoplatonic philosophy generally and in More's mythic mysticism specifically. Ahad later declares himself to be the "Father of Community" (38), subtly conveying a deeper issue at play. A central preoccupation of all Platonic philosophy has been the problem of accounting for the derivation of the Dyad from the Monad (the Many from the One). As More well knew, the One (Ahad) is never understood quantitatively, and thus the emanation of matter from the first principle necessitates a unique mode of explanation. Thus, the myth of the marriage becomes crucial for More's symbolic approach to explaining the homology between the intellectual union of the lower and upper realms. As the previous analyses demonstrated, More knew that there were always limits to analytic categories and synthetic reconstructions, and this is why he adopts the form of myth.

Following the marriage, we are told of Psyche's elusive and allusive "veil," which is comprised of three "films" (cf. stanza 40). Perpetuating the marriage symbolism, the "triple golden film" (40) of the veil signifies deeper levels of intimacy that Psyche can reveal to the advancing philosophical mind. The first film is called "Physis," and this encompasses animal and vegetative life ("Their number's infinite" [42]) as humans know them. The clear correspondence to biological life does not render them any more pellucid, however:

[56] It is true that More uses the term "God" later (e.g. stanzas 50 and 52), but it is not clear whether he does so in the manner of Plotinus (who calls many aspects of divinity "God") or rather somewhat periphrastically to gesture toward Ahad.

> And all besprinkled with centrall spots,
> Dark little spots, is this hid inward veil:
> But when the hot bright dart doth pierce these knots,
> Each one dispreads it self according to their lots"(42).

As stanzas 44 and 45 make clear, Physis' role in the mediation between Aeon and Psyche can be compromised if the "Dark little spots" are simply reduced to crude matter (stuff), which is personified once more as the hag (i.e. witch, cf. 44) Hyle. More is not denigrating the physical world, but rather making it clear that without the higher animating conceptuality of Psyche, materiality is merely like a sorceress in changing one thing into another indiscriminately. Therefore, vegetative and animal life can become irrevocably opaque to the human mind if it lacks a larger frame of reference.

The next film of the veil is called "Arachnea," and, as the name implies, this is conceived of as a nexus or web of the senses. At the center of More's mythic description of sense perception (Arachnea) is the figure "Haphe," who signifies the network of the five senses through the specific sense of touch. Haphe, as "the root of felt vitality" (49), is the crucial means by which Psyche disseminates herself through "Community" (49): "In this clear shining mirour Psyche sees / All that falls under sense, what ere is done / Upon the Earth" (50). Like Plotinus, who read Plato through the lens of Aristotle, More is committed metaphysically here to emphasize how important the physical senses should be in forming a comprehensive account of reality. "Sensation is not just the impression made on the mind by an external agent. It is the activity of the soul going out and meeting the soul in other things."[57] The senses afford access to the physical world, and through this access the philosopher intuits another principle which in turn affords coherence to the senses themselves.

More then introduces the most crucial film of Psyche's veil: Semele (57-61): "But Haphe and Arachne I'll dismisse, / And that fourth vest, rich Semele display." Semele is the principle of

[57] Bullough, xlvii.

intellectual vision (i.e. imagination), and through it Ahad channels "love and joy" (57). If Haphe unified the senses in order to provide a means of apprehending their higher coherence, Semele integrates abstract thinking into the imagination of the philosopher-poet.

> This all-spread Semele doth Bacchvs bear,
> Impregn'd of Jove or On. He is the wine
> That sad down-drooping senses wont to rear,
> And chearlesse hearts to comfort in ill tine.
> He 'flames chast Poets brains with fire divine;
> The stronger spright the weaker spright doth sway;
> No wonder then each phansie doth incline
> To their great mother Semel, and obey
> The vigourous impresse of her enforcing ray. (58)

Here we need not try to extricate the Neoplatonic dimension of More's poetry from his ostensibly Christian dimension. More has clearly spliced the two together in a novel way. Plotinus writes (*Enneads* V.5.6):

> As one wishing to contemplate the Intellectual Nature will lay aside all the representations of sense and so may see what transcends the sense-realm, in the same way one wishing to contemplate what transcends the Intellectual attains by putting away all that is of the intellect, taught by the intellect, no doubt, that the Transcendent exists but never seeking to define it.

The praxis of negation (More's apophatic logic) at the beginning of the canto refused to define Ahad in any philosophical way, but turned instead toward the idiom of myth. We now learn that part of that governing logic was Semele, who "sees and sways imagination / As she thinks good" and "makes the Poet write" (59).

The two concluding stanzas of canto I make clear that "Prophets and Poets have their life" (60) from this part of Psyche's veil. Part of the reason that canto I has been read as a metaphysical "manifesto" of Cambridge Platonism is its imaginative means of framing a whole metaphysical account of Being. I would add that it gives an absolutely idiosyncratic explication of Plotinian philosophical mysticism through myth. The concluding overview of intellectual imagination (Semele) allows the reader to see how More wishes to position himself in relation to his Neoplatonic model.

As Jens Halfwassen has reminded us, Plotinus' philosophy is not an attempt to understand a specific mystical experience.[58] Rather, any state that could be called mystical (i.e. beyond discursive thought) must follow the process of the speculative enterprise itself. More concurs with this position, but he introduces something prophetically imaginative (cf. 60 above) to the endeavor. He starts with the philosophy but reveals it through a narrative of Ahad, Aeon, and Psyche. More suggests that only "chast Poets" can cultivate "brains with fire divine" (58). The poetic revelation that Psyche facilitates through Semele is not predicated upon esoteric secrecy as such or upon mystical rapture alone. Far more important is the process, through a mythic telling of apophatic logic, that conceals through revealing. This is the essence of all symbolism (as Plotinus and More agree), and the license for More's elaborate depiction of Psyche's veil. Through the presentation the veil and its three films, the deeper dimensions of Being are manifest through their opaqueness. Psyche becomes the soul of the inconceivable.

FROM MYSTICISM TO MYTH AND BACK AGAIN

As the foregoing analysis testifies, More's *Psychozoia* constitutes a poetic and mystical reinterpretation Plotinian philosophy. By availing himself of the "Plotinian imaginary," the poet goes well beyond anything sanctioned by the Neoplatonism of late antiquity toward something more approximating Gnostic mythography.[59] For like the Gnostics, More was inclined in the 1640s to believe that

[58] Cf. Jens Halfwassen, "The Metaphysics of the One" in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism* eds. Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin (London: Routledge, 2014), 182-199: "Plotinus' mysticism of *ekstasis* emerges from the absolute transcendence of the One. This connection is important. One completely misunderstands Plotinus if one assumes that his philosophy is a subsequent attempt to understand a mystical experience of unity. His mysticism would then stand at the beginning of the theory. What can be referred to as Plotinus' mysticism is rather the reverse: the *consequence* of his theory of the Absolute as pure transcendence, as it was developed" (193, emphasis in original).

[59] Though we should bear in mind that, despite Plotinus' critique of the so-called Gnostics, the latter groups were fluent in Neoplatonic philosophy. Cf. John D. Turner, "Gnosticism and Platonism: The Platonizing Sethian Texts from Hag Hammadi in their Relation to Later Platonic Literature," in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* ed. Richard T. Wallis (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 425-460.

knowledge as well as faith were needed for ultimate salvation. Imparting that knowledge was always challenging, especially since the Neoplatonic system seemed an uneasy fit with theological orthodoxy. In the 1647 reprint of *Psychozoia*, More added dozens of lines to cantos II and III in an attempt to make his poem more straightforwardly satirical and less philosophically allegorical. The protagonist of the last two cantos, Mnemon, starts on the Plotinian journey back to the One (Ahad) only to face the challenges and obfuscations of sectarian voices (allegorized versions of the Calvinist, the Papist, the Enthusiast, and so forth). The additions followed a period when More faced intense criticism for the form and message of his poem (to the extent that the latter was even discernable to many). By the end of the 1640s it was easier to reference the poem as a youthful exercise in satire than attempt an explication of its deepest philosophical commitments. Indeed, canto I, in all its mythical density and philosophical sophistication, would remain needlessly obscure to many despite its elegant encapsulation of a whole system of thought.

Psychozoia occupies a complicated genre: metaphysical fiction. We can begin to understand what More sought to accomplish in this poem if we appreciate both the dynamism and limits of what I have been calling apophatic mythopoeia. In a seminal essay, Hans Jonas explains how, in the history of religious culture, myth and mysticism often stem from a similar existential condition: "one may regard the myth as a projection of an existential reality which seeks its own truth in a total view of things and may even at first satisfy its primary aspiration in such objective-symbolic representations."[60] In this sense, mystical ascent can correspond in interesting ways with the

[60] Hans Jonas, "Myth and Mysticism: A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought" *Journal of Religion* 49.4 (1969): 315-329, here at 315. He concludes: "The true mystic wants to put himself into possession of absolute reality, which already is and about which doctrine tells him. So it was, at least, with the mysticism of late antiquity which still stood in continuity with the intellectual and ontological speculation of the Greek past. Having an objective theory, the mystic goes beyond theory; he wants experience of and identity with the object; and he wants to be able to claim such identity" (328-329).

representational transcendence of myth.[61] The mystic, affectively or speculatively, can internalize the objective narrative, affording coherence to his metaphysical relationship with the One.

The pervading logic of More's narrative is the interplay of concealing and revealing, which is integral to both his metaphysics and his mystical theology. If the One (Ahad) is so resplendently transcendent as to escape all language and ontological determinations, it remains desperately unclear how the seeker can even come to know this characteristic of the Absolute. As theologians since Augustine have reminded us, to call something "ineffable" is tantamount to a contradiction. Hence the need for a negative dialectic (called negative theology) that provides a means for orienting oneself to the unfathomable One. Plotinus followed Plato in believing that the Ultimate was beyond Being (but made Being intelligible),[62] but he nonetheless insisted on giving some account of the derivation of a multi-tiered reality from the One. Plotinus' negative dialectic was transformed into negative theology by many Christians, and More followed the Gnostics in viewing mythical narrative as somehow more revelatory of the One's transcendence than discursive reason.

Indeed, the revelation of Psyche's veil is an unveiling that re-veils the transcendent source of all reality.[63] It is, in effect, a mythic presentation of knowledge of the unknowable and the unspoken. What necessitates, or warrants, the mythic mode over the discursive mode? As the last few stanzas of canto I (on Semele, intellectual imagination) make clear, the use of narrative symbols reflects the

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[61] On this subject, the following essays have been invaluable: Frank Kermode, "Secrets and Narrative Sequence" *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 83-101; and W.H. Kelber, "Narrative and Disclosure: Mechanisms of Concealing, Revealing, and Reveiling" *Semeia* 43 (1988): 1-20.

[62] Cf. *The Republic* 508a–c and *Parmenides* 137b-144e.

[63] On the significance of Psyche's veil, Crocker's reading is especially helpful: "In *Psychozoia* More viewed Psyche's veil in two distinct ways: metaphysically as the manifestation of a four-fold ornament made up of universal natural principles - imagination, Sense, growth or formation, and extension - and ethically, as the exercise of divine wisdom, providence and justice experienced by the embodied soul. These principles characterized both the macrocosm and the microcosm, since the same triad or trinity underlay both, and the same universal ethical and metaphysical principles were manifested in both. Psyche's veil, like that which was the Substrate of the successive vehicles of the soul, was woven from these principles, and itself became the inner Substance or life of the physical cosmos, through a process of collision and mixture with Hyle, first or abstract matter" (Crocker, 32).

inherent symbolism of all physical reality and all Being.[64] In other words, since everything is interconnected and mediated through representation, each being points beyond itself. The Neoplatonic tradition of Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius formulated the preeminent paradox of their metaphysics: "To be a being is to be a symbol, to interpret the inaccessible, to announce the divine silence."[65] Psyche "announces" the divine silence of Ahad, but through material efflorescence, which the "raging" poet charts and mirrors through the representational transcendence of myth.

The mythic mode of mystical theology is hard to sustain, as the untimely fates of both ancient Gnostics and early modern enthusiasts attest. Apophatic mythopoeia proves to be extremely volatile for both the refined thinker and the pious seeker. Later in his life, More turned to what is perhaps the most sophisticated version of apophatic mythopoeia: the Jewish Kabbalah. As Allison Coudert has so judiciously pointed out, More became frustrated with others who "asserted the most monstrously complex theories and spoke about them as if they were fundamental truths."[66] More was exceedingly uncharitable in viewing Lurianic Kabbalah as "monstrously complex." It is unclear whether such an intense later encounter with a different mystical tradition undermined his previous commitment to the philosophical form of mystical experience as expressed in his Plotinian poem, a literary piece characterized by many in the 1640s as monstrous. Perhaps the exigencies of the Civil War prevented many from appreciating fully the intricate apophatic logic of the poem. In any case, as Crocker notes, the first canto of *Psychozoia* is the most sophisticated piece of philosophical poetry in the decade and the first published example of Cambridge Platonism. More's complicated first canto, so very different from the other two, makes it clear that for him (as for Plotinus and the

[64] Cf. Peter Struck, *The Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
[65] As helpfully formulated by Eric Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 107.
[66] Allison Coudert, "A Cambridge Platonist's Kabbalist Nightmare*" Journal of the History of Ideas* 36.4 (1975): 633-652, here at 651.

Gnostics), cosmology must come before anthropology, and the latter only comes into view authentically from the vantage of Psyche's preeminence. *Psychozoia* is a poetic articulation of a mystical apprehension occasioned by a philosophical (Neoplatonic) process. Such a "monstrous" expression encapsulates but goes well beyond the rudiments of any supposed *via negativa*. This is because, for More, the material world, Psyche's veil, reveals through concealing via the power of symbols. We might read this in line what Catherine Keller has very helpfully described as "the potential of the apophatic tradition to support the re-symbolization of materiality."[67] It is within this idiosyncratic form of symbolization that seventeenth-century literature participated at many turns. Far from being the mere radical insistence on inexpressibility as such, the line of apophatic reasoning traced above highlights the hermeneutical condition of engaging the ineffable within the constraints of literary practice.

[67] Catherine Keller, "The Cloud of the Impossible: Embodiment and Apophasis," in *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, eds. Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 38.

CHAPTER III

Ecstatic Subjects:
Sir Tobie Matthew and the Legacy of the Mystical Body

> There is also Augustine's philosophical fidelity in whom, throughout his work but more obvious than ever in the *Confessions*, the cleavage of what is one's own and what is foreign rips the will apart. The gap that the conversion at the same time postulates, reveals, and turns to the good separates two co-originary but incongruous terms of the will: the universal concordance of orders which is mine by right because it is communicated to the mind by emanation, and the bestowing of a singular concord-the peace of my heart-that occurs like a fact of grace and thus remains foreign to me. Lodged in discontinuous sites, this law and this counter-law make the willful search for joy erratic.
>
> -Reiner Schürmann[1]

INTRODUCTION: FORGOTTEN BODIES

Schürmann's elucidation of Augustine's famous conversion provides the modern literary historian ample resources with which to examine the complexities of identity throughout Western culture. Most obviously, Schürmann helps us understand that conversion, following the paradigmatic examples of St. Paul and Augustine, is the boundary condition where a certain myth of the self is negotiated with social as well as metaphysical categories. The convert's life is more frequently than not a map of texts, read and authored, which manifest an overpowering dissonance: a past not yet fully left behind and a future not yet fully actualized.[2] If this liminal condition, following Schürmann, makes the pursuit of joy erratic, it can nonetheless occasion real moments of tragic ecstasy in divesting the self of its singular burdens. In the Pauline template of conversion, an overarching burden is how the convert relates to the material constraints of his body. From late antiquity to early modernity, the words of Romans 7:18 reverberated in the minds of many: "For I know that in me

[1] Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 262.
[2] Cf. Karl Morrison, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1992).

(that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." Paul would pioneer the theology of grace to alleviate this psychological tension, but the concept of a divided will assumed new valences with the advent of the Protestant Reformation. In the English context, various theologies of the material world became manifest as opposition to Catholicism became a unitive principle within devotional practice and national politics. Indeed, the phenomenon of conversion to Catholicism following the English Reformation intensified the realities, expounded so eloquently by Schürmann, of a divided self facing the incongruous exigencies of identity.

Catholic bodies haunted the early modern English cultural landscape. Scholars have become more attuned to the presence of these bodies due largely to the spate of recent studies which, under the umbrella manifesto of the recent "turn to religion," has redrawn the historiographical lines of early modern Catholicism, effectively challenging the "Whiggish master narrative of English religious history." The revisionary scholarship has seriously undermined the prevailing notion, summarized by Peter Lake, "that after some indeterminate point in Elizabeth's reign, if not before, Protestants and Protestantism are central to the national story in a way that Catholics and Catholicism are not."[3] English Catholics, who were undoubtedly present in bodily form under the Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline regimes, manifested a variegated culture of their own against the backdrop of a hostile Protestant church. The methodological paradigm shift brought about by the turn to religion has resulted in a far more nuanced understanding of how English Catholics created "symbolic systems" of meaning within their communities of believers. Indeed, the physical

[3] For an overview of this larger trend in the field, see the much-cited essay by Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism* 46.1 (2004): 167-190, with the current quotation drawn from 169. The quotation from Peter Lake is taken from Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 321.

presence of Catholics in England is, as Peter Davidson has shown, traceable to the "discrete expressions of their faith through the use of space, symbol, and inscription."[4]

Adherence to Catholicism in this period, however, often entailed absence as much as it did hidden or illegal presence. Throughout much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many Catholics faced the very real possibility of exile through either imposed or voluntary relocation to the Continent. Prospects of banishment, as Alison Shell has helpfully articulated, engendered "two contrasting topographical effects, obliging one either to flee, or to stand one's ground with an unambiguous proclamation of allegiance" to the Roman faith. The latter topographical effect frequently involved living in distinct opposition to the established church, and this, as recent scholarship has emphasized, concomitantly produced counter-cultural expressions of piety.[5] Fleeing England did not necessarily extricate Catholics from living in opposition to the various ideologies of their (mainly Protestant) countrymen. Quite to the contrary, physical displacement could easily intensify the already pronounced differences between the two religious spheres. Still, charting Catholic culture among exiles proves difficult, largely because these Catholics lived physically outside, but always in relation to, the dominant power structures of the Church of England. In the seventeenth century, this paradoxical cultural orientation becomes most evident among English

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[4] See Peter Davidson, "Recusant Catholic Spaces in Early Modern England," in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, eds. Ronald Corthell, Frances E. Dolan, Christopher Highly, and Arthur F. Marotti, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 46. I appropriate here Raymond Williams' useful definition of "culture" as "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group" that produces "signifying or symbolic systems." See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 90-91.

[5] See Alison Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 130. For a consideration of the counter-cultural expressions of Catholics who chose to remain in England under the Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline regimes, see Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Michael C. Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, C. 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

converts to Roman Catholicism who, through their fluency in dual devotional vocabularies, dramatize most clearly the effects of transition, displacement, and absence.

As apostates from the English Church, Catholic converts embodied opposition. Within the seventeenth-century context, I wish to concentrate in this chapter on the under-studied example of Sir Tobie Matthew (1577-1655) and his immediate context and legacy. Along with such figures as Robert Persons (1546-1610) and Richard Verstegan (1550-1640), the life of Matthew is a testament to the international character of early modern English Catholicism. The son of the staunchly Protestant Archbishop of York, Matthew converted to the Roman faith in 1607 when he came under the influence of Persons while traveling abroad. Despite his Catholicism and his priesthood, both of which were widely known, Matthew would enjoy close relationships with many within the Jacobean establishment and would be knighted in 1623 for his crucial role in the diplomatic venture of the Spanish Match. Although he was exiled on at least three occasions, Matthew would serve as a crucial link between English and continental Catholic cultures. And yet, the overall significance of Matthew's personal trajectory has too often fallen between the historiographical cracks: studies of courtly culture, Laudianism, and the Civil Wars have been conducted without much regard for this elusive figure. This remains all the more perplexing in light of the evidence, which, when taken in its entirety, suggests that within the first five decades of the seventeenth century Matthew was never more than two steps removed from the most politically influential Catholics and Catholic sympathizers of the period.

As I shall illustrate in what follows, Matthew's significance for English literary history is best understood when read alongside, and in conversation with, his fellow Catholic converts of the period who availed themselves of a mystical idiom which he pioneered through translation. Far from being a mere recondite footnote to the larger narrative regarding the origins of the English Civil War, Matthew was indeed a vital member of the English Catholic intelligentsia between the late 1620s and

the early 1640s. Previous considerations of Matthew's role in the Caroline court have by and large ascribed to him a rather marginal role within the complex political networks of these decades. There is, however, another political dimension of Matthew's theological activities which has not been fully fleshed out, one that is consequential for understanding the scope of devout humanist and theological practice among English Catholic exiles in the mid-seventeenth century. Specifically, as I shall elaborate here, Matthew was instrumental among exiled Englishmen in cultivating a sophisticated study of Catholic mysticism, the fruits of which provided some helpful rhetorical building blocks for resisting the ideology of English Protestant nationalism as well as controverting a widespread polemical attack against corporeal forms of Catholic devotional practice.

The importance of Matthew's cultural role goes beyond simple conceptions of influence. A much more generative way of thinking through his impact is to understand how the complexities of early modern Catholic culture and the exigencies of English/Continental politics provided fertile soil in which to plant new conceptions of mystical discourse that would be fully harvested by Matthew's fellow English converts. These specific converts shared a pronounced interest in mystical writings, especially those authored by the mystics such as St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and Julian of Norwich (1342-1416). Moreover, many of the Catholic converts of the seventeenth century, following in Matthew's footsteps, transformed their status as cultural and religious exiles into a discursive means of positioning themselves beyond the constraints of Protestant anti-mystical sentiments. This is immediately evident in Matthew's close contemporary, Richard Crashaw (1612-1649), as well as in his slightly more distant fellow convert, Serenus Cressy (1605-1674).

The purpose of the present chapter is, first, to explicate the discursive correlation between the Catholic's exile (i.e. his bodily dislocation) and his interest in mystical literature, and, second, to underscore the thematic importance of the body within this discursive relationship. My overarching contention is that the cultivation of mystical literature among these convert-writers supplied unique

resources for resistance to Protestant negations of bodily religious practice. Mystics like Teresa and Julian claimed in their writings to have experienced divine revelations through affective sensual states of ecstasy and rapture. Matthew, and by extension Crashaw and Cressy, cultivated a specific orientation around the mystics' texts, and their tales of ecstatic devotion, in suggestive ways. Of the many characteristics of mystical literature, what appealed to these writers most was the prospect of envisioning the body as a *locus* of divine disclosure. There is in each of these instances, I maintain, a discernable cultural correspondence between the Catholic exile's physical erasure from his country and his gravitation toward corporeal mysticism.

Importantly, approaching the physical body as the place of one's encounter with an ineffable God stood, among these Catholics, in contradistinction to many conventional Protestant condemnations of mystical experience.[6] The dominant English Protestant voices of this period collectively fostered a radical antithesis between, on the one hand, the supreme authority of scriptural texts and rational theology, and, on the other hand, the elusive domain of the senses.[7] The latter came to be almost absolutely associated, through complex and often gendered language, with Roman Catholicism. Matthew, Crashaw, and Cressy took it upon themselves to challenge the pre-given and often over-determined conceptions of corporeality that proliferated in their former native context. They accomplished this, as I shall demonstrate here, in their dramatized respective roles as translator, reader, and transcriber of mystical literature. In addition, all three faced prolonged

[6] For incisive treatment of the evolution of popular understanding of mystical experience, see Niklaus Largier, "The Rhetoric of Mysticism: From Contemplative Practice to Aesthetic Experiment" in *Mysticism and Reform: 1400-1750* eds. Sara S. Poor and Nigel Smith (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 252-273.

[7] In many respects, it is all too easy to make facile generalizations about, on the one hand, corporeal Catholics and, on the other, rational Protestants. This chapter eschews such a rigid dichotomy, but nonetheless stresses that in the period it was common in polemical attacks against Catholics to emphasize their complicated entanglement with the material world (e.g. the doctrine of Transubstantiation). Radical English Protestants would also come to negotiate their relationship with both mystical theology and the body's prospective involvement devotional practice. See Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

hardships due to their conversions to Catholicism and were repeatedly disenfranchised by a country that they both loved and feared. I shall suggest that the elusiveness of the body in mystical literature corresponded in discernable ways with the displacement that the Catholic convert felt upon exiting the dominant power structures of the English Protestant hegemony. Cultivating the corpus of mystical literature allowed these writers a unique countervailing opportunity to resist both the ideology of English nationalism and the ideological disregard for the body.

THE HISTORY OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE: AUGUSTINE AND BEYOND

If we are to grasp fully the conceptual relationship between textuality, mysticism, and embodiment in the seventeenth century, it is imperative that we appreciate the long tradition of mystical reflection and its recalibrations in the age of Matthew. Debates centered on textuality and mystical experience were operative in early modern deliberations regarding the origins of authoritative spiritual truth. Several centuries of historical change leading up to this period contributed to the interrelationship of these notions: the advent of a fully developed print culture, the fragmentation of European Christianity, and the emergence of novel forms of religious praxis. An important cultural index of these changes can be found in the evolving conception of the mystical as it related to ecclesiology, scriptural exegesis, and pious observance.

Throughout the patristic and early medieval periods, the idea of the "mystical" was often initially related to biblical hermeneutics. From its original etymology, it signified something hidden, secret, or imbedded within the text of scripture itself to be teased out by the trained (i.e. clerical or religious) interpreter. Thus, within this timeframe it would be grossly anachronistic to think of those who contemplated the hidden meanings of scripture as mystics in the modern sense of the term. Nonetheless, there arose in the patristic period a parallel conception of visionary revelation that would in time come to be closely associated with the mystical as something hidden or arcane. St. Augustine (354 – 430 C.E.) was instrumental in the development of a robust conception of visionary

experience, which for this speculative theologian signaled principally the soul's ascent through contemplation to the divine presence. Building on his Trinitarian speculations about the nature of rationality and epistemology (discussed in his works *De Trinitate* and *De Genesi ad Litteram*), Augustine articulated what is perhaps the first taxonomy of mysticism within the Christian tradition. Bernard McGinn, the foremost historian of Christian mysticism writing today, has noted that the Bishop of Hippo "laid the foundations for the theological evaluation of visions by dividing the showings produced by special divine action into three ascending forms based on their relation to materiality: corporeal visions, spiritual visions (i.e., visions given interiorly to the soul); and intellectual visions, which constitute an immediate grasp of infallible divine truths."[8] In early Christianity, visionary revelation did not stand in opposition to biblical revelation, but rather existed symbiotically with it in the paradigm of theological speculation heralded by Augustine.

The relationship between corporeal visions and infallible divine truths remained predicated upon Paul's own visionary account of his journey to the third heaven in 2 Corinthians. Perhaps one of the most cryptic passages in the entire New Testament, the opening lines of 2 Corinthians 12 recount Paul's rapture to the third heaven and his divine revelation of "unspeakable words" (*arreta rhemata* in the Greek text and *arcana verba* in the Vulgate). Recent biblical scholarship has demonstrated convincingly that Paul's experience should be interpreted in the context of first-century Jewish Merkabah theology and the genre of apocalyptical literature of that period.[9] Alan Segal has further noted that when Paul is properly situated within his intellectual *milieu* it becomes

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[8] See Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)*, vol. 3 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 155. For a detailed treatment of Augustine as a "founding father" of Christian mysticism, see chapter 7 of McGinn's first volume, *The Foundations of Christian Mysticism*, 228-262.

[9] For an overview of first-century Jewish mysticism, see Gershom E. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), 14-20, and *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Shocken Books, 1946), 44. See also Michael Lieb, *The Visionary Mode: Biblical Prophecy, Hermeneutics, and Cultural Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), esp. 179-180.

clear that he wrote as a mystic, and Segal contends that Paul "is the only early Jewish mystic and apocalypticist whose personal, confessional writing has come down to us."[10] Indeed, Paul's visionary account has enjoyed avid readership through the ages. The apostle's ineffable experience inspired many patristic and medieval writers, including Origen, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and Bonaventure, all of whom grounded their mystical theology, at least in part, on the explication of Paul's reference to divine rapture. What was perhaps most enigmatic about Paul's account of mystical ascent was his uncertainty about whether the event affected him corporeally. Twice in his narration he reflects his irresolution about his bodily state during his visionary experience: "whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth." In some respects, since Paul entertained the possibility that the body could have been operative in mystical ascent, this biblical passage contributed to the theological significance of embodiment within multiple intellectual paradigms.

As the supreme model of Christian mysticism *and* conversion, Paul's rapture to the third heaven elided naturally with both patristic Neoplatonic theology and medieval scholastic thought, both of which posited mutually reinforcing celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies that reflected the path of mystical ascent. However, during the Reformation many Protestants faced the predicament of explaining the nature of Paul's quasi-corporeal experience and the revelation that resulted from it. Indeed these two issues were inextricably bound up with one another. At the center of these concerns was the epistemology of faith understood over against the phenomenology of religious experience. The magisterial reformers eschewed and critiqued mystical experiences as aberrations from the authentic deposit of faith. Through the collective enterprise of writers like Luther and Calvin, the epistemic ground of theology and religious practice began to shift increasingly toward an

[10] Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 34.

emphasis solely on scripture. As a result, many Protestants, both English and Continental, distanced themselves from visionary modes of religious practice, often denouncing them opprobriously as marks of "fanaticism," "enthusiasm," and "Romanism." Luther had objected to both the mystical hiddenness of scriptural meaning as well as the prospect of visionary modes of revelation.[11] Both remained, in the eyes of the magisterial reformer, legitimated by the oppressive ecclesiastical control of the Catholic Church.

Diverging from patristic and medieval forms of mystical devotion, Luther disallowed the visionary modes of revelation that had seemingly been confirmed by Paul and later systematized by Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. The chasm between the individual believer and the deity was unbridgeable through any other means than that of the biblical text (the Word) itself. Luther declared:

> The people of Israel did not have a God who was viewed "absolutely," to use the expression, the way the inexperienced monks *rise into heaven* with their speculations and think about God as He is in Himself. From this absolute God everyone should flee who does not want to perish, because human nature and the absolute God…are the bitterest enemies…We must take hold of this God, not naked but clothed and revealed in His Word; otherwise certain despair will crush us.[12]

The symbiotic relationship between corporeal visions and infallible divine truths that had been so integral to speculative theologians like Augustine undergoes a complete epistemological overhaul in Reformed thought. Noam Reisner writes, "Beginning with Luther…Reformed debates about the authority of Scripture tended to relocate that authority, and consequently the ineffable barrier of its

[11] On Luther's central role in transforming theological understandings of "mysticism," and the overall impact this transformation had all the way to Kant and postmodernism, see Niklaus Largier, "Mysticism, Modernity, and the Invention of Aesthetic Experience" *Representations* 105.1 (2009): 37-60.

[12] Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms I*, trans. L. W. Spitz, Jr., vol. 12 of *Collected Works*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955), 312.

language, from text to reader."[13] This process was fraught with vexing complications, due largely to its inability to accommodate the idea of hidden, ineffable mystery. Paul's ineffable moment in effect constituted an extra-biblical mode of revelation. Whereas the apostle's rapture had served in previous centuries as a cornerstone of apophatic theology, the same account lurks loosely and ambiguously behind Luther's indictment of the late medieval meditative tradition. While Pseudo-Dionysius posited a celestial hierarchy that was concomitantly reflected in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Protestants like Luther initiated a transition through which individual believers interiorized the scriptures irrespective of external ladders of ascent or visionary experience. Put another way, piety for Luther was the process of attuning oneself to the internal inspiration of the Holy Spirit and certainly not advancing through any hierarchical channels. The emerging spiritual doctrine of *sola scriptura* within Reformed theology thus maintained a complicated and often confused theological relationship with what Paul expressed as the *arcana verba* (unspeakable words) that constituted mystical revelation.

In the formative years of Protestant orthodoxy, early modern Catholicism was manifesting its own advancements in the arena of mystical and visionary devotion. For Catholics, the term *mystical* was also linked to the mystical body of Christ, which in the Middle Ages signified the assortment of believers within the ecclesiological nexus. Following the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and largely in response to inter-denominational disputes over the Eucharist, *mystical* also became refracted through the sacramental materiality signaled by the Eucharistic phrase *hoc est corpus meum*. The semantic metamorphosis of the term "mystical body" (*corpus mysticum*) thus revitalized the linkage between biblical, liturgical, and ecclesiological pathways to divinely authoritative truth.[14]

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[13] Noam Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 84.
[14] Jennifer Rust, *The Body in Mystery: the Political Theology of the Corpus Mysticum in the Literature of Reformation England* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

The two semantic facets of the *corpus mysticum* (i.e. "body" and "mystical") assumed another valence in Catholic theology after Trent: the mystical saint. The *locus* of the "mystical body" followed a progression from the abstract understanding of the church, thereupon evolving through conceptions of Eucharistic theology, and culminating in the actual bodies of individual mystics such as St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) and St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). The Roman Church endorsed these figures in the late sixteenth century as embodiments of doctrinal veracity.[15] In their writings John and Teresa popularized the motifs of the dark night of the soul and the quasi-erotic state of mystical ecstasy. The latter motif became most influential in the wider Catholic European context, as witnessed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini's famous seventeenth-century sculpture depicting the ecstatic Teresa. It was because of John and Teresa that the term "mystic" is used as a substantive description of an actual person beginning only in the seventeenth century following the wider circulation and readership of their writings.[16] The canonization of these saint-mystics initiated a process whereby the semantic dimensions of "mystical body" were renegotiated within Catholic Culture through much of early modern Europe.

The pairing of these two semantically erratic terms ("body" and "mystical") intensified, rather than alleviating, the ambiguities inherent in their respective denotative meanings, and this point is essential to the narrative being summarized here. *Mystical* had, since the patristic era, pointed to something hidden that was nonetheless manifest in something present (e.g. the Biblical text, the institutional church, or the Eucharist). Similarly, as Paul's visionary account suggested, the *body* constituted the form of the human sensorium that often blurred the distinction between absence and presence *vis-à-vis* visionary revelation. It was for this reason that Augustine had accepted

[15] Cf. Moshe Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), esp. 207-232.
[16] Cf. Louis Bouyer, "Mysticism: An Essay on the History of a Word," in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Richard Wood, O.P. (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 42-55.

the locution "corporeal vision" as a legitimate theological category. Both terms must be understood, especially following late medieval and early modern developments of affective spirituality, as involving a complex interplay between notions of absence and presence, hiddenness and manifestation, internal and external.

Reformed discussions of scriptural authority had obviated the semantic instability and ambiguity of "mystical body" in much of Protestant thought. In Catholic circles, matters were made more complex by the canonization of mystics who developed even further the corporeal idiom of mystical devotion. The interplay between hiddenness and manifestation necessarily assumed a widespread social significance given that mystics' personal experiences of divine revelation were refracted through the Church's popular hagiography. In the public sphere of early modern Catholic culture, interior sanctity and visionary modes of mystical life became the templates whereby authentic holiness could be detected and emulated. Construing early modern mysticism as generative of novel forms of discourse, Michel de Certeau locates that effect specifically in the mystics' corporeal language.

> [T]he mystics [i.e. Catholic mystics] were drawn away, by the life they lived and by the situation that was given to them, toward *a language of the body*. In a new interplay between what they recognized internally and the part of their experience that was externally (socially) recognizable, mystics were led to create from this *corporeal vocabulary* the initial markers indicating the place in which they found themselves and the illumination they received.[17]

Most operative in this cultural phenomenon is the dynamic whereby the mystic's *body* becomes constituted not by a discrete definition of the term "body" but rather through the interchange of the mystic's subjective experiences with their correlative physical manifestations. In the writings of figures like John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, such a discursive system had the paradoxically cumulative effect of appropriating corporeal language to emphasize the *indeterminacy* of the *body* as a

[17] Michel de Certeau, "Mysticism," trans. Marsanne Brammer, *Diacritics* 22.2 (1992): 11-25, here 15 with emphasis added.

definitive category of meaning. In this sense, I would suggest that within the (official) Catholic mystical discourse of this period the *body* functions as the ineffable *frontier* of religious experience. This elusive partition does not work to delineate definitively what is and what is not bodily, but rather underscores the uncertainty of the boundary by employing corporeal tropes to move between different religious registers (spiritual, sensual, etc.). Catholic mystic-saints even drew inspiration from the biblical story of Paul, who according to Acts 22:17 was momentarily *en ekstasei* and who subsequently received his hidden revelation, "whether in the body, I cannot tell" (cf. 2 Corinthians 12).[18]

Given the multivalent rhetorical function of the terms, interpreting the idea of the mystical body becomes an infinitely complex hermeneutical enterprise. The literary historian need not impose an artificial uniformity on the diverse significations of "body" or "mystical" to recognize that both terms were frequently employed in polemical exchanges between Protestants and Catholics in early modern England. As in much of Europe, the seventeenth-century English context revealed that the new corporeal idiom of Catholic mysticism had important political dimensions and ramifying social effects. Presently, I would like to concentrate on a few examples of robust Protestant skepticism regarding mystical devotion before proceeding to a consideration of how Matthew (and Crashaw and Cressy) utilized the discursive system of mystical corporeality. Such an overview will afford the opportunity of gaining greater interpretative traction on the Catholic converts' resistance to specific English ideologies.

[18] Astute readers of the Bible have often discerned acute similarities between Paul's description of the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12 and Luke's description of Paul's "heavenly vision" in Acts 26:19. Caravaggio was not the first to imagine Paul as an ecstatic visionary, for Acts 22:17 clearly speaks of Paul *en ekstasei*. Both Paul's Damascus experience and his journey into Paradise were subsumed into a collective *mythos* throughout Christian history. For my purposes, this latter point is central to the underlying connection between conversion and mysticism as it relates to Paul, Augustine, and English Catholic converts.

The genre of mystical literature popularized in the writings of John and Teresa was influential throughout much of Europe, though the discourse assumed new valences in Protestant cultural contexts. In early modern England, for instance, an interest in esoteric devotion could all too easily be associated with the nation's two most feared religious foes: radical Anabaptism and authoritarian Catholicism. The former posited a church without hierarchical mediation: neither magistrate nor papacy. The latter was depicted as the supreme incarnation of Antichrist: despotic and heretical. Both were described as religions of "enthusiasts," a derogatory term denoting persons who claimed access to private inspirations and intense spiritual visions beyond the realm of rational speculation. According to Peter Lake, the specters of popery and Anabaptism were frequently appropriated by English interlocutors as "anti-types" in discussions of "the middle ground of protestant orthodoxy."[19] While these polarities were first negotiated by the established church in the sixteenth century, they were frequently invoked again in the 1630s, 1640s, and 1650s when the magistracy and the established church reconfigured (while revitalizing) their institutional stance against Catholicism.[20] Even as late as 1652, Henry Vaughan could write in the preface to his popular devotional work *The Mount of Olives, or, Solitary Devotions* the following: "I envy not their frequent ecstasies and raptures to the Third Heaven; I only wish them real, and that their actions did not tell the world they are rapt into some other place."[21] Despite the fact that the Greek text of Acts 22:17

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[19] Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 17. As Lake demonstrates, the fundamental nature of English Protestantism was still very much being negotiated at the end of the sixteenth century, and debates over the Church of England's essential theology carried over well into the Jacobean and Caroline periods. For further considerations of the wide appeal of anti-Catholicism on a grand cultural scale, see also Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat*, esp. 229-280.

[20] For a useful explanation of how theological debates from the mid to late sixteenth century powerfully influenced English culture from the 1630s to the 1650s, see Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 31-77 and 146-150.

[21] Henry Vaughan, *The Mount of Olives: or, Solitary devotions. By Henry Vaughan silurist. With an excellent discourse of the blessed state of man in glory, written by the most reverend and holy Father Anselm Arch-Bishop of*

speaks of Paul *en ekstasei* and 2 Corinthians locates Paul in the third heaven, Vaughan could dismiss more recent reports of ecstatic experience (very likely that of Teresa of Avila) as an insubstantial mode of religious practice. Ecstatic mysticism, in its Catholic variant, was thus a crucial factor by which English Protestants could differentiate themselves from their great religious nemesis.

Another representative Protestant voice in this period was that of Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), founding member of the Cambridge Platonists. Circulating in the same *milieu* as Richard Crashaw, Whichcote, in his attempt to establish a religion on "some rational principle of certitude" declared: "We cannot ascend higher in our acting than we are in our Beings and Understanding. […] [T]hey [i.e. Catholics and other "enthusiasts"] do not advance Religion who draw it down to *bodily acts*… [T]he *Christian Religion is not mystical*, symbolical, enigmatical, emblematical; but uncloathed, *unbodied*, intellectual, rational, spiritual."[22] At precisely the socio-cultural moment when the established Church of England was attempting to formulate the boundaries of its orthodoxy, when the parameters were being constructed outside the ambit of Anabaptism and Catholicism (as Lake demonstrates), one can chart a prolonged animus toward the notion of the mystical. This comports with de Certeau's explanation of the mystic discourse emerging in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: "The thread of psychosomatic signs was from then on the borderline that made it possible for mystical experience to be articulated in socially recognizable terms, *to be made legible* to the eyes of unbelievers."[23] Whichcote speaks for a large

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Canterbury, and now done into English. London : Printed for William Leake at the Crown in Fleet-street between the two Temple-Gates, 1652.

[22] Quotes are from Ernest T. Campagnac, *The Cambridge Platonists: Being Selections from the Writings of Benjamin Whichcote, John Smith and Nathanael Culverwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), xxxi; xvi. In the case of Whichcote, locating his anti-body philosophy of religion within the larger world of seventeenth-century English Protestantism can reveal interesting dimensions of this religious mindset on a large scale. See, for instance, James Deotis Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism in Seventeenth-Century England* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969). Whichcote is emblematic of the ongoing debate about materiality in the circle of the Cambridge Platonists. A later chapter will explore the issue in the poetry of Whichcote's colleague Henry More and his speculative poetry.

[23] De Certeau, "Mysticism," 15 (emphasis added).

demographic of intellectual English Protestants who articulated denunciations of mysticism in any form, but especially that specimen predicated upon "popish" presuppositions. His rhetoric is as pointed as it is totalizing: the Christian religion "is not mystical" and it is "unbodied." The attempt to make legible the ineffable experience of the mystic represents the extreme incoherence of objectification and further speaks to a radical rhetorical violence underlying this particular strain of Protestant polemic.

In many respects, the discursive power structures of Protestant England were geared toward identifying and controverting the psychosomatic signs of Catholicism. One important facet of this widespread cultural project was its gendered dynamic. Scholars such as Frances Dolan, John N. King, and Arthur F. Marotti have highlighted the degree to which Protestant invective toward Catholics frequently involved the polemical and misogynistic propensity to associate the Catholic Church with feminized corporeity. The English Church figured itself, in the words of Marotti, as "a masculinized, reform Christianity" which abjured the carnality of Catholicism (and its reverence for the feminine Virgin and female saints) in favor of "the supposedly more spiritual orientation of Protestant text- and language-based religion." The inherently "unbodied" nature of Protestant devotion, as Whichcote had phrased it, could be "intellectual, rational, spiritual" only through the linguistic basis of its religion. By identifying Rome with the Whore of Babylon, English Protestants could, as Dolan remarks, "vivify intensely corporeal denunciations of the church's corrupt and feminized body." Furthermore, "[b]y persistently associating the Roman church with fallen women, reformers could acknowledge its seductive appeal while simultaneously repudiating it."[24] While

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[24] Arthur F. Marotti, "Alienating Catholics in Early Modern England: Recusant Women, Jesuits and Ideological Fantasies," in *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*, ed. Arthur Marotti (London/New York: Macmillan Press/St. Martin's Press, 1999), 4; Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 52. For a comprehensive overview of entrenched Protestant anti-Catholicism, which identified Rome with the Whore of Babylon, see also John N. King, *English Reformation Literature*

Roman Catholicism had, since the days of Luther, been denounced as a church mired in material matters, in Reformation England this attitude assumed a new trenchancy in subsuming the psychosomatic signs of Catholicism into the figurehead of feminized corporeality.[25]

These polemical caricatures were first fashioned in the sixteenth century but came to a head in the years leading up to the English Civil War (1642-1649) when King Charles I's Catholic wife, Queen Henrietta Maria, came to embody all of Catholicism's supposed perversions, including its endorsement of mystics.[26] It has been important for my purposes to note the engrained misogyny of Protestant anti-Catholic polemic. I do so to adumbrate how the discourse of the body was rendered problematic in the seventeenth-century English context. While a fruitful line of inquiry would pursue what these denunciations of the body reflect about Protestant anxieties surrounding female agency, I have been more interested here in charting momentarily how the gender-inflected language of Protestant polemic functioned as a backdrop to Catholic emphases on the elusiveness of the body in mystic discourse. Thus, if Queen Henrietta Maria came to represent all of the supposedly degenerate psychosomatic signs that perturbed the English establishment, she also served as a nodal

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 381-387; and *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 91-97.

[25] This is not, of course, to deny that Protestants could also appropriate feminine imagery for their own conceptions of the authentic (i.e. established) church. See for example Una of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, the imagery of Donne's Holy Sonnet "Show me deare Christ, thy spouse, so bright and clear," and Herbert's "dear mother" of his poem "The British Church." These Protestant templates of the feminine church are characterized by there emphasis on purity, whereas the gendered rhetoric of English anti-Catholicism figures the Roman Church as carnally corrupt through its aberrant (e.g. the whore imagery) feminized devotion.

[26] Dolan provides a helpful historical overview: "Henrietta Maria also notoriously engaged in theatrical performances, taking speaking parts, perhaps even dressed as a man, and presenting works she had written and directed. Her performance reinforced associations among women, theatricality, the foreign, and the Catholic. Furthermore, Henrietta Maria's entertainments were indistinguishable from her devotions, both because of a long tradition of attacking Catholicism for its theatricality and because of practices that did indeed blur the distinction between liturgy and performance. […]Furthermore, Henrietta Maria acted out her Catholicism in offensively public ways: refusing to attend the coronation, chatting and giggling with her ladies through a Westminster Abbey service, or, perhaps most scandalously, enacting her notorious if apocryphal 'penance'" (*Whores of Babylon*, 99-100).

figure in the seventeenth-century cultivation of mystical discourse, especially among English converts to Catholicism. Two of the most prominent of these converts, Tobie Matthew and Richard Crashaw, would intensify the association of Catholic enthusiasm with elusive corporeal devotion by interacting with the Queen.

TOBIE MATTHEW'S CONTEXT

Tobie Matthew (1577-1655) was the son of a staunchly Protestant father (the archbishop of York) whose anti-Catholic vitriol painted a very exotic picture of the Church of Rome. Following his academic training at Oxford (1590-1597), Matthew would convert to Catholicism in 1606/07 after meeting the English Jesuit and ideologue Robert Persons abroad, and would subsequently possibly become a Jesuit himself.[27] The trajectory of Matthew's life reveals that even when Catholics were given a modicum of acceptance among political elites, they remained within a hair's breadth from being ostracized culturally and religiously, if not physically. Throughout his life he enjoyed close relationships with people like Francis Bacon, John Donne, and the Duke of Buckingham. But Matthew openly avowed his interest in retaking England for the Catholic cause, as evidenced in his attempt to facilitate the Spanish Match. More importantly, despite his appeal to figures such as Buckingham (who was often responsible for orchestrating Jacobean tolerance of his presence), Matthew was exiled (first by Archbishop Bancroft in 1608 and later in 1618 by King James himself) for his obstinate and repeated refusal to take the Oath of Allegiance. He was allowed to re-enter the realm on both occasions due to his close affiliation with Buckingham and Prince Charles.

Matthew irked other members of the Jacobean establishment, however, primarily because of his cunning ability to convince influential figures, such as Frances Brydges and Anne Boteler, to convert to Catholicism. On more than one occasion Matthew was referred to as "perverse" for his

[27] Concrete evidence for Matthew's entrance into the Society of Jesus is hard to discern, but I follow Michael Questier, who calls Matthew at the very least "Jesuit minded." See Michael Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 180.

contagious Catholic influence, and many within the court feared that his proximity to Prince Charles was potentially pernicious.[28] James was so beguiled by Matthew's crucial role in the diplomatic venture of the Spanish Match that he knighted him in 1623. Matthew was one of a very small group of Catholics to receive such patronage by the monarch in this period. With the knighthood he could move more freely as a courtier, but following the ascendancy of Charles I his growing influence provoked deep anti-Catholic sentiments among court officials. In 1640 Matthew was accused, probably erroneously, for being a participant in a Jesuit plot to kill Charles, and he was banished from the realm for good in 1641.

While Matthew's courtly career would suggest a mere political dynamo, his true interest was always in literary Catholic culture, as is clear from his persistent interest in making translations of Catholic devotional literature. He was a lifetime devotee of Augustine, whose *Confessions* he translated to great acclaim in the 1620s. He would go on to translate works of Lucy Knatchbull and Francisco Arias. More important for my purposes is the fact that his final exile afforded him the opportunity to compose verse that reflected his displaced status as a Catholic and to translate Teresa of Avila's *El Libro de la Vida*.

In striking ways, Matthew's case testifies to the profound disruption experienced by Catholics in years leading up to the Civil War. On the occasion of his final banishment, he penned a poem entitled "Vpon the Sight of Douer Cliffs from Callis," reflecting the emotional and physical displacement of having to take leave of his country:

> Better it were for me to haue binn blinde
> Then with sadd eyes to gaze vpon the shore
> Of my deare countrey, but now mine no more
> Which thrustes me thus, both [out] of sight and minde,
>
> Better for me to haue in cradle pined

[28] Cf. A. J. Loomie, "Sir Toby Matthew," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Then liue thus longe to choake vpon the coare
Of his sad absence, whom I still adore
With present hart, for harts are not confined

Poore hart, that dost in so high tempest saile
Against both winde and Tide, of thie friends will
What remedie remaines, that cann availe
But that thou doe with sighes, the sailes fullfill
Vntil they split, and *if the body die*
T'is well ymploy'd, the soule shall liue thereby.[29]

Commenting that his country is no longer his, Matthew frames the exilic event as violent ejection: "thrustes me thus." As in the case of many "papists" before and after him (cf. the lives of Southwell and Crashaw), Catholics hovered in the liminal space of an English culture that tolerated neither their physical presence nor their theological positions. Catholics were, as Matthew puts it, "out of sight and minde." Gazing at his country from a distant shore, the speaker places Catholics in the destitute position of a lonely child who, being the progeny of an inhospitable mother, is cast off and left alone.

Punning on the Latinate word *cor* ("choake vpon the coare"),[30] Matthew employs one of his favorite figurative constructions: the heart. It is the heart, as metonymic representation, that functions as the emblem of the displaced Catholic. The Catholic experiences England as "absence" (7), and the heart becomes the vehicle of devotional mobility: "for harts are not confined." Sailing upon the tempestuous seas of cataclysmic religious change (perhaps evoking the Civil War), the speaker refers cryptically to the heart's fluid status between the body and soul: "Vntil they split, and

[29] The sonnets of Tobie Matthew have been transcribed from manuscript and published by Anthony G. Petti, "Unknown Sonnets by Sir Toby Matthew," *Recusant History* 9.3 (1967), 123-158, esp. 142-153. The current sonnet is identified by Petti as Sonnet 28 (his numeration). The emphasis is mine.

[30] Matthew's image of choking upon the heart naturally evokes the moment in *King Lear* when Cordelia, in response to Lear's questions at the beginning of the play, remarks, "Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth" (I.1.91-92). I am referring to David Bevington's edition of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, 5th Edition (New York: Pearson-Longman, 2004). Catholics were, perhaps, in a position similar to Cordelia, who speaks of her indebtedness to her father ("You have begot me, bred me, loved me" [I.1.96]), but who is ultimately rejected by her parent on grounds that are not her own.

if the body die / T'is well ymploy'd, the soule shall liue thereby." Given the complex syntax and grammar of the last quatrain and concluding couplet, it is difficult to understand completely what the speaker's last thought is meant to encapsulate. However, we may be justified in taking the reiterated emphasis on the heart as a poetic marker of the body's liminal state as both exiled Catholic body as well as the dying national body of apostate England.

In Matthew's sonnet on exile, it is the heart that sails and moves in the chasm between Protestant England and the peripheral world of the Continent. His usage of the heart motif should be read in relation to a wider facet of Counter-Reformation culture that is often identified, sometimes opprobriously, as a quintessential baroque aesthetic: the flaming heart. Within the larger network of what Peter Davidson calls "the universal Baroque," the flaming heart "symbolizes the endurance of faith" in the face of rapid change, that further signals a "baroque tradition of symbolic ornament and symbolic articulation of place and history." While flaming hearts of this period were frequently depicted in emblem literature as "the disembodied devout heart floating in radiance in the heavens," they came to represent the excess of the corporeal as reflective of the immanence of an infinite divine reality in bodily form.[31] This baroque aesthetic functions according to the same logic that I have identified as operative in the mystical construal of the body as ineffable frontier. Just as the "body" becomes constituted as the partitioning boundary between two indeterminate spheres (spiritual and non-spiritual; bodily and non-bodily), the baroque flaming heart represents the paradoxical confluence of a finite material form emblazoned with the vibrancy of infinite divine signification. In this representational system, the semantic integrity of the "infinite" (which by

[31] See Peter Davidson, *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 177-178. As Davidson demonstrates in this book, the use of the appellation "Baroque" to describe grotesque excess of corporeal forms develops out of a Whiggish-Anglican historiographical tendency to associate the body with foreign Catholicism. Davidson's larger project involves showing how what we commonly identify as Catholic/Baroque can be traced, in some respects, through Protestant and non-western traditions as a universal impulse of expressivity.

definition contradicts everything corporeal and finite) is compromised and dispersed into a discrete representation of a bodily organ.

Part of the historiographical difficulty of addressing early modern English Catholicism has been the persistent problem of understanding how the so-called Counter-Reformation baroque aesthetic engendered a "symbolic articulation of place and history" specific to English Catholics. If we accept Matthew's figuration of the heart as the liminal devotional vehicle that traverses the space of exile, hovering between different "bodies" (cf. "Vntil they split, and *if the body die* / T'is well ymploy'd, the soule shall liue thereby"), his case offers a compelling opportunity to rethink how English Catholics found means of articulating their place in history through the elusiveness of this bodily form. The elusive nature of the body in the English Catholic imagination did not necessarily preclude approaching the corporeal as a means of expression. This is most clearly borne out in Matthew's engagement with the work of St. Teresa of Avila and later in Crashaw's similar encounter with Teresa's corpus.

Teresa's work *El Libro de la Vida*, first published in Spanish in 1588, had been translated into several other vernacular languages by the beginning of the seventeenth century. Matthew saw to it that Teresa would be rendered in English as well by translating the saint's autobiography in 1642 and subsequently dedicating it to Queen Henrietta Maria who was then fleeing the onset of the Civil War. We may reasonably date Matthew's exile poem, preoccupied as it is with hearts, to his last definitive banishment from the country in 1641, for it was around this time that he initiated the extensive labor of translating Teresa's autobiography, which he entitled *Flaming Hart, or The Life of the Glorious S. Teresa.* In Matthew's translation, we see the author transmuting the aggrieved heart of the Catholic exile depicted in "Vpon the Sight of Douer Cliffs from Callis" into the flaming heart of Teresa. Since the flaming heart, in the words of Davidson, "symbolizes the endurance of faith," it makes sense that the translator dedicates his work to a fellow exile who both stands for England and

remains physically asunder from its domain: Queen Henrietta Maria. In this work, Matthew's preface to the reader seemed to confirm English Protestants' worst suspicions: that Catholics manifested an inordinate attraction to the body of the female saint-mystic and in turn accorded it an authority usually reserved for the Bible.

Published in Antwerp, Matthew's translation of *El Libro de la Vida* positions mysticism squarely within the discourse of seventeenth-century English politics.[32] Matthew claims in his dedicatory address to offer the translation to her "Majestie a meanes of *magnifying your owne natural greatnes*, by your avowing & protecting, and enlarging the glory of an comparable Saint, S. Teresa, to whome, as I have well understood that already you carry an extraordinary devotion."[33] This last remark is worth considering in some length. Like in every other endeavor of his career, Matthew was a shrewd observer of scenes on the European political stage. He thus knew that Henrietta Maria had a pronounced interest in the Carmelite order to which, as she confessed in several of her letters, she felt a deep vocational calling. Matthew's comment that the Queen exercised an "extraordinary devotion" to Teresa likely stems from the fact that Teresa had taken painstaking strides in reforming the Carmelite order in her lifetime. Carmelites were in fact often identified as "daughters of Teresa." If the Queen was a proto-daughter of Teresa, and Matthew was a willful and obedient subject to a Catholic Queen, he recognized the discursive force of configuring such an association among the group of exiled Englishmen. Indeed, he continues to underscore the political subtext of his translation by emphasizing repeatedly that England had been forced to maintain convents and monasteries abroad, such as the one at Antwerp where much recusant English writing was published.

[32] It should be noted in passing that Matthew was not the first English Catholic intellectual to promulgate mystical literature generally or Spanish devotional practice specifically. His Jesuit predecessor Michael Walpole (1570-1625) had in fact produced the first translation of Teresa's *El Libro de la Vida* in 1611, also under politically compromising circumstances.

[33] Tobie Matthew, *The Flaming Hart, or The Life of the Glorious S. Teresa, Foundresse of the Reformation, of the Order of the All-Immaculate Virgin Mother, our B. Lady of Mount Carmel* (Antwerp: Iohannes Muersius, 1642), 2-3, with emphasis added. All references and parenthetical pagination are to this edition, which was accessed through *Early English Books Online*.

By amalgamating the theological influence of Teresa's work with the magisterial prowess of Henrietta Maria, Matthew is drawing clear correlations between the two spheres of influence.[34] This tendency is magnified even further in his prefatory statements.

In his preface to the "Christian and Civil Reader" (5), Matthew makes several significant and incendiary statements regarding the mystical corpus of Teresa. He places, for example, Teresa in league with the famed patristic author, Augustine. Like the bishop of Hippo, Teresa experienced God directly and provided a first-hand account of her experience just as Augustine had done in his *Confessions*. To Protestant readers, for whom Augustine was also a pivotal and singularly great figure, the comparison would have appeared grossly mistaken and undeserved.[35] As Whichcote's and Vaughan's comments have made clear, Teresa's example of ecstasy would have discomfited the Protestant ethos of England in subversive ways. Even sharing a unique revelatory experience in

[34] There are important political dimensions of the narrative I am writing here. Obviously, both Matthew and Crashaw were in a position to receive political support from the exiled Queen. This does not mean, I would hasten to add, that their literary production should be reduced simply to political motivations. Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti have underscored the limitations of participating in "political analyses of early modern texts and history" that "approach religion *and* politics as religion *as* politics" (emphasis in original). See "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism* 46.1 (2004): esp. 168. As both Foucault and de Certeau demonstrate, tracing history involves figuring out how different writers organized themselves around a web of documentation and textual production. Matthew's translation of Teresa's autobiography remains under-studied. It is also worth bearing in mind that while Henrietta Maria was able to marshal support for both Matthew and Crashaw within her insular group of exiled English Catholics, she was not in a position to offer substantive preferment to either writer as a consequence of her own exiled status. For a consideration of politics in relation to early modern theology (as a form of political theology), see Debora Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in "Measure for Measure"* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

[35] The political appropriation of Augustine by continental and English Protestants is well documented. Protestant engagement with the Augustinian corpus often involved selective readings. For an overview of this tendency among English Protestants see Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 79-86 and 170-190. For the role of Augustine as a figure of authority in Anglican conformist rhetoric, see also Peter Lake, "The Laudians and the Argument from Authority," in B. Young Kunze and D. D. Brautigan, eds., *Court, Country and Culture: Essays in Early Modern British History in Honour of Perez Zagorin* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1992), esp. 159 and 164.

common with St. Paul could not legitimize Teresa as a viable devotional model. In 1638 Joseph Beaumont elicited Puritan furor by publicly endorsing Teresa in a lecture at Peterhouse, Cambridge that would ultimately cause him to be expelled from the college. While Matthew throughout his prose writings refers to the bishop of Hippo as the "incomparable Augustine," he willingly goes against his own opinion by likening Teresa to her patristic forbear and thereby elevating her texts to the level of supreme authority. Even such a devoted student of Augustine as Luther never claimed to be like the saint in any discernable fashion. For Matthew, both Augustine and Teresa enjoyed ineffable experiences of the divine in a manner that confirmed and legitimated their theological writings.

The significance of Augustine extends to another important dimension of early modern religious Catholic identity. Like St. Paul before him, Augustine was a famed convert to Christianity. Indeed, the conversion narratives of Paul and Augustine constitute the paradigmatic conception of religious change in the history of Christianity. Protestants relished Augustine's reading of the Epistle to the Romans, foundational as it was for Reformed soteriology and theories of grace, but for Catholics Augustine was a Doctor of the Church as well as the supreme exemplar of a converted soul. Augustine's conversion provided the point of departure for his innovative theorization of subjectivity that would become instrumental in theological reflections and humanistic studies in subsequent centuries.[36] For early modern Catholics, the Augustinian legacy clearly underscored a model of piety more consistent with Roman Catholic theology.

Matthew's provocative assertions about Teresa are compounded even further when he attempts to mitigate the seeming strangeness of her experiences by comparing them to biblical accounts of apocalyptical visions. According to him, the Bible is *more* absurd than Teresa's writings: "I must heer, put you also in minde, how, particularly, it is found in Holie scripture, that there are

[36] Cf. Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

innumerable instances (and especially, in the *Reuelations*, of the Blessed, and Beloued Apostle, S. Iohn) which are *incomparably more repugnant*, both to reason, and euen to Commonsense, then anie thing, which is related heer [i.e. in Teresa's text]" (12, emphasis added). There are few inflammatory comments that could have alienated Matthew from his Protestant countrymen more than this. Not only was Matthew privileging Teresa's writing over more ostensibly venerable texts; in addition he was seemingly denigrating the biblical text as both irrational and nonsensical in the process. The gravity of Matthew's asservation needs to be understood specifically in relation to the Reformed doctrine of *sola scriptura* that I have already outlined. This doctrinal stance was an absolute principle that located divine authority squarely within the confines of the printed Word. To challenge the fixity of the Word and its final authority was, in Protestant theology, to risk compromising the faith at large.[37] Matthew's claim takes advantage of the latent ambiguity in Paul's mystical experience (bodily or non-bodily?) which substantiates Teresa's own *sui generis* experience that was endorsed by the Roman magisterium.

Matthew's comments on the comparative dynamic between Teresa's works and the Book of Revelations show clear signs of an interpellated identity originating in the national Protestant ideology that equated Catholicism with the Whore of Babylon.[38] This ideological prescription, which has been examined by Frances Dolan and John King, fabricated a totalizing association of Catholics with the biblical demonic figure who threatened the politico-religious establishment of

[37] Cf. Reisner, 85: "Paradoxically, and perhaps fittingly, for Luther the *idea* of the ineffable becomes itself ineffable—he will not openly discuss it, but its silent presence oppresses his religious vision to the point where he must act to save himself rather than merely rest in speculation. The core Reformation principles of *sola fides*, *sola scriptura* become in this context a survival mechanism which demands that Christians read the Bible and read it right, because otherwise there is only the silence of madness, despair, and ultimate reprobation."

[38] I am indebted here to Althusser's critical analysis of state ideology. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85-126.

England and the security of Christendom.[39] The ideology extended into the realm of Protestant biblical commentary. The Geneva Bible, for instance, glosses Revelation 17:4 in the following manner: "This woman is the Antichrist, that is the Pope with *the whole bodie* of his filthy creatures" (emphasis added). Matthew appears alert to the ideological subtext of Revelations, and perhaps he uses the comparison from within the discourse of Protestant ideology to both magnify and complicate the association. If he was cognizant of the Whore/Rome conflation in Protestant polemics, and it would have been difficult for him to ignore, then his deliberate comparison of Teresa's *Life* with the Book of Revelations would constitute a radical confrontation with an essential component of English anti-Catholicism. As the Geneva gloss indicates, and as Matthew seems to accentuate, the body served as the supreme emblem of Catholic difference.

The Protestant hypothesis that the errors of Catholicism stemmed from its entanglements with the body clearly found expression in Matthew's preface to *Flaming Hart*. Matthew anticipates his reader's concerns and anxieties by drawing explicit attention to the corporeal texture of Teresa's writings. To take but one example here, he addresses his reader, "my Reader, whosoever you may be,"[40] and preempts any impulse to dismiss Teresa's work as simply erroneous: "And so, that Seruant [i.e. Teresa], consisting both of a Bodie, and a Soule, his Diuine Maiestie is also gratiously pleased, manie times, to affect both the Bodie, and the Soule, togeather, with *a sensible kind of feeling of that grace*; Those outward demonstrations (*which speake, but, as it were, to the Bodie*) serving chiefly, but

[39] See, *op. cit.*, Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 53-57, and King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*, 92-98.

[40] I would maintain that, despite his dedication to Queen Henrietta Maria, Matthew anticipated a readership that consisted of both Protestants and Catholics. It was not terribly uncommon for Laudians at Cambridge and Oxford to display interest in Teresa's works. Richard Crashaw's friend and confidant Joseph Beaumont, for instance, refers to Teresa at times and even mentioned her in public addresses. It should be noted, however, that interest in Teresa almost explicitly came from those espousing a high-church ecclesiology (i.e. Catholics or Catholic sympathizers). Arthur F. Marotti has written persuasively about Matthew's very public conversion, which he describes as "performative." See Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 115-119.

to denote, and describe, in that sort, to the whole man, the influences, and impressions, which then are made, and powered out, into the Soule" (31-32, emphasis added). By representing the mystic's body as the *locus* and conduit of divine disclosure, Matthew actively resists the "unbodied" belief structure typified by Whichcote. In this way, Matthew's notion that sensible manifestations of divinity *speak to the body* works as a seventeenth-century Englishman's articulation of de Certeau's premise: "It is not enough to refer to the social body of language. Meaning is written through the letter and the symbol of the physical body. Mystics receive from their bodies the law, the place, and the limit of their experience." Through his operative role as translator, Matthew in effect revitalizes the relationship between corporeal visions and infallible divine truths that had been so integral to Augustine. In his case, however, the immediate grasp of divine truth also entails the strictly affective modality of Teresa's ecstasy, which enjoys its own authority. What is more, Matthew's prefatory statements supply further evidence that mystical manifestations point to, in de Certeau's words, "a non-subject (stranger to all individual subjectivity)" that in turn "demystifies consciousness."[41]

For an exiled English Catholic, a demystified consciousness may have represented an attractive alternative to pre-given Protestant inscriptions upon the body. As one who is no longer a subject in the national sense of the term, Matthew positions himself in relation to a corpus of mystical literature that purports to illustrate the elision between the saint's subjectivity and God's Being. However, the point of this is not that the body can be definitively isolated as a completely intelligible place of revelation or that it, with subjectivity, can be dissolved into the divine abyss. In Matthew's formulation, Catholic mystic visionaries reveal the "sensible kind of feeling of that grace" that *speaks to the body*. As Teresa's works seemed to indicate, grace could become both tangible and corporeal. But if Teresa's writings constitute, as many scholars have maintained, an example of apophatic theology wherein the divine is approached through *unsaying*, then such apophatic

[41] De Certeau, "Mysticism," 21-22.

mysticism works to hold definitive conceptions of the body in perpetual abeyance. It accomplishes this by looking to the mystic's body as the place where the "voice" of divine truth becomes resonant. If, as Matthew frames it, divine grace speaks directly to the mystic-saint's body, then to objectify the body is manifestly to objectify the very voice of God. Matthew's translation would have been alarming to his Protestant readers precisely because it subverted the objectifying speech about the body that had suffused the Jacobean and Caroline establishments. Some prominent English Protestants routinely objectified the body by presuming to delimit its capacities in religious observance and speculative theology. The claim that Christian religion should be "unbodied" conceals a subtle circumscription of the concept of the body within the dominant Protestant discourse. One must presume to know what a body *is* before one can exclude it from the domain of devotional practice.[42] By contrast, Matthew's construal of the mystic's ecstatic events points toward a radical openness to the indeterminate nature of mystical corporeality.

MATTHEW AND THE LEGACY OF TERESA

It was perhaps more than a little auspicious that Teresa's autobiography was first published in Spanish in a year that would assume vital importance for English nationalism: 1588. For while England could resist the Armada's military advancements, the potency of Spain's religious culture progressed triumphantly through the libraries, imaginations, and devotional practices of many learned high-churchmen. Many read Teresa surreptitiously in both Spanish and English languages, sometimes escaping the oversight of Protestant authorities, and sometimes not. In time, the legacy of Matthew's translation of the autobiography would come to an extreme point in the fraught early years of the 1640s. Figures such as Francis Beaumont and Richard Crashaw were publicly implicated

[42] My understanding of the English Protestant propensity to objectify matters is indebted to Barbara J. Shapiro's explanation of the "culture of fact" that originated in the seventeenth century. See Barbara J. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), esp. 170-171.

in reading Teresa's works, and this in turn helped precipitate the investigations into Peterhouse, Cambridge that launched the Civil Wars.

Catholics in Spain were very mindful of Teresa's influence abroad. Even before her official canonization in 1622, the traditional iconography of Teresa underwent an evolution that signaled her political functionality. As Erin Rowe and others have so helpfully demonstrated, the earliest depictions of the saint often were of Teresa with pen in hand, authoring the first-hand account of her ecstatic experience of God which conformed perfectly with Tridentine orthodoxy. However, following the Spanish parliament's attempt between 1617 and 1627 to make her the official co-patron of Spain (the other of course being Santiago, St. James the Great), iconographical depictions evolved to show her principally as a warrior fighting for the faith, and crucially fighting on behalf of Spain.[43] This move from the docile authoress to the fighting mystic was consonant with a broader cultural evolution that pointed toward the remarkable theological cachet that Teresa enjoyed within Catholic circles across Europe.

The intricacy of this cultural evolution warrants more attention from literary historians than it has received. Whereas it is a commonplace in feminist studies of the period to remark that Teresa wrote under extreme patriarchal control and hegemony, the complex significance of her overall impact on male readers is less appreciated.[44] Moshe Sluhovsky notes that initially Teresa's writings were accepted in Spain by Inquisitorial authorities such as Juan de Ávila because she "was held to be above suspicion and due to her humility and submission to male authority."[45] This point is well made, but we should not lose site of the fact that in very short order Teresa became the military and

[43] Cf. Erin Rowe, *Saint and Nation: Santiago, Teresa of Avila, and Plural Identities in Early Modern Spain* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2011).
[44] Cf. Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
[45] Sluhovsky, *op. cit.*, 186. Sluhovsky also notes that personally Teresa was ambivalent about her own male confessors, provocatively suggesting that they were too dull to understand her mystical insights. See Sluhovsky, 212-214.

nationalistic figurehead of Spain. Moreover, Teresa appears to have evolved from the early status as a humble nun to a national warrior to an international author capable of so pervasively impacting English readers that reading her at Cambridge in the 1640s was grounds for dismissal and exile (as seen in the cases of Beaumont and Crashaw). More interestingly, Teresa's work functioned in unique ways to help English authors navigate their own sexuality, even against the backdrop of their open confessional allegiances. As Richard Rambuss has so astutely explained, the eroticized mystical body of Teresa could actually, however paradoxically it may seem to modern readers, facilitate a means for English Catholics to explore homoerotic topoi of excess and penetrative love.[46] Clearly, Teresa was a volatile emblem and an even more volatile author. Matthew's translation of her autobiography and his subsequent highlighting of the body's role in devotion could not have appeared at a more incendiary time than 1642.

Matthew's contention that Teresa's corpus was in some sense more pellucid than scripture and more redolent of sensual grace would resonate with many Catholics, including Matthew's contemporary and fellow convert Richard Crashaw (1612-1649). The first edition of Crashaw's religious verse, *Steps to the Temple*, dates from 1646 and contains the poems written while he was clearly in the Protestant fold. Having held Laudian sympathies for much of his adult life, Crashaw fled to Holland to seek refuge after Parliamentary troops took over his native Cambridge in 1643. It is likely that Crashaw converted to Catholicism in 1645. By 1646, it is clear that Crashaw's change in ecclesial affiliation was noticed even in England.[47]

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[46] See the interpretative introduction in Rambuss' edition *The English Poems of Richard Crashaw* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), esp. lx-lxvii. It should be noted that in his lifetime Matthew himself became a highly sexualized public persona. He was frequently demonized by English Protestants for supposed homosexual behavior, and this was always linked to his Catholicism and devotion to female mystics. Cr. Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy*, 115-117.

[47] I explore Crashaw's conversion in Chapter Two. Here I concentrate on him briefly only to demonstrate the scope of Matthew's influence.

The 1646 edition of *Steps* contains two poems dedicated to St. Teresa entitled "In memory of the Vertuous and Learned Lady Madre de Teresa that sought an early Martyrdome" and "An Apology for the Forgoing Hymn." Crashaw was likely compelled to write an apology for his enthusiasm for Teresa's works because he understood how volatile such sympathies would have been in the hyper-Protestanized context of the late 1630s and early 1640s.

It is precisely the manner in which Crashaw depicts his enthusiasm for Teresa's corpus that warrants a closer examination of his participation in the mystical discourse of the body. What is more, Crashaw's focus on Teresa bears the clear imprint of Matthew's influence and testifies to the abiding impact the translation made. As is evident in the title of his first Teresian poem, ""In memory of the Vertuous and Learned Lady Madre de Teresa," Crashaw figures the mystic as a learned scholar whose textual narration of her ecstasy provides material for her followers to study:

> Those rare workes, where thou shalt leave writ,
> Love's noble history, with witt
> Taught thee by none but him, while here
> They feed our soules, shall cloth thine there.
> Each heavenly word by whose hid flame
> Our hard hearts shall strike fire, the same
> Shall flourish on thy browes; and be
> Both fire to us and flame to thee;
> Whose light shall live bright in thy face
> By glory, in our hearts by grace. (156-165)[48]

The baroque motif of the flaming heart, which was exemplified so nicely in Matthew's sonnet and translation, resurfaces here in Crashaw's poem. Crashaw, however, adjusts the imagery of the flaming heart to reflect a deeper dimensions of the mystical trace: "Each heavenly word by whose hid flame / Our hard hearts shall strike fire" (161-162). The poet's identification of Teresa's text as a hidden flame emanating from her original mystical fire pushes the figure of the liminal heart (voiced by Matthew) into new significations. What Matthew had described as "a sensible kind of

[48] All references to Crashaw's poetry are to L. C. Martin, ed., *The Poems, English, Latin and Greek, of Richard Crashaw* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

feeling of that grace" is clearly mediated for Crashaw through the experiential nature of reading Teresa's works. Crashaw orients himself to Teresa's text, creating a dynamic of relationality whereby the mystical excess of ecstasy proliferates in hiddenness even as it proliferates in textual significance. The poet thus enacts the dynamic interplay of presence and absence, hiddenness and manifestation that had characterized conceptions of the mystical in patristic and medieval writers. However, Crashaw alters the dynamic by situating such interplay within Teresa's corpus itself. Matthew positioned himself as translator of Teresa's mystical corpus, which created the first model of an English reader orienting himself to the seductive text. Matthew strove to achieve fluency in the corporeal idiom of mystical devotion, and Crashaw accentuates his role as a reader whose spiritual flame draws nourishment from the hidden meanings of Teresa's published text. This theme becomes clearer in his other poems on Teresa.

Crashaw wants to draw attention to Teresa's unique manner of speaking about mystical revelations. For him, such a mystical idiom is transformative precisely through its textual mediation. In this respect, the poet transposes discursive agency away from the authorial perspective toward the printed text itself. A question thus seems to emerge: what is the function of the reader? In his "Apologie" for his first poem to Teresa, Crashaw recounts his poetic achievement in the following way:

> Thus have I back againe to thy bright name
> Faire sea of holy fires transfused the flame
> I took from reading thee" (1-3).

Speaking once more of hiddenness ("all thy mysteries that there lye hid" [12]), the poet returns to the image of reading Teresa:

> What soule soever in any Language can
> Speake heaven like hers, is my soules country-man.
> O 'tis not Spanish, but 'tis heaven she speakes,
> 'Tis heaven that lies in ambush there, and breakes
> From thence into the wondring readers breast,
> Who finds his warme heart, hatch into a nest

Of little Eagles, and young Loves, whose high
Flights scorne the lazie dust, and things that dye. (21-28)

This short poem provides highly wrought imagery to convey the poet's deep affinity with Teresa and her *Vida*. Demurring in the face of Teresa's renowned mystical eloquence, Crashaw seeks to give her a proper honorific in his English vernacular. Perhaps most intriguing is the manner in which the poet conceptualizes Teresa's influence as almost militaristic. The poem claims that the printed text of Teresa's work is guilty of having a life of its own in dramatically influencing the minds of her readers. Bolding asserting that the appellation "Spaniard" (cf. *l.* 15) does not apply to souls or to spiritual matters, Crashaw consciously attempts to forestall any association in the mind of his readers of Teresa with simply her country of origin. Indeed, he argues that Teresa's native language is not Spanish, but rather the universal idiom of mystical discourse that is clear for all to read, regardless of national associations. As I have noted, the new mode of speaking characteristic of early modern mystical discourse traces the elusiveness of both the mystical event and the mystic's body. For Crashaw, the trace must be pursued through the text itself. Once more, the poet figures the heart as the emblem of corporeal elusiveness, evidenced by the profusion of images (e.g. Eagles) emanating out of the converted heart.

We can begin now to understand even more precisely how mystic discourse evolved in relation to Catholic English converts in the seventeenth century. Crashaw describes the process of reading Teresa as a transfusion of blood from one heart to another. The animating life force of the mystic is conveyed to the English convert through writing.[49] Crashaw develops the scope of Matthew's sensual imagery to establish a seemingly homologous comparison between the mystic's body and the mystic's body of work. Just as Teresa was ravished by some divine reality, so too is

[49] Even though Crashaw's first two poems on Teresa were written while he was still technically a Protestant, I feel justified in calling him a convert at this point. This will be more fully explained in the next chapter.

Crashaw's reader ravished by Teresa's text: ""Tis heaven that lies in ambush there, and breakes / From thence into the wondring readers breast" (24-25). There is a crucial paradox at the center of this construction. The poet has made it clear that the mystic flame lies hidden in the text of the saint, and yet this divine hiddenness seizes and invades the reader's breast to permeate the corporeal heart. The process whereby the mystical phenomenon becomes simultaneously hidden and manifest inscribes a mode of alterity in the text itself. Crashaw frames such alterity from the perspective of the reader, whose passivity forestalls any possible objectifying orientation. In this formulation, ineffability remains entangled with textuality. Crashaw's Teresian poems encapsulate this principle, derived ultimately from Matthew, in a number of ways.

The second edition of *Steps to the Temple* was printed in London in 1648 and announces on its title page that the volume contains "divers pieces not before extant." This edition includes the following six new poems: "O Gloriosa Domini," "In the Glorious Epiphany of Our Lord God," "Charitas Nimia," "To the Name Above Every Name," "To the Same Party: Councel Concerning her Choice," and "The Flaming Heart." L. C. Martin, Crashaw's modern editor, notes that "[b]y 1648 Crashaw had probably been absent from England for three years; but the supposition that he had written, for him, a good deal between 1646 and 1648 seems a likely one," and further argues that "the religious and devotional verse now first published [i.e. in 1648] seems likely to have been very largely of recent composition."[50] Thus, one important post-conversion poem by Crashaw is one that takes its name from Matthew's translation of Teresa's autobiography, "The Flaming Heart."

In his poem, "The Flaming Heart," Crashaw intensifies the heart imagery from his earlier works.

> O Heart! the æquall poise of love's both parts
> Bigge alike with wound and darts.
> Live in these conquering leaves; live all the same;

[50] Martin, ed., xlvii.

And walk through all tongues one triumphant Flame.
Live here, great Heart; and love and dy and kill;
And bleed and wound; and yeild and conquer still.
Let this immortall life wherere it comes
Walk in a crowd of loves and Martyrdomes
Let mystick Deaths wait on't; and wise soules be
The love-slain wittnesses of this life of thee.
O sweet incendiary! shew here thy art,
Upon this carcasse of a hard, cold, hart,
Let all thy scatter'd shafts of light, that play
Among the leaves of thy larg Books of day,
Combin'd against this Brest at once break in
And take away from me my self and sin[.] (75-90)

Without necessarily conflating the poet and the poem's persona, it is interesting to note the reference to the self in this text. There is evidence from Crashaw's actual life that during his exile abroad in Leiden he felt profound displacement and uncertainty about his status. If Crashaw composed "The Flaming Heart" around the time of his exile on the continent, we may rightfully discern important correlations between the poet's loss of his homeland and the speaker's loss of self in mystical rapture. In this respect, Crashaw's poem forms natural parallels with Matthew's exile sonnet explore above.

Crashaw is not, however, concerned simply with the supposed annihilation of the self in the divine. As all of his Teresian poems make clear, the discursive function of the mystic's life, in which the texts "exhaust themselves trying to express" the inexpressible, militates against the temptation to objectify the mystical phenomenon.[51] Far from objectifying the bodily form, Crashaw's poem personifies the Heart as a marker of the elusive body in its perpetual motion through text: "Live in these conquering leaves; live all the same; /And walk through all tongues one triumphant Flame" (77-78).[52] As a baroque emblem of divine saturation, the heart again functions as the vehicle of

[51] Cf. de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, Volume I: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 15.
[52] I agree with de Certeau that, "The mystical body is the intended goal of a journey that moves, like all pilgrimages, toward the site of a disappearance" (*The Mystic Fable*, 81-82). The body that moves towards the site of disappearance (which does not mean the body ceases to "exist") resists figuration

corporeal elusiveness that at once conquers and supersedes the static conception of the body as "carcasse of a hard, cold, hart" (86).

Crashaw tellingly eschews a common motif of mystical literature, the dark night of the soul, in favor of those "scatter'd shafts of light, that play / Among the leaves of thy larg Books of day" (87-88). In playing upon the homology of the mystical corpus (body and text), the poet once more signals the elusiveness of the body by playing upon the prismatic effect of light.[53] The mystic's radiance points to the scattered shafts of both body and text. Like Matthew before him, Crashaw imbues the mystic's body of text with heightened resonances of the mystic's actual ecstatic body. As Richard Rambus notes, "Teresa's multiply penetrated body becomes multiply orgasmic…resulting in spiritual insemination and fostering of converts" whereby the woman's ecstasy is, through the transposing of text for body, sublimated into the "the ecstasy of a male body." What Rambus identifies as the "thematics of erotic penetration"[54] is most readily seen in Crashaw's depiction of

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as "substance." Indeed, the idea of transubstantiation represents the doctrinal tensions embedded in the Eucharistic presence, which is also a move toward disappearance. For a different approach to Crashaw's poetry, one that emphasizes "somatic display," see Richard Rambuss, "Sacred Subjects and the Aversive Metaphysical Conceit: Crashaw, Serrano, Ofili," *ELH* 71.2 (2004): 497-530.

[53] Methodologically, I am very much indebted to Leah Marcus' pioneering work on the authorial body/textual *corpus* connection. Cf. Leah Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (London: Routledge, 1996), 192-198.

[54] Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 40. Rambuss further remarks: "Accorded a mystic body both impregnable and phallic, Teresa's ecstatic experiences overrun any template that organizes gender or eroticism in terms of a binary structure…Similarly, gender is not transcended in Teresa's ecstasies; rather, it is palpably taken up and on, gender's concomitant forms, postures, and acts serving as a tensile field for the expression of Crashaw's trenchantly corporealized mysticism" (42). However, I exercise caution in adopting too readily Rambuss' association of orgasm with Teresa's experience for it re-inscribes a problematic first voiced by Jacque Lacan: "You need but go to Rome and see the statue of Bernini [i.e. of Teresa] to immediately understand that she's coming. There's no doubt about it. What is she getting off on?" See Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality and the Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX, Encore, 1972-1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 76. Recent groundbreaking work in feminist scholarship has seriously questioned the Lacanian inclination to read sex and religion as religion *as* sex. The relationship is far more complex than this. See especially Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). Building foremost on Foucault, Burrus seeks to complicate our conventional understanding of the body's role in religious practice and she delineates how, upon reading saints' live through

Teresa's text ravishing him, penetrating his own body and not just his soul or mind. In his deceptively simple preface to Teresa's autobiography, Matthew had unapologetically deployed a phenomenological idiom to characterize how God can "speak to the body" through mystical experience. There is perhaps no greater substantiation of this idea, or testament to Matthew's immediate influence, than Crashaw's much-maligned poem "The Flaming Heart."

MATTHEW'S LATER SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY LEGACY

The accounts of both Matthew and Crashaw would seemingly confirm the worries of English Protestants who feared that the reports of mystics, especially female mystics, would infect the minds of impressionable young men. This worry assumed widespread public visibility in the second half of the seventeenth century when Protestants and Catholics in England became enthralled in a debate over the writings of an English mystic: Julian of Norwich (1342-1416). It is worth contextualizing this debate briefly in relation to Matthew before considering the example of Serenus Cressy.

Like many western European cultures, England had experienced a surge of mystical writing in the late medieval period. Its noteworthy authors included figures such as Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe. Following the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth-century, however, the corpus of mystical literature fell into limbo. The archives of early modern England were rich with literary artifacts of the medieval Catholic heritage, but many Protestants selectively utilized the nation's libraries to substantiate their

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history, modern scholars can more easily "affirm the holiness of a love that is simultaneously embodied and transcendent, sensual and spiritual, painful and joyous; that may encompass but can by no means be limited to (indeed, may at points entail disciplined refusal of) the demands of either biological reproduction or institutionalized marriage; *that furthermore resists the reductions of the modern cult of the orgasm*. In the stories of the saints who steadfastly reject both the comforts and the confinements of conventional roles and relationships (swapping and discarding 'identities' like so many threadbare cloaks), we may discover not only evidence of the historic transformation of desire but also testimony to the transformative power of *eros*" (1-2, emphasis added). Rambuss' "thematics of erotic penetration" is compatible with my point about the elusiveness of the body in mystical discourse if "erotic" is taken in the wider sense of *eros* that Burrus elucidates.

own current political concerns. In this respect, as Jennifer Summit has recently demonstrated, "the history of the English Middle Ages is [really] a history of the Renaissance, since post-Reformation collectors like [Robert] Cotton," England's most distinguished antiquarian of this period, "selected, organized, preserved—and in so doing…remade—medieval books and documents in line with their own contemporary concerns and fantasies about the past."[55] For committed Protestants like Cotton, the repository of medieval manuscripts was, in Summit's useful formulation, the laboratory where a distinct form of "scholarly alchemy" could be performed and geared toward Protestant nation building. The corpus of medieval mystical texts was catalogued but ignored, falling as it were outside the parameters of the emerging orthodoxy of the Church of England.

For English Catholics, however, the traces of pre-Reformation England were of special interest. For instance, Augustine Baker (1575-1641), a Benedictine monk in charge of spiritual direction of English nuns exiled in France and Flanders, found in Cotton's archive largely ignored texts such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Julian of Norwich's work *A Book of Showings*. These texts became inspirational to Baker himself, but more importantly to the nuns under his direction who required vernacular texts due to their lack of training in Latin. After his experience in England's most notable manuscript archive, Baker discerned a clear need to transcribe and to edit mystical texts, making them available for a wider Catholic audience.

Such a goal was, from the beginning, fraught with difficulty. Cotton's library was subsidized by a Protestant political regime that, in the helpful words of Summit, "made libraries into arsenals and manuscripts into weapons."[56] The national church required documentary evidence that its pre-modern origins lay not with medieval Catholicism but rather with a distinctly English history that naturally led to the Tudor and Stuart dynasties. When Baker visited Cotton's library in the early

[55] Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 136.
[56] Summit, 140.

1620s, he encountered, among others, William Camden, the first official biographer of Queen Elizabeth. Camden came to the library as an openly Protestant historiographer and busily made use of the resources to write a fully documented account and justification of England's recent history as a Protestant nation, one that Elizabeth had prudently guided in the *via media*.

When Baker noted that the archive was thus being utilized as a tool to substantiate the Protestant ethos at the expense of a possible Catholic counter-narrative, he reacted in kind by searching for, in his words, "a collection of all manner of ecclesiastical antiquities."[57] It was during his research that he discovered the rich English mystical resources of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Given his pastoral vocation, Baker was interested first in supplying his disciples with manuscript copies of medieval mystical works for their own devotional ends. Toward the end of his life he had established a scriptorium in Cambrai (in northern France) where he and his followers copied and disseminated manuscripts of late medieval works of English mysticism. It is because of Baker's editorial initiative to copy from Cotton's library that many of these works were not destroyed and forgotten to history.

Augustine Baker's initiative to rescue works of mystical literature from oblivion was taken over after his death in 1641 by his close friend and confidant, Serenus Cressy. Cressy begins his recuperative efforts to rescue and maintain the native English mystical tradition at the exact moment when, as Matthew's lift testified, interest in Catholic mysticism was most dangerous. Whereas Baker's archival work had been brought to immediate fruition outside of England in his private French scriptorium, Cressy introduced mystic discourse into the English mainstream in the 1650s by editing and publishing Baker's rescued manuscripts. English Protestants could easily and decidedly denounce more recent mystics like Teresa of Avila as merely foreign exponents of a corrupt church.

[57] Qtd. in Dom Justin McCann and Dom Hugh Connolly, eds., *Memorials of Father Augustine Baker, O.S.B.*, Catholic Record Society 33 (London: John Whitehead and Son Press, 1933), 112.

Matters became more complex, however, when Cressy published works of English mysticism that had been previously excised from England's cultural religious history by contemporary historiographers. Cressy's publication of the works of Julian of Norwich revived interest in the mystic's body, the *locus* of ecstatic rapture and quasi-erotic religious performance. Like Teresa of Avila, who had recently received the Catholic Church's stamp of approval, Julian enjoyed a physical ecstasy that supposedly both signaled her encounter with the divine and legitimated her spirituality.

Protestant polemic against female mystics occasioned Cressy's most profound defense of Julian. Cressy was one of the prime interlocutors of the English Bishop Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699), whose work *A Discourse Concerning the Idolatry Practiced in the Church of Rome* (1672) targeted the growing interest and support of mysticism among Catholics. Like Whichcote before him, Stillingfleet sought to provide, as he described it in 1662, a "rational account of the Christian Faith" that was both "unbodied" and anti-Catholic.[58] In 1671 he published a rabid attack against Catholicism entitled *A Discourse Concerning the Idolatry Practiced in the Church of Rome* wherein he condemns, among other things, the feminine and bodily nature of Catholicism. Attacking specifically the new wave of Catholic expositors of contemplative theology such as Baker and Cressy, Stillingfleet writes:

> Excellent men! That debar the people reading the Scriptures in their own tongue, and instead of them put them off with such Fooleries, which deserve no other name at the best than the efforts of *Religious madness*. Were we to take an estimate of Christian Religion from such Raptures and Extasies, such Visions and Entertainments as those are, how much must we befool ourselves to think it *sense*?[59]

I quote these lines at length to underscore the manner in which Stillingfleet, echoing Luther in pronounced ways, frames the Catholic endorsement of mysticism as involving a rejection of reading

[58] Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae, or a Rational Account of the Grounds of Christian Faith* (London: 1662), iii. This work was accessed through *Early English Books Online*.

[59] Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse Concerning the Idolatry Practiced in the Church of Rome and the danger of Salvation in the Communion of it: in an answer to some Papers of a Revolted Protestant: wherein a particular Account is given of the Fanaticism and Divisions of that Church* (London: Robert White, 1671), 235-236. Parenthetical references are to this edition, which was accessed through *Early English Books Online*.

the Bible in the vernacular. Hovering just below these lines is a profound anxiety regarding Paul's rapture to the third heaven. Stillingfleet's uneasiness stemmed from the realization that Paul's *arcana verba* do not fit comfortably within the scheme of *sola scriptura*. Whereas the Bible is open to all through its dissemination in various tongues, the experiences of individual mystics, Paul included, do not extend to all Christians, and remain inscrutable in problematical ways.

In the fourth chapter ("Of the Fanaticism of the Roman Church") he laments "[t]he great number of female Revelations approved in the Roman Church" as evinced in "the Fanatick Revelations of Mother Juliana very lately published by Mr. Cressy." Stillingfleet asks, "Do we resolve the grounds of any doctrine of ours into any Visions and Extasies?" (258), before repudiating Julian's writings as "fopperies," "efforts of Religious madness," and the product of "distempered brains" (258). Stillingfleet was most vexed, as were his fellow Protestants, by Julian's ascription of the epithet "Mother" to Jesus.[60] This was both an intolerable notion and an evocatively sensual locution. The Protestant preoccupation with the mystical corpus (in its textual and bodily forms) coincided with what they perceived as Catholics placing the texts on par with scripture. As we have seen, Matthew established a precedent that substantiated the Protestants' distress. Stillingfleet suspected that Cressy was doing something similar by publishing and endorsing the works of a "demonstrably mad" pre-modern "enthusiast."[61]

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[60] Julian was not unique within medieval mysticism in her use of this appellation, but it did strike a particularly sensitive note in the print culture of seventeenth-century England. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), and "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays in Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

[61] Stillingfleet's initial publication of the *Discourse* provoked several responses from Catholics. In his rejoinder to these various treatises, he remarks: "But I would fain know of these men, whether they do in earnest make no difference between the Writings of such as Mother *Juliana* and the Books of *Scripture*; between the Revelations of S. Brigitt, S. Catherine, &c. and those of the *Prophets*; between the actions of S. Francis and Ignatius Loyola and those of the Apostles?" See Edward Stillingfleet, *An Answer to several late Treatises Occasioned by a Book entituled A Discourse Concerning the Idolatry Practiced in the Church of Rome, and the Hazard of Salvation in the Communion of it* (London: R.W. for Henry

Cressy's response to Stillingfleet was both nuanced and dynamic. In his work, *Fanaticism Fanatically Imputed* (1672), Cressy speaks of the "science of saints" (59) in a manner that anticipates de Certeau's work in interesting ways.[62] The English Catholic convert knew that the science of saints would be unintelligible to his Protestant interlocutors, since members of the Church of England could isolate any given saint or mystic in the Catholic tradition as an "enthusiast" *avant la lettre*. Stillingfleet had denounced the reports of mystics as "unintelligible canting," to which Cressy took special offense. For Cressy, the "Mystick Divines" (i.e. ecstatic visionaries such as Julian and Teresa) acknowledged in their writings "the *Infinitenes, Totality,* and *Vniversality* of *Gods Being*" (48), and so it was thus nearly blasphemous to label their discourse "unintelligible canting." Indeed, the Catholic convert responds by suggesting that what really makes Julian unintelligible to her Protestant readers is her excess. For Julian had entered the "*inaccessible light*," which was, according to Cressy, the "light though infinitely glorious, yet to us *invisible,* and invisible because of the excess of its Visibility" (48). In printing Julian's works for the first time, Cressy explains to Stillingfleet that he was merely transcribing this excess so as to dramatize its visibility for more readers (cf. 45-46).

Stillingfleet had proclaimed that doctrinal matters could never be adjudicated by appeal to ecstatic events, for such experiences appeared as simple religious madness. Cressy could respond by suggesting that such a negative orientation to visionary revelation would contradict much of the contemplative Christian tradition, including the theology of Augustine. But he warned further that if

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Mortlock, 1673), 11. Clearly, Stillingfleet is drawing attention to the wider tendency within early modern Catholicism to promote non-biblical modes of devotion. Of course, this goes to the heart of Protestant/Catholic disagreement in this period and beyond.

[62] Serenus Cressy, *Fanaticism fanatically Imputed to the Catholick church by Doctour Stillingfleet and the imputation refuted and retorted* / by S.C. a Catholick ... , [Douay? : s.n.], 1672. Parenthetical references are to section numbers within the work. This work was accessed through *Early English Books Online*. For a helpful overview of the cultivation of the medieval past among English Catholics in the late seventeenth century, see Jennifer Summit, "From Anchorhold to Closet: Julian of Norwich in 1670 and the Immanence of the Past," in *Julian of Norwich's Legacy: Medieval Mysticism and Post-Medieval Reception*, eds., Sarah Salih and Denise N. Baker (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan: 2009), 29-48.

one were to follow this line of reasoning all the way down, one would necessarily subvert the New Testament itself. It was not that Catholics privileged mystical texts over the Bible (as Luther had maintained), but rather that Catholics grounded all mystical visions, even the corporeal, in the model established by the supreme scriptural archetype of ecstasy. Cressy therefore speaks of the one particular mystic whom Stillingfleet would be at pains to dismiss: St. Paul.

> And this is a certain Holy man that professes of himself that in a wonderful Extasy he found himself present in *Paradise*, and there saw and hear (as he thought) God only knows what. Now what soever it was that he saw and hear, he was, no doubt, willing to have communicated it to his brethren, but he had not the power to doe it. No human language could afford words so elevated and Divine. For if it could, I am assured he, who was the greatest *master of language* that perhaps every was, had not failed to do it. Nay more, which still increases the wonder…This was surely, according to the Doctours [i.e. Stillingfleet] grounds, the greatest Fanatick that ever was, yea the father of all fanaticks. Yet the Doctour dares not call him so, after he is told that this was S. Paul (41-42).

As Catholics understood, especially in the wake of the early modern mystical revival, this arcane biblical passage shifted the *locus* of divine revelation away from its textual mediation toward the inscrutable realm of the flesh: Paul himself entertains the possibility that he received some kind of bodily initiation into the divine mysteries and this sets the stage for his infamous discussion of his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:1-7). In linking Julian's visions to the account found in 2 Corinthians, Cressy insists that all mystical devotion must be reconsidered in light of the embedded textual indebtedness to Paul's template of corporeal revelation. Julian's text supplied English Catholics with further discursive means of resisting the dominant ideology of the established church, which objectified Catholic mysticism as madness. As Cressy's role as transcriber and publisher indicates, one important facet of this subversive move involved reminding Protestants of a scriptural passage that Reformed thought had conveniently glossed over. When Cressy, following Matthew reminds Stillingfleet that even Paul "could not determin whether all the while his corporall sences, externall or internall, were employed in this *Divine Visitation*" (43), he bestows a heightened degree of

authority to corporeal visions that had been endorsed in the Catholic tradition from Paul, through Augustine, and now to Julian and Teresa.

CONCLUSION

Brian Cummings has characterized Paul's conversion and sensational transformation through ecstasy as a "monstrous metamorphosis."[63] What makes the change monstrous is its elusive and indeterminate nature. In seventeenth-century England, Catholic converts like Matthew, Crashaw, and Cressy experienced their own monstrous metamorphoses in the eyes of the national Protestant establishment. Accepting Jennifer Summit's contention that early modern English culture "made libraries into arsenals and manuscripts into weapons," I would suggest that it is perhaps equally prudent to conceptualize the dissemination of Catholic mystical literature in this time as a sort of spiritual guerrilla warfare. The writings of Teresa of Avila and Julian of Norwich supplied the three converts considered here with discursive means of resisting the dominant Protestant ideology of their time. De Certeau writes that in early modern Europe, the Catholic mystic's body becomes "the intended goal of a journey that moves, like all pilgrimages, toward the site of a disappearance."[64] I have suggested that one method of reading the lives of these converts involves correlating the displaced existence of English Catholics with the elusive, ecstatic body of the Catholic mystic. Such a correlation, of course, is not viable for all English converts to Catholicism. In the case of Tobie Matthew and his English legacy, Catholicism became inextricably linked with a corpus of mystical texts in the seventeenth century.

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[63] Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 370.
[64] See de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 81-82.

It has been suggested recently that Cressy's effort to rehabilitate Julian of Norwich "was too idiosyncratic to attract the broader Catholic readership." [65] As I have attempted to illustrate in this chapter, such a conclusion misses crucial points about the phenomenon of Catholic mysticism as Matthew and Cressy understood it. If Cressy's efforts to promulgate the ideas of Julian were not as successful as Matthew's were in promulgating Teresa's, it was not because Julian differed from her Spanish counterpart in any dramatic way. Rather, Matthew's translation and interactions with the Queen were clearly occurring during a time when the differences between Protestant England and Catholic Spain were reaching a more radical divide than ever before and when England's national fabric was being torn in two from within. If anything, the lack of interest in Julian following Cressy's editorial efforts only substantiated, tragically as it were, Matthew's suspicion that England was no longer a genuine spiritual home to her Catholic subjects. English converts to Catholicism were all too aware of the latter reality, as their change in confessional allegiance led them outside of themselves toward radical alienation. There is then perhaps a poignant homology between the convert's compromised subjectivity and his newfound devotion to mystical literature. As the examples of Paul and Augustine testified through the centuries, conversion often entailed a divestment of selfhood in one degree or another. However, the visions of ecstasy (*ekstasis*, a standing forth outside of the self) that were dramatized in the writings of Teresa and Julian supplied these converts with a new idiom of confessional devotion that both imitated and recalibrated Paul's monstrous metamorphosis.

[65] Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 17.

CHAPTER IV

Richard Crashaw's Pre-Texts: Conversion, Mysticism, and Hermeneutic Practice

> Both temporal and historical, the movement of faith—conversion, confession—"is" at the same time not of this world, eternal, the annulment of time, and the transformation of its ordinary concept. Faith marks the instant in which time, after having gone through a painful preparation, touches upon eternity, "consecrates time," and "begins a new time."
>
> -Hent de Vries

> The aporia of time thus maintains a direct relation with the difficulty of conversion. Must time itself be converted so as to grant the possibility of conversion?
>
> -Jean-Luc Marion[1]

INTRODUCTION: RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND MYSTICAL POETRY

Critical attempts to understand Richard Crashaw's conversion to Catholicism (*c.* 1645-1646) have produced contradictory studies of the poet. Unlike several other notable converts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Crashaw (1612/13-1649) did not dramatize his change of religious orientation either in poetry or prose. His own conversion occasioned no grandiloquent narrative in the manner of William Alabaster (1568-1640), Sir Tobie Matthew (1577-1655), or Serenus Cressy (1605-1674) that justified his transition to the Roman Church. Noting the seeming absence of explicit references to Catholic doctrines in his writings, many critics construe Crashaw's conversion as either opportunistic or simply incidental and arbitrary, having more to do with the exigencies of the Civil War (1642-1651) than with any intrinsic attachment to Catholicism *per se.* Thus, Thomas F. Healy, Clifford Davidson, and John N. Wall have argued that Crashaw would not have converted had he not witnessed the

[1] Heny de Vries, "Instances: Temporal Modes from Augustine to Derrida and Lyotard," in *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 76). Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 205.

overthrow of his beloved Laudian church by the Presbyterians. As Wall, for instance, maintains: "While it is true that Crashaw became a Roman Catholic in the mid-1640s and they [Donne and Herbert] did not, he did so only after the Church of England as he knew it had been destroyed by the Puritan party."[2] Due to the paucity of references to a conversion event in the Crashavian corpus, the scholarship addressing the poet's works has become plagued by guesswork and conjecture, fluctuating between intransigent categories of Protestant and Catholics "poetics." Criticism of the poetry is still largely motivated by the unwarranted need to demonstrate Crashaw's "authentic" confessional identity, and this process has been significantly complicated by his abiding interest in both the works of the Catholic saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and in the liturgical motifs of the established Church of England.[3] Conversion remains an important topic and heuristic approach for understanding Crashaw's poetry, though certainly not in the interest of finding some quintessence of the poet's religious identity. Rather, conversion has a much deeper, metaphysical import for Crashaw's poetry.

Recent scholarship has attempted to understand early modern conversion through the interpretive framework of political discourse and religious individuality. For instance, in his seminal study *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625*, Michael C. Questier rightly argues that "conversion is a key to unlocking the nature of religious allegiance in this period," and has further commented that in particular cases of conversion to Roman Catholicism, "when political and religious motives were both engaged in the mind of the individual convert they were maintained in a constant

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[2] John N. Wall, "Crashaw, Catholicism, and Englishness: Defining Religious Identity," *Renaissance Papers* (2004): 113. See also Clifford Davidson, "The Anglican Setting of Richard Crashaw's Devotional Verse," *Ben Jonson Journal* 8 (2001): 259-276, and Thomas F. Healy, *Richard Crashaw* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 1-9.

[3] I refrain from using the anachronistic term "Anglican" in light of Peter Lake's pioneering scholarship dismantling that notion. See Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 17. As Lake demonstrates, the fundamental nature of English Protestantism was still very much being negotiated at the end of the sixteenth century, and debates over the Church of England's essential theology carried over well into the Jacobean and Caroline periods.

tension; they do not fuse, nor is one subordinated to the other." From this position, Questier concludes that, "Conversion, in its many forms, provides…a means of determining how the political and religious elements of entrenched Catholic and Protestant positions fell into place in the confrontation between these two starkly opposed but also frequently aligned concepts of Christianity."[4] Building in part on Questier's findings, Molly Murray has more recently examined how early modern converts "actively seek to perform or enact versions of that change of name in and through poetic language." According to Murray's highly regarded monograph, for famed converts like Donne, Alabaster, Crashaw, and Dryden, "the composition of verse offers neither an escape from, nor a solution to, the heated 'contraryes' of confessional conflict," but rather "acts as a mechanism for actively transforming the terms of this conflict, and thus the terms through which identity is defined and maintained."[5] The issues of political motivation and religious selfhood are undoubtedly integral to any consideration of conversion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, in this chapter I eschew these critical tendencies in order to appreciate more fully how Crashaw engages the *topos* of conversion through eclectic hermeneutical strategies that negotiate and reinterpret noteworthy texts (especially mystical texts).

While I find Murray's approach helpful, I also agree with Questier that "[c]onversion does not generally lend itself to quantitative analysis."[6] It is nearly impossible to extrapolate from the individual lives of converts any overriding truths about the conversion in general.[7] On the other hand, as

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[4] Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2, 3, 206.
[5] Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.
[6] Questier, 2.
[7] For an overview of the psychological and phenomenological dimensions of conversion broadly conceived, see Karl Morrison's highly regarded works, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), esp. 3-23, and *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992).

philosophers from Augustine to Derrida have noted, conversion often involves the interplay of metaphysics, epistemology, and literary practice in a manner that necessitates a highly refined method of interpretation. Thus, I am skeptical of Murray's goal of delineating a "poetics of conversion." Murray proposes that in the writings of poets like Crashaw "the particular formal qualities of poetry – its schemes and tropes, it distinctive styles of signifying – are used to confront the unsettling phenomenon of religious change," and maintains further that a sensitivity to this reality facilitates a crossing of "the critical boundary separating early modern Catholic and Protestant poetics."[8] The principal limitation of this critical approach is its commitment to the corpus of any one author as a self-contained system of signification. Focusing primarily on the correspondence between a writer's change in ecclesiastical affiliation and his figurative language demarcates too finely the semiotic range of any literary instantiation, and it further risks overlooking modes of speculative thought and poetic experimentation that conversion often facilitates. There are further problems. I do not think it is useful to speculate about, or attempt to marshal evidence regarding, Crashaw's (or any other convert's) motivations or "true" confessional identity.[9] Scholars have at least established beyond reasonable doubt that confessional identity could be fluid and that cross-pollinations could occur, and indeed did occur, frequently.[10] Furthermore, the scholarly habit of characterizing Crashaw's elusive style as a "poetics" (either of conversion or as Protestant/Catholic) tends to prevent modern readers from seeing the poet in his humanistic context in Cambridge and, later, abroad on the Continent. Reading the whole corpus of Crashaw's poetry backwards from his conversion, ironically, prevents any

[8] Murray, 7, 176.
[9] The older debates about Catholic and Protestant poetics of 40-60 years ago are still residually playing out in more recent scholarship. See, for example, Joseph R. Teller, "Why Crashaw Was Not Catholic: The Passion and Popular Protestant Devotion," *English Literary Renaissance* 43:2 (2013): 239-267.
[10] Cf. Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 229–41; Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans, and Puritans: Seventeenth Century Essays* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

nuanced appreciation for how his writings, especially his later writings, and his conversion were received by his contemporaries. While we cannot definitively demonstrate Crashaw's true motivations for converting, we can locate his text and his conversion within a larger cultural matrix of religious imagination.

Since the first publication of his verse in the 1640s, Richard Crashaw has remained a contentious literary figure for another significant reason. Arguably, much of the scholarly disagreement about both his confessional identity and aesthetic merits (and demerits) has stemmed from Crashaw's affiliation with an another intractably opaque category: *the mystical.* Indeed, following the 1652 printing of his poems, Edward Thimelby, in his own polemical poem, acknowledged the quality of Crashaw's verse, but ultimately dismissed what he identified as the "mistcall poetik straine" running throughout the collected works.[11] In her magisterial book *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, Barbara Lewalski defends her omission of Crashaw from her study on the grounds that he writes out of "the aesthetics emanating from Trent and the Continental Counter-Reformation, which stresses sensory stimulation and church ritual (rather than scripture) as a means to devotion and *to mystical transcendence.*"[12] When critics are not appropriating "the mystical" as grounds for dismissing Crashaw's verse, many others emphasize his ecstatic spirituality, typified by his early devotion to St. Teresa, as a sort of index of his many idiosyncrasies and peculiar perversions. Even if his early interest in Catholic mysticism should not be read as something leading inexorably to the

[11] *Tixall Poetry* (Edinburgh: 1813), III.4. Although composed in the early 1650s, Thimelby's poem was not printed until the nineteenth century. Cf. Sean McDowell, "From 'Lively' Art to 'Glittering Expressions': Crashaw's Initial Reception Reconsideration," *John Donne Journal* 24 (2005): 229-262.
[12] Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 12 (emphasis added). Similarly, commenting on the six new poems of the 1648 edition, editor George Walton Williams suggests that the second printing (1648) "intensifies the sensuousness and emphasizes the experiences of ecstatic mysticism already expressed" (xxi): George Walton Williams, ed., *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974).

Roman Church, some critics argue, it none the less reveals an excessive aesthetics unparalleled in Renaissance literary culture. Thus, even if the poetry can be demonstrated to be of authentically Protestant provenance (which is as equally indemonstrable as the Catholic thesis), it remains at least eccentric in its intensity and figural adaptations.

While it is true that Crashaw never penned an account or justification of his change in ecclesial affiliation, I would argue that his later poetry (published first in 1648) represents a form of experimental poetic mysticism that also signaled the importance of conversion in a manner that went far beyond simply the poet's own process of becoming a Roman Catholic. In this chapter, I wish to interrogate several of Crashaw's writings written around or after his turn to Catholicism to discern their full humanistic significance. I argue specifically that Crashaw's Epiphany Hymn, first printed in 1648, constitutes his most profound poetical consideration of conversion, and I suggest that this poem was charged with resonances of mystical theology that his contemporaries could not fail to have discerned. Indeed, to a seventeenth-century reader, the Epiphany Hymn could easily be read as a novel convergence of the *topoi* of mysticism and conversion, though not in a manner necessarily compatible with recent critical interpretations. Reading this poem in conjunction with other works I demonstrate that Crashaw exhibited a sustained interest in archetypal converts whose circumstances, in many respects, were analogous to his own in 1645. I maintain that Crashaw's later writings bear the imprint of two significant biblical converts: St. Paul and Dionysius the Areopagite (cf. Acts 17:34). These two figures experienced seismic alterations in worldview in turning away from their native Jewish and Hellenistic conceptions of the world. It is for this reason that they serve as supremely suitable models for Crashaw's portrayal of the Epiphany: for the poet, the advent of Christ signals the triumph of Christianity over paganism and the supplanting of one religious paradigm for another.

Finally, I propose that when the Epiphany Hymn is refracted through the interpretive lens of conversion, it becomes apparent that Crashaw's later mystical themes function along lines that are

fittingly characterized as deliberately intertextual. Scholars have known for some time that Crashaw was a gifted humanist poet, but it has taken Richard Rambuss' recent pioneering scholarship to reveal completely the extent of Crashaw's place within a larger international framework of letters.[13] Critics have failed to apprehend adequately the literary significance of Crashaw's conversion precisely because they have not been attuned to the exact nature of intertextuality that is operative in his later poetry. In what follows I illustrate how Crashaw formulated specific referential connections through his allusions to St. Paul and Dionysius the Areopagite and contend that these intricate citations should be read as a form of poetical experimentation that a learned audience would not have been able to dissociate from the poet's own religious transitions and overall aesthetic vision. Importantly, this understanding of Crashaw's verse places the poet within a larger culture of Baroque self-fashioning that takes us beyond debates about authentic confessional identity and into the broader importance of English apophatic poetry within the larger intellectual history of early modernity.

CRASHAW DIVIDED: TEXT AND SELF

The first edition of Crashaw's religious verse, *Steps to the Temple*, dates from 1646 and contains the poems written almost exclusively, as far we can tell, while he was an observant English Protestant. Having held Laudian sympathies for much of his adult life, Crashaw fled to Holland to seek refuge after Parliamentary troops took over his native Cambridge in 1643. By 1646, it is clear that Crashaw's

[13] Though less commonly discussed in more recent scholarship, Crashaw's role as a humanist poet at Cambridge has been widely established. See for example: Sean McDowell, "From 'Lively' Art to 'Glittering Expressions': Crashaw's Initial Reception Reconsideration." *John Donne Journal* 24 (2005): 229-262; Francis Newton and David Reid, "Silius Italicus, Daniel Heinsius, and Richard Crashaw: The Genesis of Crashaw's Latin Poem 'Bulla' ('The Bubble'), with a New Edition of the Text" *John Donne Journal* 24 (2005): 263-302; Claes Schaar, *Marino and Crashaw: Sospetto D'herode: A Commentary* (Lund: Gleerup, 1971); Austin Warren, "The Reputation of Crashaw in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." *Studies in Philology* 31 (1934): 385-407; George Walton Williams, "Richard Crashaw's 'Bulla' and Daniel Heinsius' Crepundia" *John Donne Journal* 20 (2001): 263-273. See also Richard Rambuss, ed., *The English Poems of Richard Crashaw* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), which includes a much needed updated interpretive introductory essay.

change in ecclesial affiliation was noticed even in England. The anonymous editor of the 1646 *Steps*, which was printed in London, bestows many compliments upon Crashaw's name, including his proficiency in several languages, but ends his preface by stating in passing that the poet is "now dead to us."[14] Since Crashaw actually died in 1649, the author of the preface clearly means that Crashaw was dead *religiously*. He was no longer in communion with the English Church. In fleeing to Leiden in search of support from his friend Mary Collet, Crashaw likely left the manuscript of his devotional verse, such as it was, in Lincolnshire with Jonathan Worthington.[15]

The second edition of *Steps to the Temple* was printed in London in 1648 and announces on its title page that the volume contains "divers pieces not before extant."[16] This edition includes the following six new poems: "O Gloriosa Domini," "In the Glorious Epiphany of Our Lord God," "Charitas Nimia," "To the Name Above Every Name," "To the Same Party: Councel Concerning her Choice," and "The Flaming Heart." In his modern edition of the poems, L. C. Martin notes that "[b]y 1648 Crashaw had probably been absent from England for three years; but the supposition that he had written, for him, a good deal between 1646 and 1648 seems a likely one," and states further that "the religious and devotional verse now first published [i.e. in 1648] seems likely to have been very largely of recent composition."[17] This would imply that the newly penned pieces of the 1648 edition were possibly written after Crashaw converted to Roman Catholicism in 1645. In any case, these new poems have long inclined scholars to discern Crashaw's definitive Catholic identity as fully manifest in the 1648 volume in a way that is less obvious in the 1646 edition.

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[14] L. C. Martin, ed., *The Poems, English, Latin and Greek, of Richard Crashaw* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 77. All references to Crashaw's poetry are to this edition.
[15] Cf. Healy, 8.
[16] Martin, 206.
[17] Martin, xlvii. It is generally supposed that Crashaw returned briefly to England in 1644 and possibly visited Oxford.

Thomas Healy famously challenged this conclusion stating that, "beyond the new poems in the 1648 edition having not appeared previously, there is little evidence to support their late dating." Healy also notes that at several points in the newly added poems Crashaw "is still using Anglican liturgical influences, influences which can be seen throughout his work."[18] Healy keenly observes that among the 1648 revisions, the poem "On a Prayer Booke Sent to Mrs. M. R.," which appears to be about the *Book of Common Prayer*, received six new lines. This addition, according to Healy and many others, suggests that Crashaw was still writing, at least theologically, within the conceptual orbit of the English Church.[19] As Crashaw's most recent biographer, Healy has sustained a long-running critical dispute over the essential nature of Crashaw's religion. He is, in large part, reacting to a commonplace assumption in studies of seventeenth-century religious poetry, which was most forcefully articulated by Barbara Lewalski. Healy views this conclusion as groundless, suggesting instead that it was the English Church that shaped Crashaw's literary talents.

Healy is not alone in preferring a Protestant Crashaw; several other critics have drawn more attention to the mitigating circumstances surrounding Crashaw's conversion. Crashaw was not happy in Holland, having lost the support of his dear friend, and ultimately fled to Paris where, in abject poverty, he likely made his official entrance into the Roman Catholic Church in 1645. The motivations for such a change have been a consistent subject of dispute. It would appear, according to one interpretation of the facts, that Crashaw entered his new Church in the context of strong political influences. When, for instance, Abraham Cowley, longtime friend and admirer of Crashaw's poetry, found Crashaw in Paris he introduced him to the exiled Queen Henrietta Maria. The combination of

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[18] Thomas Healy, *Richard Crashaw* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 7-8.

[19] Cf. also Joseph R. Teller, "Why Crashaw Was Not Catholic: The Passion and Popular Protestant Devotion," *English Literary Renaissance* 43:2 (2013): 242, "For if we assume that the religious poetry of Donne or Herbert is exclusively normative, Crashaw does look strange. But when we read Crashaw against a broader Bernardine tradition, the poet becomes as native to English literary piety as Donne and Herbert."

extreme financial woe with Crashaw's new relationship with the queen has led some scholars to the conclusion that the poet's conversion was motivated, at least in part, by an active pursuit of preferment. Highlighting these circumstances, Wall and others rightfully underscore that some of Crashaw's seemingly blatant Catholic poems, such as the "Ode on the Assumption," were written in the 1630s in a highly diverse Anglican setting. The strand of scholarship championed by Healy and Wall has had the cumulative effect of supplanting the previous critical orthodoxy, which posited a fundamentally Catholic Crashaw, for the more contentious perspective that Crashaw maintained an inherently Protestant sensibility, despite later political exigencies, to the end of his life.

As Alison Shell has aptly demonstrated, the phenomenon of conversion in early modern England resists definitive categorizations by modern critics. Noting how "Laudianism contained within itself the potential for experimentation with Rome," Shell states,

> Even when a conversion took place near-instantaneously, the convert was assenting to a previously learnt body of theological discourse; and where a conversion was more considered, it involved processes of deliberate exploration, such as reading, praying, dispute, discussion, and - inevitably - a certain degree of imaginative role-playing which could be vented in poetry. There is no contradiction in recognizing that Crashaw could assume a Catholic mentality while still a conformist, and it is helpful to approach his poetry in this light.[20]

We must use caution, however, in viewing Crashaw's genuine Laudian piety as a period of exploratory preparations for Rome, and there is no definitively sufficient warrant to suppose that his early religious commitments were merely tentative. But we are justified in assuming that the newly printed poems of the 1648 edition were difficult to extricate from the poet's conversion as it appeared to his contemporaries. *Pace* Healy, I see no reason to distrust the title page of the 1648 edition of *Steps to the Temple* which announces the presence of newly composed poems. We could, perhaps, entertain the possibility that the poems first printed in 1648 were omitted from the 1646 edition due to the

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[20] Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 95; 93.

political strife of the Civil War and the hesitancy of printers to publish theologically volatile verse. However, as Shell has established, Crashaw's associations with mystical themes, many of which held common associations with Catholicism, were already in place and arguably discernable in other poems as well. Thus, Healy's impetus to place certain poems earlier in Crashaw's chronology would not alleviate, methodologically, the problem of deciphering thematic elements pertaining to mysticism and conversion. As I will show, the confluence of motifs that center on archetypal converts in the new poems of the 1648 edition trenchantly suggest that the discourse of conversion informed Crashaw's poetic vision irrespective of his later Catholicism.

Shell's corrective comments also forestall any essentialist conclusions that accept an either/or dynamic regarding Crashaw's theological preferences. Crashaw's texts do not betray, even residually, the same rhetorical and polemical features that typified conversion narratives of the period. Arthur Marotti has designated the very public declaration of religious change through narrative in this period as "performing conversion." The performative nature of conversion narratives, according to Marotti, emphasized the agency of the author above all else: "An interesting feature of the phenomenon of conversion is the fact that, whether or not it explicitly attributes human change to divine agency, it religiously and politically enacts human choice." He adds: "converts acted as though they had the freedom to choose among a recognized set of institutional options."[21] According to this line of reasoning, maintaining the belief in religious choice, however illusory, was inherently subversive because it grounded the believer's autonomy in an institutional realm of practice that extended beyond the state. Marotti's reading of conversion in this period is arguably too simplistic to account for the intricacies of Baroque self-fashioning that I am charting here. Indeed, Crashaw's poetic practice suggests that religious agency inhered less in the simple ability to choose between institutional options

[21] Arthur Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 98.

and more in the writer's ability to experiment with new conceptions of self and world through mystical tropes. The challenge has thus become hermeneutical: how do we interpret what Shell calls the "imaginative role-playing which could be vented in poetry"? We must be attuned to subtle textual patterns which, taken collectively, reflect the type of role-playing that Shell identifies in Crashaw's writing. I believe that Crashaw, as a poet, maintained a heightened degree of imaginative role-playing throughout his final years. To discern fully the manner of this role-playing it is necessary to examine the one extant piece of correspondence we have from Crashaw: his letter from Leiden. While certainly not a conversion narrative, the letter marks the beginning of textual practice that participates in the discourse of conversion that may also be correlative to the later poetry. A close reading of the Leiden letter will bring the citational references in the Epiphany Hymn into sharper relief.

Likely written to Joseph Beaumont on 20 February 1644, the letter from Leiden reflects foremost the poet's precarious financial situation.[22] Though it is never overtly stated, it appears that Collet had rejected Crashaw for a recent decision regarding religion. As the niece of Nicholas Ferrar, Collet had assumed the role of "Mother" at the community of Little Gidding in England before fleeing with her family to the Netherlands during the Civil War. The religious setting of Little Gidding was ideal for Crashaw's high-church orientation and integral to his formative development, but for some unstated reason, the family most prominently associated with this religious community had shunned Crashaw. As a result we see a highly personal account of the poet's dire state of mind. He writes,

> I find my self still foulded in and round wrapped about with a still encreasing ty of inextricable engagements, which grow so fast and gaine so upon mee that I am put a perpetuall but ineffectuall *projection with my self* what possible mean to imagine which might in any measure speak for mee, not y^{e} deed by y^{e} desire of a soul that is ashamed to be quite left behind in curtesy. [...] And withall neither am I so expreemly an Antipodes of Desperation to your better boding soule that I haue no hope of a *brigther*

[22] While Crashaw never refers to Joseph Beaumont by name, most critics have agreed with Elsie Elizabeth Duncan-Jones that Beaumont is the most likely recipient. See Elizabeth Duncan-Jones, "Who Was the Recipient of Crashaw's Leyden Letter?" in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, ed. John R. Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 174-179.

> *side* that may break out from this *great black cloud* and now blotts y^e^ whole face of our Horison.[23]

Crashaw frames his unfortunate circumstances in metaphors of dark skies that await the hoped-for light. The light and dark imagery reflects his sense of a dissonant new world in a foreign culture that has no place for him among the Dutch or his fellow emigrants. The "great black cloud" that so powerfully afflicted Crashaw and Beaumont was the turbulent onset of the Civil War which, by this point, was well under way. The passage quoted here is useful as an indexical marker of Crashaw's temperament in the year before his conversion. In the context of several conflicts, both military and personal, Crashaw's discourse reflects his own internal strife: "perpetuall but ineffectuall projection with my self." Framing his self-reflection in the metaphor of darkness, Crashaw is, perhaps consciously, establishing the mode of imagery that will become the staple of his later poetry.

As the letter progresses, Crashaw combines a tone of desperation with pronounced reticence to dedicate himself even more strongly to his devotional ends. Posing a rhetorical question to Beaumont as to what he shall now do given his untimely fate, he declares:

> Nothing but a third resignation of all to God. His good pleasure his gratuitous providenc, y^e^ one for y^e^ end, the other for y^e^ way and means to it, into these do I desire to resolue my totall self. I confess this last peece of my persecution the very sorest I yet haue suffered, in my exclusion and compleat excomunicacon from my gratuitous mother to whome I had so holy and happy adherence, & in whome I tresured up to my self as much as you could wish (I need say no more of sacred satisfaction and Catholick contentation, my extrusion and exhaereditation hence, I say been such a concussion of mee such a dislocation of my whole condition, as puts mee into y^e^ greatest exigence both spirituall and temporall I was euer cast into.[24]

Crashaw uses strong ecclesiological language in recounting his split with Collet and the community her family represented, referring to the discord as the "compleat excomunicacon from my gratuitous mother." He states early in the letter that he thinks his "share in the hazards of England to be no

[23] The letter is reproduced in Martin, xxviii-xxx; here xxix, with emphasis added.
[24] Martin, xxx.

small one," confessing further that he lives without true friends abroad.[25] Crashaw has become dispossessed and alienated from his community of believers (cf. "concussion of mee such a dislocation of my whole condition"), and yet he commits himself to a solid "resignation" to God.

The letter hints that Crashaw was beginning to experience a degree of cultural schizophrenia. While acknowledging that his native England was lost, he simultaneously casts a suspicious eye on his newfound surroundings. Referring to his geographical dislocation, he conveys an additional sense of divided selfhood. Crashaw is conscious of the fact that he has left England and its church behind for good, even though he makes it clear in the letter to Beaumont that he never wanted to relinquish his fellowship from Peterhouse or his intellectual and spiritual life more broadly in Cambridge.[26] In effect, he has received a poignantly unofficial but solemn excommunication from his former friend and confidant. Crashaw now lacked a homeland, but more significantly he lacked a religious community in which to he could worship and peacefully pray. As a high-church Englishman abroad during the most tumultuous period of the seventeenth century, Crashaw was permanently dislocated. Like Sir Toby Matthew before him, Crashaw slowly realized that the place he called home was perhaps never adequately suited to him.

When Crashaw turns to the social conditions in Leiden, he uses language that is richly illustrative of his disposition toward religious observance. He presents his comments about Holland alongside his own introspection:

> But what now remaines to be don with this desolate thing, this that is left of mee ; what must I doe ? what must I bee ? If I must be any thing of religious being, here I must not be. To be left thus at this Athens alone (Leyden I mean) where yet I am my spirit will not support it I may on with y^{e} borrowed stile of y^{e} the sacred text and say I so *wholly see the people giuen to Idolatry*. you guest I mean the God of this world, Gaine, but I dare say you guest not that To make it a meer Athens indeed they haue set up in the great church of S^{t} Peter here the plaine Pagan Pallas, Cap a pee, with speare and

[25] Martin, xxvii.

[26] Crashaw writes: "I haue I assure you no desire to be absolutely and irrespectiuely rid of my beloued Patrimony in St. Peter" (Martin, xxix) where is it clear he is referring to his fellowship at Cambridge.

> Helmet, & Owl & all, in the place of saints at lest which heretofore it seemes usurped the window. So that for me I am either not scholler enough or not Pagan enough for this place.[27]

Crashaw's troubles are compounded: having lost his native England to radical Protestants, he finds himself rejected in Leiden and out of place among the esoteric and idolatrous culture of its citizenry. His suggestion that he is neither scholar nor pagan enough for the world of Leiden constitutes a major reference to the classical past and invitation to the literary historian to inquire about the nature of Crashaw's alienation. Was Leiden too culturally and theologically polyvalent (hosting radical Protestants, free thinkers, and observant Jewish communities) for Crashaw's sensibility? As we will see, Crashaw is perhaps deliberately embellishing his account of what puts him off by Leiden. His notoriety and penchant for classical learning and pagan poetry were already well established in Cambridge, and these would have functioned as a propaedeutic for his sojourn among the Dutch. By likening Leiden to Athens, Crashaw purposefully appropriates the language of Scripture: "I may on with y^{e} borrowed stile of y^{e} the sacred text" (i.e. the Bible). Crashaw would have been alive to the intertextual nature and resonances of his comments. Specifically, the poet appears to be channeling a scene from Acts 17:16 where St. Paul is described in the following manner: "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the *city wholly given to idolatry*."[28] The near exact wording to describe both Leiden and Athens creates a deliberate overlap between Crashaw's letter and the Acts of the Apostles. Crashaw implicitly likens himself to Paul who, among Stoics and Epicureans, conversed with Athenians who aimlessly offered worship to an unknown god (cf. Acts 17:18-23). Thus like Paul Crashaw lived among scholars and philosophers who displayed more affinities with pagan antiquity than with orthodox Christian belief. With the verse from Acts in mind, Crashaw also appears to be imitating Paul's internal stirring ("while Paul waited for them at Athens,

[27] Martin, xxx-xxi, emphasis added.
[28] All biblical references are to the King James Version. Here I have added the emphasis.

his spirit was stirred in him"). The poet's query "what must I bee?" is the essential question for a person living with the turbulence of national war, diverse religious practices, and elaborate visions of a pagan intellectual past.

To date, the rhetorical effects of Crashaw's letter to Beaumont have not been fully appreciated. As Crashaw's only extant prose work, the letter supplies the modern reader with a very personal portrait of the poet's precarious situation in 1644. The letter's biographical importance is readily apparent when we consider its proximity, both chronologically and thematically, to the two major editions of Crashaw's poems published in his lifetime.[29] The first edition of *Steps to the Temple* (1646) was based on a manuscript that Crashaw left in England before he fled to the continent. This manuscript suffered from a disjointed organization of poems. The 1648 edition of *Steps*, however, was, as even Healy admits, "produced from a corrected copy of the 1646 edition plus a manuscript with many new poems and some extensively revised version of poems which first appeared in 1646."[30] For this reason, the 1648 edition has appropriately been regarded as the superior text of Crashaw's poems because it was collated with the previous edition and revised. If we can safely assume that Crashaw did indeed compose new poems between the two printings of *Steps to the Temple*, then I would suggest that the 1644 letter from Leiden should be read against the backdrop of what appears to be a brief but vibrant period of new literary production for Crashaw (i.e. the period between 1644 and 1648). Crashaw self-consciously channels the persona of St. Paul in his Leiden letter and extends this practice in "To the Name Above Every Name" and "In the Glorious Epiphany of Our Lord God," both of which were first printed in 1648. In what follows, I demonstrate that the reference to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the Epiphany Hymn follows quite naturally from Crashaw's prolonged

[29] I am excluding from consideration here Crashaw's posthumously published edition *Carmen Deo Nostro* (1652).
[30] Healy, 5.

poetic engagement with the conversions of both St. Paul and Dionysius the Areopagite as depicted in the New Testament.

CRASHAW'S EPIPHANY WITHIN THE HISTORY OF THE MYSTICAL

Richard Crashaw's 1648 hymn "In the Glorious Epiphany of Our Lord God" has elicited a diverse range of positive scholarly interpretation. Michael Murrin has commented that the hymn achieves a "medley of historical periods" that include the visitation of the Magi, the death of Christ, and the triumph of Christianity over pagan heliolatry.[31] Austin Warren provocatively suggests that this poem, "more than any of his other poems, seems metaphysical in style and intent."[32] Warren views the hymn as a significant evolution away from the sensual imagery that characterized Crashaw's earlier poems towards more abstract religious conceptualizations. More recently, Rambuss regards the poem as "notable as Crashaw's fullest philosophical elaboration of mystical theology, specifically the *via negative* of Pseudo-Dionysius."[33] Crashaw's Epiphany Hymn has also rightly been regarded as his masterpiece. Ruth Wallerstein, for instance, has spoken for many critics in arguing that the symbolism of this hymn "is a summation of all those evolving elements of his [Crashaw's] consciousness," and has further noted that, "*every metaphor of his poetry* from the earliest days is repeated in this poem."[34] The significance of this last point should not go overlooked. The Epiphany Hymn is the most structured and carefully wrought poem in the Crashavian corpus. In addition, it represents the recapitulation of Crashaw's

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[31] Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes Toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 111.

[32] Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939), 148.

[33] Rambuss, *The English Poems of Richard Crashaw*, 386. Rambuss reads Pseudo-Dionysius as "a Neoplatonic Christian philosopher who emphasizes the inexpressibility of the divine and conceives of union with God as a hermetic experience that transcends intelligibility and sensuous experience" (386). Thought Rambuss is generally correct, more nuance can be brought to bear on both Pseudo-Dionysius and his significance for Crashaw, as the following elucidation argues.

[34] Ruth Wallerstein, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Style and Poetic Development* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1935), 144, emphasis added.

literary career in its deliberate reworking of previous metaphors and images. Given that critics have abundantly noted the intricacy of the poem and its unique form, we can begin to understand how the Epiphany Hymn should be read as the supreme distillation of Crashaw's experimental mystical poetry.[35]

George Walton Williams, in his seminal study *Image and Symbol in the Sacred Poetry of Richard Crashaw*, was the first to discern the four-part structure of the Epiphany Hymn. According to Williams, the poem breaks down in the following manner: I. The Arrival of the Kings [i.e. Magi] to Worship the New Light (ll. 1-41); II. The Comparison between Paganism and Christianity (ll. 42-133); III. The Crucifixion and the Eclipse (ll. 134-233); and IV. The Surrender of Paganism (ll. 234-254). This arrangement works perfectly in conflating the various historical periods, Visitation – Crucifixion – Triumph, into one powerful theological vision. The Hymn's lines alternate among the three Magi, and Crashaw assigns numbers – 1, 2, 3 – to each Magus to represent a plurality which, at distinct moment in the poem, coalesce into a unified choral voice. The poem's commanding coherence overextends itself, according to many critics, toward the end of hymn when the reader encounters the anomalous allusion to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*fl.* 500 CE), who is identified as the "Great master of the mystick day" (208):

> [2.] By the oblique ambush of this close night
> Couch't in that conscious shade
> The right-ey'd Areopagite
> Shall with a vigorous guesse inuade
> And catch thy quick reflex; and sharply see
> On this dark Ground
> To descant THEE. (190-196)

[35] If we also follow the line of reasoning that suggests the Epiphany Hymn was composed after his conversion this would conveniently place the poem's composition toward the end of Crashaw's life (i.e. between 1646 and 1648) when he would have been ideally situated to revise and reassess this work.

The description of the "right-ey'd Areopagite" comes after the retelling of the Magi's abandonment of eastern religious practices and the sun's penance for having been the object of pagan worship. Crashaw takes advantage of the belief, long held in the Middle Ages and still common during the Renaissance, that the converted Dionysius mentioned in Acts 17:34 and the author of the mystical *Corpus Dionysiacum* were one and the same person. The conflation of the two Dionysii enables Crashaw to achieve the blend of historical periods that reinforces the four-part symmetry of the hymn.

Wallerstein, despite her respect for the poem as a whole, feels compelled to suggest that Crashaw's reference to Dionysius is one of the poem's "elements of thought not fully mastered." The passage quoted here marks the beginning of an excursus in the poem where Crashaw employs the language of the *via negativa* associated with the Pseudo-Dionysius' mystical theology. Wallerstein again speaks for many critics when she opines: "I do not think this concept of the negative way in all its scope has been fully realized by Crashaw, or fully absorbed into the growth of Crashaw's own mind; and the statement of the concept does not flower from the vision of the poem as a whole, but seems added to it."[36] While both Wallerstein and Warren recognize the poem's deft design, the former has left an indelible critical mark in construing the allusion to Pseudo-Dionysius as an aberration tacked on to what is otherwise a masterfully organized poem.

Critics have been perplexed by Crashaw's allusion to the sixth-century mystical theologian largely because they have relied on a longstanding though simplistic taxonomy of mysticism. According to this line of thinking, there are two types of mystics: metaphysical and affective. The former kind, which include writers such as the Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, are characterized by abstract theological speculations predicated upon specific premises regarding transcendence and immanence. The latter kind, typified most fully by figures such

[36] Wallerstein, 143.

as St. Teresa of Avila, are prone to sensuous ecstasy and divine rapture that often exists irrespective of underlying theological premises. The two mystical forms are often presumed to be mutually exclusive, or at least fundamentally different in terms of spiritual practice. Since Crashaw's interest in St. Teresa is well documented and likely spanned the majority of his adult life, scholars who rely on the twofold division of mystics are understandably flummoxed by the poet's appropriation of the *via negativa* in the Epiphany Hymn.

Echoing the arguments of T. S. Eliot and Mario Praz, Wallerstein accepts unconditionally that, of the two forms of mysticism, Crashaw was animated more by the affective kind. These scholars err in presuming that Crashaw wrote in one static devotional mode. Warren, in his book *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility*, first suggested that Crashaw's reference to Pseudo-Dionysius perhaps signals an evolution in his thought away from the ostentatious forms of mystical devotion of his youth toward more mature, philosophically oriented considerations of the *via negativa*.[37] Williams follows Warren in entertaining the idea that Crashaw's reference to Pseudo-Dionysius is illustrative of his evolving mystical consciousness, and uses the reference as a warrant for juxtaposing Crashaw's poetry with significant passages from the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (hereafter CD). Michael McCanles and Joseph P. Hilyard have followed suit by relating Crashaw's poetry to the long theological tradition emanating from the CD's influence.[38] These investigations into Crashaw's mysticism, most of which are more

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[37] See Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939), 146-150 and 236n107. Warren is the only modern critic who entertains, however briefly, the notion that Crashaw's interest in mysticism evolved over time to encompass the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius. He does not, however, undertake the challenge of ascertaining just how Crashaw came to incorporate Dionysian elements into this poetry. For a somewhat more thorough analysis by Warren, see Austin Warren, "The Mysticism of Richard Crashaw," *Church Quarterly Review* 116 (1933): 75-92.

[38] See George Walton Williams, *Image and Symbol in the Sacred Poetry of Richard Crashaw* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1963). Michael McCanles, "The Rhetoric of the Sublime in Crashaw's Poetry," in *The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry from Wyatt to Milton*, eds. Thomas O. Sloan and Raymond B. Waddington (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 189-211; and Joseph P. Hilyard, "The Negative Wayfarers of Richard Crashaw's 'A Hymn in the Glorious Epiphanie,'" in

conjectural than definitive, look to the CD merely as a source-text for some of Crashaw's extravagant images and paradoxical conceits. By focusing on Crashaw's potential affinity for Pseudo-Dionysius, scholars are responding to Eliot's and Praz's arguments that Crashaw was supposedly oriented exclusively toward affective mysticism.

Crashaw did not, however, follow the modern facile understanding of mysticism as *either* metaphysical *or* affective. Indeed, of the six poems first printed in the 1648 edition of *Steps to the Temple*, one piece, "The Flaming Heart," is specifically about Teresa of Avila. Thus, any supposition that the Epiphany Hymn's reference to Pseudo-Dionysius signals an evolution away from sensuous mysticism toward its philosophical counterpart is misguided. "The Flaming Heart" describes the famous artistic depictions of Teresa in divine rapture as recounted in her autobiography *El Libro de la Vida* (1588). While it is likely that Crashaw read the *Libro* in its original Spanish, his poem on Teresa's ecstatic moment borrows its title from Toby Matthew's 1642 English translation of this work entitled *Flaming Hart: the Life of the Glorious S. Teresa*. A fellow Catholic convert and exile from England, Matthew presented the translation to Queen Henrietta Maria, who shared his devotion to the female saint. While it is conceptually convenient for the modern scholar to differentiate between the metaphysical and affective modes of mystical discourse, it is a mistake to presume that this dichotomy had any currency in the seventeenth century. In fact, recent studies of early modern mysticism have underscored its relationship with patristic and medieval models.

In his book *The Mystic Fable*, Michel de Certeau explains how the early modern period engendered a new wave of mystical thought that re-interpreted, rather than repudiated, patristic and medieval forms of mysticism.[39] The unexpected endorsement and subsequent canonization of mystics

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Essays on Richard Crashaw, ed. Robert M. Cooper (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik, 1979), 169-195.

[39] Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, Volume I: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

such as Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and John of Cross (1542-1591) by the Catholic Church facilitated "a new science" which de Certeau calls *mystics* (*la mystique*). Written in a register different from patristic thought, though certainly not antithetical to it, *mystics*, as a new mode of discourse (*modus loquendi*), enjoyed widespread proliferation as both a cause and a benefactor of the growing individualism that characterized early modern Christian devotion. The science centered on the very public role played by the written works of individual mystics. The interior sanctity and visionary modes of mystical life became the template whereby authentic holiness could be detected and emulated. The *modus loquendi* was mediated through textual production, written by the mystics themselves, describing visions and ecstasies. As de Certeau explains, "The saint who became mystical received scriptorial function. He established himself in the field of language."[40] Paradoxically, mystical theology, which had historically preoccupied itself with the ineffable transcendence of God, was manifested in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through written works. St. Teresa's *El Libro de la Vida* is the example *par excellence* of the genre of spiritual discourse that outlines the experiential affectivity that naturally flows from the mystic's union with an ineffable God.

The mode of discourse articulated in the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross ultimately derived, according to de Certeau, from the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. De Certeau argues, "The corpus of [Pseudo] Dionysius the Areopagite contributed to the emancipation of that 'science,' which, in turn, interpreted that corpus more and more in the nocturnal light emanating from its *Mystical Theology*…In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its printed circulation *enlarged the audience of the Dionysian corpus, which continued however, by its 'secrets,' to produce innovation*."[41] Throughout the sixteenth century, and especially in the seventeenth, the CD enjoyed immense popularity through various translations and publications of noteworthy medieval commentaries such

[40] De Certeau, 102.
[41] De Certeau, 102, emphasis added

as those of Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Cusa. Noting how early modern writers frequently praised the CD, de Certeau adds,

> But these laudatory appellations were displayed in works of spirituality and in the recent editions of Louis de Blois or John of the Cross for which Dionysius served as the seal of quality. To be authorized, one had to resemble him. […] The Areopagite was the eponymous hero of an entire literature, just as Jerome had been before him and as Augustine would be during the second half of the century. He was no longer the oracle of an elite. His ensigns waved at the head of a "turba magna" of spiritual and devout followers. At the end of the sixteenth century, the composition of a panegyric of him was a school assignment.[42]

Thus, contrary to what Wallerstein and Warren maintain regarding his supposed revision of mystical sensibility, Crashaw's allusion to Dionysius in the Epiphany Hymn is neither peculiar nor unprecedented for the age. The new science of *mystics* quickly became associated with the CD, and it would have appeared as altogether fitting to appropriate the language of both the sixth-century theologian and the sixteenth-century Carmelite in literary practice.

Crashaw's reference to Dionysius, therefore, is not superficial. More plausibly it stems from his direct engagement with the CD. While parts of the CD were published in London during the first half of the seventeenth century, the complete corpus was widely available on the continent. After expressing his dissatisfaction with Leiden, Crashaw moved to Paris in 1645, where he eventually entered the court of Queen Henrietta Maria. The queen, finding Crashaw very affable, wrote to Pope Innocent X on his behalf requesting support for the newly converted poet. Her letter, written on 7 September 1646, is one of only a few extant historical documents that describes Crashaw's lifestyle after his departure from England. She begins the correspondence with the following background information:

> Mr. Crashaw, having been a Minister in England and nourished in the universities of this country among people quite remote from the sentiments of our Holy Religion has nonetheless, through his reading and his study, become a Catholic and, to enjoy the

[42] De Certeau, 103.

> practice in peace, has moved far away and lived near me by about a year, where by the good example of his life he has edified all those who have conversed with him.[43]

The queen's language is telling. She describes Crashaw's conversion as having been facilitated through "his reading and his study." Henrietta Maria is widely known to have cultivated an interest in Neoplatonism and Catholic spirituality,[44] and Crashaw would have also been readily exposed to mystical works in the larger arena of Parisian intellectual circles. It is reasonable to presume that while in Paris Crashaw could have encountered the complete CD and that this possibly eventuated in his detailed allusion in the Epiphany Hymn.

We know from his poetry that Crashaw was powerfully affected by what he read. Following the "Hymn to St. Teresa," first published in 1646, Crashaw writes in his "Apologie" for that poem about the acute sensation he felt upon first reading *El Libro de la Vida*:

> Thus have I back again to thy bright name,
> (Fair flood of holy fires!) transfus'd the flame
> *I took from reading thee*; 'tis to thy wrong,
> I know, that in my weak and worthless song
> Thou here art set to shine, where thy full day
> Scarce dawns. O pardon, if I dare to say
> *Thine own dear books are guilty*. For from thence
> I learn' d to know that Love is eloquence.
> ……..
> O 'tis not Spanish, but 'tis Heav'n she speaks,
> 'Tis Heav'n that lies in ambush there, and *breaks*
> *From thence into the wondering reader's breast* ;
> Who feels his warm heart hatch into a nest
> Of little eagles and young loves, whose high

[43] "Le sieur Crashau ayant esté Ministre en Angleterre et nourri dans les Universités de ce pais parmy des gens tres esloignes des sentiments de nostre Sainte Religion sest toutes fois par sa lecture et sone estude rendu Catholique et pour en jouir plus paisiblement l'exercise, s'est transporté en decà et vescu prés d'un an aupres de moy, ou par le bon example de sa vie il a beaucoup edifié tous ceux qui ont, converse avec luy." Henrietta Haynes, *Henrietta Maria* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd, 1912), 328. The complete correspondence of Queen Henrietta Maria, including this letter to Pope Innocent X, is printed in this volume.

[44] On Henrietta Maria's affinity for Neoplatonic aesthetics and spirituality, see Erica Veevers' classic study, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 56-64 and 165-179. See also Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 125-128 and 142-148.

Flights scorn the lazy dust, and things that die. (1-8; 23-28)

Demurring in the face of Teresa's renowned mystical eloquence, her *modus loquendi*, Crashaw seeks to give her a proper honorific in his English vernacular. Perhaps most startling is the manner in which the poet conceptualizes Teresa's influence as militaristic. The poem claims that Teresa's works are guilty of having a life of their own in dramatically influencing – invading – the minds of her readers. Crashaw's experiences with the Teresian corpus establish a precedent whereby we can ascertain how willingly he integrated his reading into his poetry. In the case of Pseudo-Dionysius, it is not unwarrantable to presume that Crashaw was equally moved by the CD.

The cultural context most equipped to foster an avid interest in mystical thought would most certainly have been France, and Crashaw's interests would be nicely served in Paris, the epicenter of the Dionysian revival.[45] In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the CD was published in its original Greek in several regions of Europe, including Florence (1516), Basel (1561), and Antwerp (1644). Paris, too, saw the publication of the Greek *Corpus Dionysiacam* in 1644. However, it was Jean Goulu's French translation, *Les Oeuvres du divin Saint Denys Aréopagite* (1608), which had the widest influence. A member of the Cistercian Feuillants, Goulu was a prime agent in the codification of what de Certeau identifies as the early modern science of *mystics*. By rendering the entire CD into the vernacular, Goulu served as the theological conduit through which St. Francois de Sales came to know Pseudo-Dionysius and subsequently integrated mystical themes into his *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*. As Elisabeth Stopp attests, "The work [i.e. the translated CD] was widely known in his time and

[45] Crashaw did not necessarily have to venture to the Continent to read the CD. Many books printed abroad made their way to England in one form or another. In 1646, Giles Randall published *A Bright Starre*, part of an English translation of Benet of Canfield's *The Rule of Perfection* which enjoined the reader to follow Pseudo-Dionysius by seeking self-annihilation through union with God. Cf. Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 39.

contributed considerably to the mystical revival."[46] The 1608 translation would enjoy great popularity, but Goulu spent years revising the work and towards the end of his life made a fresh translation into French that would endure throughout the seventeenth century. Published posthumously, the 1642 edition of *Les Oeuvres du divin Saint Denys Aréopagite* was likely the iteration that Crashaw encountered upon moving to Paris in 1645 though it is entirely possible also that he read the original Greek as well either in Cambridge or abroad.

When Crashaw arrived in Paris, he was quickly befriended by the Catholic priest Thomas Carre (real name, Miles Pickney). Carre, who would assume editorial oversight of Crashaw's poetry after his death, publishing his poems in the collection entitled *Carmen Deo Nostro* (1652), was a zealous admirer of St. Francois de Sales' work and in 1630 had published the first English translation of *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*. Crashaw and Carre enjoyed a robust friendship in Paris. Carre was both well connected to exiled English Catholics on the continent and steeped in the mystical revival of the seventeenth century. He would have been perfectly poised to introduce Crashaw to the French translation of the CD, especially given its proximity to the works of de Sales at the time. Indeed, the connection between de Sales and Pseudo-Dionysius likely served as a gateway to the complete CD. While at Cambridge, Crashaw cultivated an interest in de Sales and possessed at least one work of French writer.[47] De Sales also strongly influenced Nicholas Ferrar and the community of Little Gidding. Carre's familiarity of de Sales' writings would have provided Crashaw with a small but poignant connection with his former life, and, what is more, functioned as a transition point whereby Crashaw began to refine his religious disposition in Paris.

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[46] Elisabeth Stopp, "Jean Goulu and his 'Life' of Saint Francois de Sales," *Modern Language Review* 62 (1967): 231.

[47] For more on Crashaw's reading of de Sales, see Hilton Kelliher, "Crashaw at Cambridge," in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, ed. John R. Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 180-214.

The CD consists of five works: *The Divine Names*, *The Mystical Theology*, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and *The Letters*. The medieval church had conceptualized all of these works as a unified body of texts, each one reinforcing the others. During the Protestant Reformation many non-Catholic theologians would commonly read *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology* independently of the other three texts, fearing the implications of admitting any type of ecclesiological hierarchy within a patristic work. As noted above, throughout the Middle Ages the author of the CD was presumed to be the Dionysius mentioned in Acts 17:34. With the author presumed to have been a direct disciple of St. Paul, the CD was regarded as a venerable representation of mystical theology in the early church. It was not until early modern humanists such as Lorenzo Valla and Erasmus revealed the CD's authorship to be pseudonymous that the apostolic authority of the corpus was undermined. Valla noted that the CD likely dated from a period no earlier than the early sixth century. Even prior to the Reformation, "[i]n the polemics of the early 1500s the denial of Areopagitic authorship was apt to put an end to a scholar's active involvement with the Dionysian tradition."[48] However, beginning with the Roman Catholic Church's endorsement of Teresa and John of Cross, the CD was refracted through the new discourse of mystical practice. Soon, Catholics could endorse all five works within the CD regardless of its apostolic authority.

Many Protestant thinkers were less than enthusiastic about the CD after careful philological analysis proved that it was not apostolic in origin. Luther voiced the most trenchant critique in his *In The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520):

> [I]t greatly displeases me to assign such importance to this Dionysius, whoever he may have been, *for he shows hardly any signs of solid learning*. I would ask, by what authority and with what arguments does he prove his hodge-podge about the angels in his *Celestial Hierarchy*—a book over which many curious and superstitious spirits have cudgeled

[48] Karlfried Froehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 40.

> their brains? If one were to read and judge without prejudice, *is not everything in it his own fancy and very much like a dream*? But in his *Theology*, which is rightly called Mystical, *of which certain very ignorant theologians make so much*, he is downright dangerous, for he is more of a Platonist than a Christian. So if I had my way, no believing soul would give the least attention to these books. So far, indeed, from learning Christ in them, you will lose even what you already know of him. I speak from experience. Let us rather hear Paul, that we may learn Jesus Christ and him crucified. He is the way, the life, and the truth; he is the ladder by which we come to the Father.[49]

Luther's condemnations are striking. Denying that the Pseudo-Dionysius exhibits any great learning, the magisterial reformer compares the theologian's writings to transient dreams, dangerous in their Platonic roots and ultimately contrary to the Gospel itself. For Luther, the CD is popular only among the "very ignorant," a notion that suggests that Dionysian ideas, if not texts, were already in wide circulation among lay audiences. His denunciations, though, comes in the face of widespread enthusiasm for the CD as evidenced in his remark: "it greatly displeases me to assign such importance to this Dionysius." Luther passingly presents the pseudonymous authorship upfront by mocking the nebulous identity of the writer, "whoever he may have been." For the magisterial reformer, the popularity of Pseudo-Dionysius is disproportionate to the actual value of an anonymous and ignorant thinker who posits notions unsubstantiated by scripture. The impetus to undercut Pseudo-Dionysius' learning was a rampant sentiment within Protestant circles. Over a century later in England, in 1641, John Sherman wrote a provocative treatise entitled *A Greek in the Temple* wherein he attempts to demonstrate how Catholics either manipulated scripture or relied on false histories to suit their doctrinal ends. According to Sherman, the Catholic keenness for Dionysius, both as a potential apostolic authority and as a mystical theologian, is emblematic of the Church's tendency to misconstrue biblical passages. Sherman attempts to forestall any possible endorsement of (Pseudo)

[49] *Luther's Works*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Fortress Press, 1955-1986), 36: 109. Here the emphasis is my own.

Dionysius by echoing Luther: "this Dionysius was no very great learned man."[50] Sherman, like Luther, maintained that Catholics made too much of the philosophical resonances embedded in Acts 17:28: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." The phraseology of this passage, which had appealed to patristic Neoplatonic theology and which had informed the Pseudo-Dionysius' mystical thought, was dangerous, according to Sherman, because it was used by Catholics to validate a seemingly non-Christian intellectual framework. Protestant thinkers like Luther and Sherman deprecated the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius by suggesting that it was characterized by flights of Neoplatonic nonsense. He was, as Luther concluded, "more of a Platonist than a Christian."

If we are to grasp the full implications of Crashaw's allusion to the "right-ey'd Areopagite" in the Epiphany Hymn, we must read the poem against the century of Protestant polemics that denounced Pseudo-Dionysius as an unlearned man. As his letter from Leiden confirms, Crashaw was highly sensitive to the moment in Acts where Paul preached in Athens. Indeed, it is this precise narrative that serves as the most prominent pre-text for the Epiphany Hymn. The relevant passage includes the following:

> Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. […] And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them. (Acts 17:16-34)

Among Paul's audience in Athens, the judge Dionysius is one of several converts mentioned in the

[50] John Sherman, *A Greek in the Temple; Some Common-places delivered in Trinity Colledge Chapell in Cambridge, upon Acts xvii, part of the 28. Verse* (Cambridge: Roger Daniel, 1641), 14.

New Testament. Almost five centuries after the events described in Acts, a Syrian monk would pen the CD under the name and persona of Dionysius, thereby establishing for posterity the idea that Paul's convert was a prolific author of mystical theology. The Pseudo-Dionysius did not just appropriate the name of his biblical namesake. In addition, he actively cultivated the identity, writing in his *Letters* to other noteworthy personae, including first-century Christians such as Polycarp and Titus. It was this seemingly intentional fiction that spurred Protestant thinkers to denounce the CD as dubious and pernicious.

One historical fabrication particularly vexed early modern (mostly Protestant) readers. In his seventh letter, written to Polycarp the Hierarch (the reputed disciple of John), Dionysius uses his adopted biblical persona to claim that he witnessed the eclipse occasioned by Christ's crucifixion. He speaks of the event, supposedly, in response to Polycarp's revelation that the Sophist Apollophanes had accused Dionysius of being only a Greek philosopher and not a believer in the Christian miracles. In response, he writes the following:

> I am saying nothing now about the miracles in Egypt nor of the signs from God elsewhere. But I only mention the well-known heavenly signs which were celebrated by everyone throughout the whole world. True, Apollophanes refuses completely to accept that they happened. Nevertheless these are things which were recorded in the sacred books of the Persians and even today the Magi celebrate the memorial of the triple Mithras. Still, let us grant that out of ignorance or inexperience he refuses to accept this. Then ask him: "What have you to say about the solar eclipse which occurred when the Savior was put on the cross?" At that time the two of us were in Heliopolis and we both witnessed the extraordinary phenomenon of the moon hiding the sun at a time what was out season for their coming together, and from the ninth hour until evening it was supernaturally positioned in the middle of the sun. And remember something else too, which he knows. We saw the moon begin to hide the sun from the east, travel across to the other side of the sun, and return on its path so that the hiding and the restoration of the light did not take place in the same direction but rather in diametrically opposite directions. […] I was with you then. I was with you as we looked at everything, scrutinized everything, were amazed by everything.[51]

It has only recently become clear to scholars why the Pseudo-Dionysius wrote in the guise of the

[51] *The Complete Works of Pseudo-Dionysius*, 268-269.

Athenian judge. Charles M. Stang has persuasively established that "the entire CD needs to be read against the backdrop of Paul's speech to the Areopagus, whereupon it becomes clear that the author writes under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite to suggest that, following Paul, he will effect a new rapprochement between the wisdom of pagan Athens and the revelation of God in Christ."[52] Like Paul, the Pseudo-Dionysius seizes upon the reference in Acts to the altar "To the Unknown God" in order "to provide a template for absorbing and subordinating pagan wisdom." Stang further notes that Pseudo-Dionysius takes on the role of Paul's convert "precisely to make the point that the riches of Neoplatonism do not constitute 'foreign divinities' (17:18) ["strange gods," KJV] but rather an incipient faith."[53] Thus, in contrast to those who maintained that he was "no very great learned man," Pseudo-Dionysius sought to cultivate harmonious relations between various philosophical discourses and early Christian theology, all the while negotiating his own confessional identity across historical and biblical boundaries. What is more, his directive to outline "an incipient faith" provides the narrative backdrop and thematic focus of Crashaw's Epiphany Hymn.

While in Paris, Crashaw must have encountered a complete copy of the CD because in the Epiphany Hymn he shows familiarity with the passage on the eclipse. Dionysius' reference to the eclipse occurs solely in his seventh letter, and the *Letters* were only published in their entirety on the continent, and especially in Paris. While in England, it is possible that Crashaw encountered *The Divine Names* or *The Mystical Theology*, but it is highly unlikely that he had access to the *Letters* in any extant version. To understand how Crashaw engaged with this noteworthy passage of the CD, it is necessary to look at the Epiphany Hymn itself. The Epiphany, properly speaking, represents Christ's manifestation on earth to all mankind. Christ comes first as the Messiah to his people, and

[52] Charles M. Stang, "Dionysius, Paul and the Significance of the Pseudonym," *Modern Theology* 24.4 (2008), 541-542.
[53] Stang, 543.

subsequently to the Gentile nations of the world. The Magi, three magician-kings from the East, signify the world generally in their encounter with the Christ child. Furthermore, they betoken an older religious regime and for them the birth of Christ heralds a new spiritual order that supersedes all previous paradigms of religious observance. Deriving from the Greek word ἐπιφάνεια, which means "appearance," the "Epiphany" signals the new Light that radiates through the world to all people.

In his Epiphany Hymn, Crashaw uses the Magi as a chorus of voices that sing to the newborn. Early in the poem, they chant together:

(*Cho.*) Look vp, sweet Babe, look vp & see
For loue of Thee
Thus farr from home
The East is come
To seek her self in thy sweet Eyes
(1.) We, who strangely went astray,
Lost in a bright
Meridian night,
(2.) A Darkness made of too much day,
(3.) Becken'd from farr
By thy fair starr,
Lo at last haue found our way. (10-21)

The kings acknowledge their idolatrous past, which was characterized by heliolatry. The chorus is also a confession: the Magi are performing penance for their sin of sun-worship. What they perceived as light was in fact the darkness of false religion. Within this "Meridian night," the kings were blind to the true light of Christ. The voice of the chorus, here and throughout the poem, employs rich paradox to encapsulate the striking dialectical imagery of light and darkness. Paradox exists alongside the voices of the choral Magi who, in consistently replicating antitheses, redeem contrarieties through their vocal unity in praise of Christ.

Following the choric opening of the poem, Crashaw participates in what Stang identifies in Dionysius as the attempt to effect a rapprochement between Neoplatonic philosophy and the Gospel.

The poet, however, achieves this by layering precise linguistic descriptors of the young Christ. Instead of describing the nativity scene in concrete detail, Crashaw utilizes a highly abstract idiom to depict the newborn God:

> The Generall & indifferent Day.
> (1.) All-circling point. All centring sphear.
> The world's one, round, Eternal Year.
> (2.) Whose full & all-vnwrinkled face
> Nor sinks nor swells with time or place ;
> (3.) But euery where & eyery while
> Is One Consistent solid smile ;
> ……..
> (*Cho.*) O little all ! in they embrace
> The world lyes warm, & likes his place. (25-31; 36-37)

Unlike many other poems of the period that portray the Nativity and Epiphany, Crashaw's poem distinctly eschews precise details of the setting and physical circumstances of the natural world. More importantly, these lines establish for the reader that the reference to the Eclipse, and by extension Dionysius, at the end of the poem is not capricious. Rather, Crashaw establishes the cosmological framework of the poem early on, using astronomical terminology to describe Christ: "All-circling point. All centring sphear." This language operates philosophically, summoning connotations from Neoplatonic philosophy, and metaphorically, creating one of the dominant strands of imagery in the hymn. Crashaw relishes the paradox inherent in the notion that a small child, the incarnate Christ, envelops the cosmos. The abstract philosophical language allows Crashaw, as Wallerstein suggests, to rework a number of important motifs and images from his earlier poetry. A. R. Cirollo has demonstrated even further that Crashaw's language exhibits specific modifications of his earlier poems. The Epiphany Hymn, according to Cirollo, "working on simultaneous orders of meaning, prunes the more sensuous elements of earlier poems and joins the themes of light, advent, and harmony inherent in a Christian hymn into the conclusion of one cycle of liturgical and Christian time,

the cycle of the Incarnation."[54] In pruning the sensuous elements, Crashaw, I would hasten to add, does not eliminate the corporeal from his poetic vision but rather sharpens his description of the physical world by subsuming its dimensions into the reality of the Incarnation.[55] Crashaw, through the Magi, adumbrates here the rapprochement between the pagan world of thought and Christianity by explicitly turning away from eastern religious practices but implicitly acknowledging the value of pre-Christian philosophical thought by appropriating the language of that world.

The imagery of darkness and clouds that characterized Crashaw's letter from Leiden re-emerges in the Epiphany hymn with a similar effect:

> (3.) To Him, who by These mortall clouds has made
> Thy self our sun, though thing own shade.
> (1.) Farewell the world's false light.
> Farewell, the white
> Egypt ! a long farewell to thee
> Bright IDOL ; black idolatry.
> The dire face of inferior Darkness, kis't
> And courted in the pompous mask of a more specious mist.
> (46-53)

One of the main paradoxes of the poem is that the sun, which bestows so much light on the world, has been the object of pagan worship and thus of "black idolatry," a heterodox religious practice that clouds the mind. Crashaw maintains the dialectic of light and dark by referring to the light sands of Egypt ("white Egypt"). The imagery of light, as many critics have argued, allows Crashaw to maintain a heightened degree of paradox and contrast, tropes which are essential to the hymn. But the passage above marks the beginning of a more operative description: the process of turning away, or converting. Crashaw repeatedly uses the word "farewell" to signify that the Magi are turning away from their

[54] A. R. Cirillo, "Crashaw's 'Epiphany Hymn': The Dawn of Christian Time," *Studies in Philology* 67.1 (1970): 73.

[55] We may read this in line what Catherine Keller has very helpfully described as "the potential of the apophatic tradition to support the re-symbolization of materiality." Catherine Keller, "The Cloud of the Impossible: Embodiment and Apophasis," in *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller, eds, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 38.

previous religion of heliolatry and embracing Christianity. Relinquishing their past also amounts to finding their true identities, and these lines naturally harken back to the poem's opening choral voice: "The East is come / To seek her self in thy sweet Eyes" (13-14). The second Magus continues the renunciation by declaring, "Farewell, farewell / The proud & misplac't gates of hell" (54-55), to which the third Magus intones "Welcome, the world's sure Way ! / Heavn's wholsom ray" (60-61). The Magi collectively articulate a sentiment that is very similar to the one voiced in Crashaw's letter from Leiden: a resignation to turn away from the culture of idolatry and toward the worship of the true God.

The Epiphany Hymn is attuned to the spiritual implications of misplaced worship, and Crashaw's Magi harshly denounce idolatrous practices. Thus:

> (1.) The doating nations now no more
> Shall any day but Thine adore.
> (2.) Nor (much lesse) shall they leaue these eyes
> For cheap Egyptian Deityes.
> (3.) In whatsoe're more Sacred shape
> Of Ram, He-goat, or reuerend ape,
> Those beauteous rauishers opprest so sore
> The too-hard-tempted nations. (86-93)

Crashaw depicts idolatry as a temptation in all nations and thus frames it as a potentially universal problem to which Christ is the universal solution. By shunning the ancient regime of pagan deities and embracing the Incarnate Light, the Magi, and by implication all nations heir to Christianity's triumph, acknowledge that idols remain powerless to embody true divinity the way the Christ child does.

The hymn's long excursus on idolatry foregrounds the thematic emphasis on conversion. Critics who dwell on the poem's rich symbolism and liturgical motifs often overlook the central role that conversion plays in the narrative. In fact, there are three distinct moments of conversion within the Epiphany Hymn. The Magi are the most blatant converts, and they signal their turn in religion by

stating "Farewell" repeatedly. In addition, the sun itself, which Crashaw depicts as a pitiful penitent, undergoes a profound change from the object of pagan worship to the cosmological devotee of Christ's new light. Third, Dionysius toward the end of the poem represents both an actual biblical convert (cf. Acts 17:34) and the sixth-century pseudonymous author who, as we saw in his seventh letter, writes in the guise of the biblical persona.

The image of the sun is integral to the concept of conversion in the poem. The Magi describe the shameful star in the following manner:

> Forcing his sometimes eclips'd face to be
> A ling deliquium to the light of thee.
> (*Cho.*) Alas with how much heauyer shade
> The shamefac't lamp hung down his head
> For that one eclipse he made
> Then all those he suffered !
> ……
> (*Cho.*) Nor was't our deafness, but our sins, that thus
> Long made th'Harmonious orbes all mute to vs
> (1.) Time has a day in store
> When this so proudly poor
> And self-oppressed spark, that has so long
> By the loue-sick world bin made
> Not so much their sun as SHADE,
> Weary of this Glorious wrong
> From them & from himself flee
> For shelter to the shadow of thy TREE ; (116-121; 132-141)

The fundamental logic of the Epiphany Hymn lies in its intricate conflation of various historical periods and theological templates.[56] Here Crashaw describes the sun's shame for having been worshiped by pagans for so long. What is more, Crashaw has the Magi prophesy that the ultimate day

[56] Paul Parrish, *Richard Crashaw* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), has helpfully noted that this logic characterizes Crashaw's whole *oeuvre*: "[W]e see in Crashaw a unique fusion of various theological, aesthetic, and personal forces that result in a truly eclectic art, and in this his poetry is rightly associated with the changing historical and religious climate" (33). Walter R. Davis, "The Meditative Hymnody of Richard Crashaw," *ELH* 50.1 (1983): 107-129, has rightly commented that the Epiphany Hymn specifically "represents a complete blending of the liturgical and meditative modes, much more complete than in any of Crashaw's other poems" (119).

of redemption (and conversion) for the sun will be the day of Christ's crucifixion. Williams provides a helpful gloss for these lines: "At the time of the redeeming act, the dark, pagan sun will submit itself to the greater light of the supreme divinity shining down brilliantly in a protective shade of love from the cross."[57] Whereas the conversion of the Magi follows almost instantaneously upon their encounter with the newborn Christ, the sun must wait for the Crucifixion when he can finally turn away from the older regime of heliolatry. Until then, he remains a "shamefac't lamp" and "self-oppressed spark." When Christ is crucified, the sun, "Weary of this Glorious wrong" will turn both from the pagan world and from himself ("From them & from himself flee") toward the shadow of the cross: "For shelter to the shadow of thy TREE." An eclipse will mark the final conversion when the sun will voluntarily allow himself to be darkened in reverence and penance. By linking the sun's conversion to the cross, the poet telescopes the life of Christ in such a way that the Nativity and the Crucifixion coalesce. In doing this, Crashaw imbues the poem here with overt biblical resonances, alluding to Luke 23:44-45: "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst." In personifying the sun, Crashaw creates another persona who converts, and in echoing the scriptural analogue he signals to his readers that the "darkness over the earth is a light unto the Gentiles and from it all the world learns that truly this is the Son of God."[58]

The Magi and the sun collectively allow Crashaw to finally address conversion directly. After the Magi have converted and after the sun's eclipse has been foreseen, Crashaw writes:

> (3.) His [the sun's] new prodigious night,
> Their new & admirable light ;
> The supernaturall DAWN of Thy pure day.
> While wondering they
> (The *happy conuerts* now of him
> Whom they compell'd before to be their sin)
> Shall henceforth see
> To kiss him only as their rod

[57] Williams, 77-78.
[58] Williams, 78-79.

Whom they so long courted as God.
(173-181, emphasis added)

The prophecy of the eclipse transitions the poem to the actual moment of Christ's redeeming act and figuratively positions the reader at the cross. The reference to the "happy conuerts" is intended to evoke a number of issues for the reader. Crashaw arranges the narrative progression of the hymn to parallel actual moments from the New Testament as evidenced by his use of the Gospel of Luke. In addition, Crashaw subsumes the poem's imagery of darkness and the reference to Dionysius the Areopagite in Acts into a paean to the mystical *via negativa*. It is unclear whether Crashaw believed that the author of the CD was actually Paul's disciple, but it is everywhere apparent that he is directly channeling both the New Testament Dionysius and the author of CD in his reference to the "happy conuerts." Pseudo-Dionysius confesses, through a pious fiction, in his seventh letter that he converted to Christianity in part because he witnessed the miraculous eclipse during the crucifixion. That Crashaw was familiar with this letter is clear from his poetic rendering of this same story. According to Crashaw, (Pseudo) Dionysius, because of the supernatural nature of the eclipse, "Shall with a vigorous guesse inuade / And catche thy [i.e. the sun's] quick reflex" (193-194). The vigorous guess of the Areopagite's mystical theology foregrounds Crashaw's panegyric to the *via negativa*:

(1.) Thus shall that reuerend child of light
(2.) By being scholler first of that new night,
Come forth Great master of the mystick day ;
(3.) And teach obscure mankind a more close way
By the frugall negatiue light
Of a most wise & well-abused Night
To read more legible thine originall Ray,
(*Cho.*) And make our Darkness serue Thy day ;
Maintaining t'wixt thy world & ours
A commerce of contrary powers,
    A mutuall trade
    'Twixt sun & Shade,
By confederat Black & White
Borrowing day & lending night. (206-219)

Crashaw provocatively suggests that the eclipse both prompted Dionysius' conversion and

engendered his mystical theology.

The poem's highly wrought arrangement of metaphor, paradox, and imagery comes to a point in these lines. The Magi exclaim at the beginning of the hymn that they had been lost is a bright "Meridian night" until encountering Christ. The sun continues this mode of paradoxical imagery by fixating on its illusory brightness that darkened pagan minds through false worship. In the description of Dionysius, Crashaw expands this dynamic to encapsulate all of mankind: "And teach obscure mankind a more close way / By the frugall negatiue light." Crashaw maintains that Dionysius' mystical theology has a restorative force for the whole of creation. This suggestion, which has so perplexed and daunted critics, stands as the poem's culminating message. Why does Crashaw posit the *via negativa* as the hymn's triumphal proclamation?

We can begin answering this question by noting its conceptual relationship to idolatry and subsequently to poetic practice. The Magi and the Sun are both implicated in a false mode of religious worship. Crashaw uses the voice of the Magi to discern the deeply flawed emphasis on material objects in the cults of Egypt, Persia, and other eastern religions. These groups worship diverse animals and multiple deities, and concomitantly have their vision darkened by the "brightness" of the Sun, who serves as the supreme symbol and object of idolatry. The *via negativa*, by contrast, places much more emphasis on describing God through negations, holding that God is beyond being and therefore beyond finite mental or physical images.[59] In other words, mystical theology, as outlined by Pseudo-

[59] For an excellent study of the philosophical reasoning underlying Pseudo-Dionysius' mystical theology, see Eric Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). Perl notes that mystical theology is not based merely on the idea of ineffability: "Dionysius is not content to say simply that God is ineffable, unknowable, or incomprehensible. To say 'God is ineffable' is to describe him, to ascribe the attribute of ineffability to him, and thus to contradict oneself. … Ultimately, then, for Dionysius as for Plotinus, negative theology consists not in any words or thoughts whatsoever, however negative or superlative, but in the absolute silence of the mind. We must 'honor the hidden of the divinity, beyond intellect and reality, with unsearchable and sacred reverence of mind, and ineffable things with a sober silence' (*Divine Names* I.4, 592D)" (14). Perl's explication of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought provides a helpful

Dionysius, illuminates through its persistent refusal to ascribe ontological fixity to descriptions of God based on phenomena encountered through human perception. It is, therefore, the best safeguard against any form of idolatry, either corporeal or conceptual.[60] However, the most paradoxical facet of the poem is that mystical theology, while seemingly privileging silence and learned ignorance, engenders highly volatile figural language. This paradox has led Wallerstein and other critics to conclude, incorrectly as we will see, that Crashaw's reference to Dionysius "does not flower from the vision of the poem as a whole, but seems added to it."[61] We can rectify this misreading of Crashaw's Epiphany Hymn by understanding how substantially he understood the implications of mystical theology for poetic expression and devotional identity. The allusion stems organically from the poem's thematic emphases on illumination and obscurity, and the reader encounters the reference as a summation of the all motifs within the hymn.

As the poem's depiction makes clear, Crashaw understood that Dionysius flourished within the interstices of Greek Neoplatonic thought and emergent Christian theology. Dionysius' method, as Renaissance thinkers realized, entailed applying Aristotelian epistemology to the Platonic theory of ontology. Indeed, the epistemic-ontological relationship between knower and known generates the animating force of Dionysius' pioneering investigations into apophasis. Like his Neoplatonic forbears, Dionysius makes some important distinctions in how one uses language to negate or deny

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corrective to those critics [e.g. William R. Russell, "'Spell in wrong to read it right': Crashaw's Assessment of Human Language," *John Donne Journal* 28 (2009): 119-145.] who read Crashaw's later poetry as a sign that he was intensely animated by the idea of ineffability. As Perl makes clear, negative theology serves first and foremost as a devotional mode and not as a system of paradoxes to be explored linguistically. Given the Dionysian revival in early modern Europe, this would have been clear to devotees of Pseudo-Dionysius' mystical thought.

[60] As John Peter Kenney, "The Critical Value of Negative Theology," *The Harvard Theological Review* 86.4 (1993): 439-453, helpfully explains: "Negative theology establishes a spiritual disquietude which calls the soul forth into further and unceasing searches for the divine. It subverts our deep human tendency to settle for idols, reminding us that all theology can function properly only as an icon of the divine, leading the spiritual self into the immediacy of God" (441).

[61] *Op. cit.*, Wallerstein, 143.

characteristics of something. To this end, he appropriates (and differentiates between) two related terms: *aphairesis* (a taking away) and *apophasis* (negation).[62] The former signals a complex means of predication-removal (adopted here in taking away extraneous encumbrances from depictions of the divine, Dionysius uses Plotinus' metaphor of a sculptor releasing a statue from its marble deposit: MT 2).[63] Apophasis is a form of negation, but a unique version in Dionysius's handling of the term. It functions not merely as an unsaying (*apo-phasis*: away from speaking) but more intricately as a "speaking away."[64] As one scholar has concisely framed it, "apophatic predicates are excessive rather than privative"; while *aphaeresis* emphasizes "a transcendence of removal," *apophasis* avers "a transcendence of preeminence."[65] Thus, it is incomplete merely to insist that one cannot say anything of the divine. Precisely because the Absolute is no discrete thing (No-thing), everything can in some sense be exorbitantly predicated of it by dint of its sheer superfluity. This naturally leads to the theme of excess,

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[62] MT I.2. I follow conventional abbreviations of Dionysius' works: MT = *Mystical Theology*; DN = *Divine Names*; CH = *Celestial Hierarchy*; EH = *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*; EP = *Epistles*.

[63] As many scholars have noted, most recent translations of Dionysius are fundamentally flawed and constitute more paraphrases than genuine renderings. The scholarly habit as of late has been to defer to a much older translation, but one that is believed to represent more accurately the complexities of the original Greek (even if in more stilted language). English renderings are taken from *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, trans. John Parker, 1897, reprinted (Merrick, NY: Richwood Publishing Co., 1976).

[64] Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 17, very keenly draws attention to this semantic slippage but without direct reference to the theme of ecstasy as covered here.

[65] Timothy D. Knepper, "Not Not: The Method and Logic of Dionysian Negation," *ACPQ* 82.4 (2008): 620. The author correctly highlights the point that, since the ideas of ineffability and negation have become mainstays within several areas of scholarship, there has been a striking lack of attention to Dionysius' original distinction between these two terms. The larger significance of this point is that apophasis does not mean simply negation as such, but involves several other important nuances. Building on Sells' incisive methodology, Knepper's work flows out of a larger project which seeks to understand how Greek grammar functioned in ancient philosophical disputation. See more recently Knepper, *Negating Negation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock: 2014). I believe he provides a helpful overview of some of the complexities that I am addressing here: "The *apheiretic* removal of properties from God employs negative predicate-terms, which, as Dionysius says elsewhere, must be interpreted *apophatically*...*Aphairesis* and *Apophasis* therefore not only fit together but also require one another. *Apophasis* interprets that which *aphairesis* removes" (*Negating Negation*, 66).

which functions as a constitutive idea and an explanatory force within Dionysian apophasis.

Like Plotinus and Proclus, Dionysius is concerned throughout his writings with the proper human orientation to the ground of being. Thus, in *The Divine Names* he approaches "the All-luminous Light" to "contemplate things Divine, after this Union, not after ourselves, but by our whole selves, standing out of our whole selves." The whole person becomes complete in effect by going beyond itself to confront "the super-wise, and all-wise Cause" (DN 7.1).[66] This ecstatic event is integral to apophatic logic because it mirrors the Absolute's own excessive apprehension: "we must attribute to God, by excess—not by defect, just as we attribute the irrational to Him Who is above reason; and imperfection, to the Super-perfect, and Pre-perfect; and the impalpable, and invisible gloom, to the light which is inaccessible on account of excess of the visible light" (DN 7.2). As Dionysius makes clear, ineffability is the condition, not the description, of confronting one's existential state in relation to this superabundance: "by reason of excess of its Union surpassing all, it is neither permitted, nor attainable to any existing being, either to express or to understand" (DN 11.1). As the method of negation, apophasis cultivates excessive predication to stress the "super-luminous gloom of the silence" (MT 1.1).[67] But the effect of this apophatic denial is to generate certain inharmonious images which, "through dissimilar forms, fashioning them into entire unlikeness and incongruity" (CH 2.3),

[66] Though there is insufficient space to elaborate here, it is worth mentioning that Dionysius' underlying conception of causality is fundamentally Plotinian. Put woefully simplistically, causes and effects bear, for the entire Neoplatonic tradition, an ontological relation.

[67] The context of this phrase is worth pondering in full: "TRIAD supernal...direct us aright to the super-unknown and super-brilliant and highest summit of the mystic Oracles, where the simple and absolute and changeless mysteries of theology lie hidden within the super-luminous gloom of the silence, revealing hidden things, which in its deepest darkness shines above the most super-brilliant, and in the altogether impalpable and invisible, fills to overflowing the eyeless minds with glories of surpassing beauty. This then be my prayer; but thou, O dear Timothy, by thy persistent commerce with the mystic visions, leave behind both sensible perceptions and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence, and all things not being and being, and be raised aloft unknowingly to the union, as far as attainable, with Him Who is above every essence and knowledge. For by the resistless and absolute ecstasy in all purity, from thyself and all, thou wilt be carried on high, to the superessential ray of the Divine darkness, when thou hast cast away all, and become free from all" (MT 1.1).

maintain incomprehensibility. Nonetheless, apophasis derives its prime function for Dionysius from its ability to situate accurately that "super-mundane superiority over all" within the "incongruous dissimilarities" (CH 2.3) occasioned by its excessive predication. Hence, to say of the Absolute that it is infinite (an apophatic term) is not to suggest that the Absolute is "non-finite" but to say that it suffuses finitude in a superlative sense. We now see the importance of apophasis as a method for dealing with questions of epistemology and ontology (albeit with Neoplatonic premises) given that it serves to delineate the conditions of intelligibility as such. To represent (aesthetically, philosophically, or otherwise) aspects of the Absolute requires an excessive logic that adequately conveys its preeminent nature. There is, then, a conceptual homology between the excessive fullness of this absolute nature and the ecstatic personal state (the individual epistemic orientation) needed "to experience" or "account for" this excess.[68] This amounts to what René Roques terms "a symmetry of ecstasies."[69] Dionysius honed the idea of excess as fundamental to negation, and this point resonated deeply with Crashaw who identifies him as the "Great master of the mystick day."

CRASHAW'S MYSTICAL HERMENEUTICS

As already noted, many poems within Crashaw's corpus draw explicit attention to the process of reading and subsequent transformation through ecstatic experiences. As an author acutely sensitive to the effects of reading mystical literature, Crashaw must have been alert to how readers of this day would have reacted to his own compositions. The critical tendency, established over 50 years ago and still alive today, to read Crashaw's figurative language and mystical references as indicative of a certain poetics has generated many important close readings but no fully explanatory paradigm for

[68] Much more could be said here regarding the limitations of the term "experience" to encapsulate the "event" being outlined.

[69] "Symbolisme et théologie negative chez le Pseudo-Denys", *Bulletin de l'Association de Guillaume Bude*, 1 (1957), 112.

understanding the references within their seventeenth-century context.[70] Crashaw's culminating allusion to Dionysius in the Epiphany Hymn would have had an additional significance for his seventeenth-century readers that intensifies the importance of mystical theology. The 1648 edition of *Steps to the Temple*, where the Epiphany Hymn first appeared, was printed in London. Crashaw's friends and sympathizers would have been in a prime position to read the new poems of 1648 as noteworthy creations of a recent convert. As we have seen, already by 1646 the anonymous editor of the first edition of *Steps* was aware of Crashaw's change in ecclesiological association. How would his former associates likely have read the Epiphany Hymn knowing that he had converted to Roman Catholicism? More precisely, what would these readers have made of the allusion to Dionysius?

It is tempting to suggest that Crashaw's reference to Dionysius should be read against the backdrop of confessional conflict. This reading would propose that he aligned his theological vision with the Catholic new science of *mystics* that de Certeau outlines in his study of seventeenth-century mysticism. As de Certeau has shown, Dionysius was central to the growth and spread of early modern mystical thought, especially that of St. Teresa of Avila. Following Luther's devastating critique of Dionysian theology in the sixteenth century, which was echoed by English Protestants like John Sherman in the early 1640s, Dionysius came to be increasingly associated with the Counter Reformation spiritual revival of the Roman Church. Both Luther and Sherman had denounced Dionysius as an unlearned man. In the face of this, Crashaw's portrayal of the Areopagite as "scholler first of that new night" (207) in the Epiphany Hymn could possibly have struck a distinct religious cord with his English audience.

Given that many English radical Protestants, such as John Everard (1582-1640), were also willing to read the CD for their own theological projects, Crashaw's reference to Dionysius would not

[70] For a recent example, see N.K. Sugimura, " 'Divine Annihilations': Richard Crashaw's Religious Politics and the Poetics of Ecstasy," *Modern Philology* 112:4 (2015): 615-642.

likely have been viewed as a simple index of his confessional allegiance, though it did explicitly point to his understanding of mysticism's relationship to political European culture. Indeed, the Epiphany Hymn is dedicated specifically to Henrietta Maria herself. Crashaw writes in his dedicatory hymn to her that practitioners of mystical devotion such as Teresa and Dionysius occupy an integral place in the authoritative monarchical lineage of the Queen. In this respect, the Epiphany Hymn is perhaps more emblematic of Crashaw's royalist allegiance than any confessional one. As Rambuss has recently reminded us, "Rather than thinking Crashaw un-English, we might receive his verse—which lends itself so readily to presentation as either (or both) Anglican and Roman Catholic—as devotionally cosmopolitan."[71] Such cosmopolitanism was both a hallmark of Henrietta Maria's own courtly culture as well as emerging Baroque intellectual life. Crashaw's Epiphany Hymn is "devotionally cosmopolitan" also in its complex citations of figures (St. Paul and Dionysius) that would have been immediately discernable to a Christian humanist culture as charged with significance.

Marko Juvan's theory of intertextual citationality will help make this last point clearer.[72] For Juvan, a citational text is "one for which the reader can, in a given context of literary life, justifiably suppose its author intentionally acquired other pre-texts, counting on the public not only to be able to recognize citational connections but to interpret them as an aesthetically and semantically relevant writing strategy."[73] In the Epiphany Hymn, the primary citational texts are the Acts of the Apostles and the theological corpus of Dionysius. By acquiring the pre-text of Acts, and through his conflation of the two Dionysii, Crashaw ends his most carefully constructed poem with an allusion to one of the most significant converts in Christian history. Juvan's explanation of general intertextuality is a fitting heuristic to apply to Crashaw's heretofore-anomalous allusion to Dionysius:

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[71] Rambuss, *The English Poems of Richard Crashaw*, (2013), lxxv.
[72] Marko Juvan, *History and Poetics of Intertextuality*, trans. Timothy Pogačar (West Lafayette: Purdue University, 2008).
[73] Juvan, 154.

> An intertext is an unfinished and flexible multitude of texts, stylemes, phrases, images, clichés, etc. *that a reader* - to the extent command of the appropriate sociolect permits - *must recall when an intra-textual anomaly turns up in a literary work and must be deciphered*. By textual interpretation informed by semantic and stylistic deviations in the text's structure itself, and by latent intertextual guideposts, the reader arrives at what is the text's semantics on a higher level - the text's significance, and he also uncovers the context that retrospectively affords coherence to the texts and its irregularities.[74]

In contradistinction to Wallerstein and Warren, I maintain that Crashaw's reference to Dionysius "affords coherence" to the Epiphany Hymn as a whole and "uncovers the context" that explains its seeming irregularity. The dynamics at work in this mode of intertextuality call for a careful interpretive strategy that involves holding all pre-texts in mind while reading this particular literary specimen.[75] For Crashaw's readers, then as now, the "right-ey'd Areopagite" is an "intratextual anomaly" that must be correctly deciphered. In order to decipher its significance, it is essential to identify the prior textual patterns that are constitutive of the text. As Juvan explains, an "allusion indicates to the reader that he should take from a pre-text a cluster of meanings or connotations that fit the new context, though they are not explicit in the alluding expression itself."[76] Crashaw's intertextual usage of mystical theology would have been immediately discernable to many of his English readers, and we can reasonably conclude that he had acquired the Dionysian corpus as a pre-text. The Acts of the Apostles is also a pre-text that everyone in Crashaw's day would have known. Thus, when Crashaw takes advantage of the historical conflation between the Athenian judge mentioned in Acts 17:34 and the sixth-century writer, we can be sure that his audience would have read his allusion as a "latent intertextual guidepost" instrumental for understanding the significance of the Epiphany Hymn. What

[74] Juvan, 114 (emphasis added).
[75] Juvan continues: "When we encounter this kind of intertextuality we observe that a literary work functions not as an iteration or variation of intertext but, quite the opposite, calls our attention to its own otherness, derivativeness, and points to differences with models that it adopts and refers to. Thus pre-texts not only play the role of molds invisibly shaping the new textual world but themselves become objects of interest - intertextual representation referentializes and sometimes even thematizes them. The term pre-text supposes a prior pattern on which a later literary work is made" (153).
[76] Juvan, 178.

is more, a seventeenth-century audience would have recognized the hymn's "semantics on a higher level." This recognition would involve, most directly, reading the culmination of the Epiphany Hymn as a panegyric to a great convert written by a recent convert.

More importantly, the pre-texts behind the Epiphany Hymn also shed light on Crashaw's poetic experimentation and aesthetic sensibility. Crashaw should be regarded as a genuinely apophatic poet and not simply an exemplar of grotesque imagination.[77] As Dionysius' own mystical theology reveals, the effect of apophatic denial is to generate certain inharmonious images "through dissimilar forms, fashioning them into entire unlikeness and incongruity" (CH 2.3). The metaphysical importance of incongruity to apophatic thought inheres in the ability to free the individual from idolatrous and false conceptions of the Divine, thereby converting the mind away from overly fixed categories. In Crashaw's age, as de Certeau reminds us, older medieval forms of apophaticism were recalibrated in light of religious reform across Europe. Thus, the incongruities of apophatic speculation generated a new form of aesthetic experimentation commonly designated Baroque. As Niklaus Largier explains:

> Devoid of their liturgical and hermeneutical embeddedness and their institutional frame on one side, and from their political-eschatological meaning on the other, these texts and the mystical practices of prayer and contemplation turn into something new, namely, the basis for what we could call an experimental poetic mysticism that is explored in many forms from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Since it no longer has a place within an authorized hermeneutics, and since its subversive political and eschatological power has been neutralized through the distinction between secular and spiritual, the mystical tropes are thus set free to be used in a different realm, a realm I think we could call an experiential supplement to the spiritual freedom of the Christian. Luther himself does not explore this and, in fact, is highly critical of any use of mystical tropes to support and produce private mystical experiences that result from the reading of the scriptures. However, in extracting them from the realm of authoritative reading he also makes them available for a new use, *which in Baroque mysticism will take the form not of a hermeneutical practice but of a poetics of self-fashioning that is meant to bridge the abyss between the secular order of submission and the abstract freedom in faith*.[78]

[77] Cf. Shun-liang Chao, *Rethinking the Concept of the Grotesque: Crashaw, Baudelaire, Magritte* (London: Legenda, 2010).

[78] Niklaus Largier, "Mysticism, Modernity, and the Invention of Aesthetic Experience," *Representations* 105.1 (2009): 37-60, here at 48 (emphasis added). Largier helpfully explains (nuancing de Certeau), "in early modern times mystical tropes come to be increasingly projected into a new epistemological space.

By acquiring certain mystical pre-texts, Crashaw embarks upon a form of poetic self-fashioning that is consistent with Baroque mysticism but also *sui generis* in its ability read conversion in a metaphysical, and not just confessional, manner. Crashaw's many incongruous images indicate a robust conception of apophaticism that takes the evacuation of the self as something that must happen to every religious person, irrespective of institutional affiliations and changes.

What happens to our reading of Crashaw when we establish the heuristic of apophasis (excessive-predicative-negation) as a governing critical mode of hermeneutics? We are perhaps in a better position to appreciate that, to take one example, the poem "To the Name Above Every Name" (1648) manages to "Sing the Name which None can say" (1) by avoiding the name (i.e. Jesus) altogether.[79] What is more, the speaker of this apophatic poem manages to implore the soul, "Goe, Soul, out of thy Self, & seek for More" (27) in an ecstatic endeavor to speak the "vnbounded Name" (12), where "in the wealth of one Rich Word proclaim / New Similes to Nature" (95-96). Throughout the poem the speaker evades the nominal utterance precisely through those types of ostentatious metaphors and predications for which Crashaw is notorious. The poet obviously engaged Dionysius himself but more suggestively he was also receptive to the distinctive conception of negation as hyper-predication, which in turn became the governing aesthetical logic in much of his poetry. More proximate to Crashaw in space and time was the Baroque world of Angelus Silesius (1624-1677). While we cannot conjecture direct influence, it is worth highlighting that both poets were in Leiden at the

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This projection into an epistemology of experience transposes the mystical language from its medieval hermeneutical context [i.e. in relation to ecclesiastical structures] and makes it available to a series of transformations from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, finally leading to Heidegger's identification of the mystical with something that is 'before thinking'—which, one might want to add, is not at all what is intended in medieval discourses about the 'experiential knowledge of the divine" (39).

[79] L. C. Martin, ed., *The Poems, English, Latin and Greek, of Richard Crashaw* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

same time (mid-1640s). Silesius' closing epigram, "Friend, that's enough already. In case you would read more, / Go and become yourself the script, yourself the core" (VI.263),[80] bears remarkable similarity to Crashaw's oft-quoted lines from "The Flaming Heart" (1648): "Readers, be rul'd by me; and make / Here a well-plac't and wise mistake. / You must transpose the picture quite, / And spell it wrong to read it right" (7-10). Apophasis, as we have seen, can easily heighten tropological intensity, and Crashaw's poetry should more accurately be understood as working from within this discursive strategy. The exact nature of this poetic experimentation must be read through his citational connections, the most prominent of which is the one pointing toward the archetypal convert who taught Crashaw how "To read more legible" God's "originall Ray."

[80] See the very helpful introduction in Maria Shrady's translation of Silesius' poetry, published as *The Cherubinic Wanderer* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), from which the epigram is taken here.

CHAPTER V

No Shadow of Turning: Messianic Consciousness in Milton's *Paradise Regained*

> Therefore, if Moses spoke with God face to face as a man with his friend (that is, through the mediation of two bodies), Christ communicated with God *from mind to mind* [...]Undoubtedly, since God revealed himself to Christ or his soul directly and not, as with the prophets, via words and visions, we can draw no other conclusion than that Christ perceived or understood real things truly; *for something is understood when it is grasped by the mind alone without words or visions.*
>
> -Benedict de Spinoza

> In coming out of the water he is filled with the highest inspiration, and this prevents him from remaining in the world and drives him into the wilderness. At that point *the working of his spirit had not yet detached itself from the consciousness of everyday affairs*. To this detachment he was fully awakened only after forty days, and thereafter he enters the world with confidence but in firm opposition to it.
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> -G. W. F. Hegel[1]

INTRODUCTION

The rather surprising words of Spinoza testify to the conceptual significance of the figure of Christ in seventeenth-century intellectual history. Decades of internecine religious strife as well as a slew of failed millenarian movements following national wars provided ample reasons for re-thinking and re-visioning messianic power. The accounts of the messiah in the New Testament, as Carlos Fraenkel has richly demonstrated, generated a new impetus among humanists as well as philosophers to examine the figure of Christ in multiple contexts: the first century, the seventeenth century, and beyond. According to Fraenkel, Spinoza was convinced that, "As a historical religion, Christianity is not only a universal religion of reason taught by Christ *more geometrico*. It also is a

[1]Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19 and 64; G. W. F. Hegel, *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 276. Emphases added.

pedagogical-political program that includes laws, parables, and ceremonies through which Christ and the Apostles adapted the prescriptions of reason to the imagination of non-philosophers in their time."[2] In comparing Moses to Christ in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), Spinoza daringly gives expression to an innovative conception of the "Son of God" even as he systematically undermines the authority of scriptural texts as they had been traditionally conceived by Jewish and Christian believers.[3] What Spinoza underscores, and what Hegel subsequently develops in his early writings, is the profound idiosyncrasy of the New Testament accounts of the psyche of Christ. Such narratives dramatize intricate modes of consciousness that were, so these philosophers believed, as psychologically revolutionary as they were politically.

As the pioneering studies of Sanford Budick and Cecilia Muratori have recently demonstrated, the theological innovations of the seventeenth century can genuinely be credited with inspiring the most profound advancements in modern philosophical and cultural speculation.[4] We can now properly identify, for instance, how figures such as Jakob Böehme (1575-1624)[5] and John Milton (1608-1674) helped catalyze striking advancements in later German Idealism as well as in Romantic theories of aesthetics. For thinkers such as Kant and Hegel, early modernity was the necessary precursor to the greater elucidation of metaphysics that would be fully realizable in the modern age only after the new paradigms of the seventeenth century were developed and refined. In

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[2] Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 269. Fraenkel argues that Spinoza did not make such comments to gain Protestant allies, for much of what Spinoza states would have been demonstrably sacrilegious to believers. Spinoza framed the figure of Christ as a pedagogue and archetype of wisdom, not as a deity or messiah.

[3] See also Wiep van Bunge, *Spinoza Past and Present: Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism, and Spinoza Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), esp. chapter five, "The Idea of Religious Imposture," 67-85, for more on Spinoza's fascination with the historical figure of Christ.

[4] See Sanford Budick, *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2010), esp. 253-300; and Cecilia Muratori, *The First German Philosopher: The Mysticism of Jakob Böhme as Interpreted by Hegel* trans. Richard Dixon and Raphaëlle Burns (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016), esp. 133-200.

[5] Most of Böehme's writings were published in the seventeenth century.

effect, they went backward historically in order to move forward speculatively, and it was the poetic visions of the seventeenth century that proved especially generative of new insights for the questions of subjectivity and epistemology.

These points are worth bearing in mind given the relatively pervasive conventions of historicist interpretations of early modern literature, especially in the world of Milton scholarship. *Paradise Regained* (1671), a poem of profound originality and subdued complexity, has for decades been read in an irredeemably contextualist manner. The trend, which follows scholars such as Christopher Hill and David Loewenstein,[6] locates Milton's late poem within the milieu of Restoration politics when the senescent poet supposedly attempted to process intellectually his role as a failed revolutionary. In this mode of reading, Milton's Messiah is either a rejoinder to some of his radical co-religionists who endorsed a pernicious and unsustainable form of enthusiasm or is, as John X. Evans has suggested, a distillation of Milton's own mindset as an intellectual martyr for the true cause of religious liberty.[7]

Such approaches to the poem have the merit of emphasizing Milton's continued interest in contemporary affairs, but the unfortunate side-effect of inoculating the modern reader against *Paradise Regained*'s broader psychological drama and universal purview. By telescoping Milton's life in terms of his political fixations, recent criticism of the later poetry has established as axiomatic that the true import of the poem lies in the circumstances of its composition, especially since no higher interpretation appears discernable from its plainness of style and simplicity of narrative action. Part of the problem stems from the fact that Milton's late poem is dwarfed by the monumental achievement of *Paradise Lost.* As Samuel Johnson noted: "The basis of *Paradise Regained* is narrow; a

[6] See Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), and David Loewenstein's study *Representing Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries: Religion, Politics, and Polemics in Radical Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[7] John X. Evans, "The Imitation of Self: Milton and the Christ of *Paradise Regained*" *Religion and the Arts* 7:4 (2003): 439–463.

dialogue without action can never please like an union of the narrative and dramatic powers. Had this poem been written, not by Milton but by some imitator, it would have claimed and received universal praise."[8] The baroque majesty of Milton's characters in *Paradise Lost* has long predisposed readers to find the Satan and Christ of *Paradise Regained* disappointing. This critical malady was also diagnosed in the Romantic age when Coleridge described *Paradise Regained* so very perceptively: "Readers would not have been disappointed in this latter poem, if they had proceeded to it with a proper preconception of *the kind of interest intended to be excited* in that admirable work. In its kind, it is the most perfect poem extant."[9] If the latter point rang true in the intellectual age following Kant, critical conventions today have read *Paradise Regained* as poetic perfection lost.

Even when we eschew the historicist methodology, as Noam Reisner does so successfully in his study *Milton and the Ineffable*,[10] we are still left with the distinct reality that as a poem, *Paradise Regained* is itself a sort of mystery whose exoteric features stand in need of careful elucidation. To understand fully Milton's preoccupations in this poem, we need to venture beyond the overly schematic understanding of the Messiah's three temptations (priestly, prophetic, and monarchical) in the narrative progression and the subsequent critical need to plot these points within the coordinates of Restoration politics and Reformation theology (heretical or orthodox).[11] In what follows, it will become clear that this persistent need to locate meaning in terms of historicity is exactly the mode of reading that the poem works to undermine. Indeed, such a critical prerogative re-inscribes the same

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[8] Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson in Two Volumes* (New York: George Dearborn, 1837), 45.

[9] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets* (London: Chiswick Press, 1893), 527 with emphasis added.

[10] Noam Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): "Although I frame the problem of ineffability in broadly speaking historical terms of Renaissance and Reformation, my subsequent critical approach to Milton's poetry is not in the least historicist" (10).

[11] See Michael Lieb, *Theological Milton: Deity, Discourse, and Heresy in the Miltonic Canon* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 88. Cf. Michael E. Bryson, *The Atheist Milton* (London: Routledge, 2012), 109-134.

limited scope of vision that Milton's Messiah imputes to the figure of Satan. Like Spinoza's interpretation of Christ in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Milton's poetic incarnation of the Son is completely *sui generis*. Moreover, both Spinoza and Milton achieved their radical visions through heterodox and iconoclastic speculation.[12]

Similarly to Spinoza and Hegel, Milton accentuates the mental world of Christ as key to understanding his mission. The manner in which the poem achieves this radical emphasis on interiority has led many scholars to correlate the Messiah's psychological adventure with several forms of radical enthusiasm endemic to Milton's England. Indeed, Jeffrey Shoulson has helpfully suggested that *Paradise Regained* signals the importance of both conversion and enthusiasm in the public English imagination, and reads Milton's "brief epic" as a literary embodiment of "the poet's struggle with the nature of radical religion and messianism in Restoration England."[13] Like Reisner's apophatic reading of the poem, Shoulson's interpretation generates new appreciations while remaining tantalizingly incomplete. As the two most noteworthy recent readers of *Paradise Regained*, Reisner and Shoulson commendably draw attention to the importance of both mysticism and conversion for a complete appreciation of the poem. But the prevailing tendency to correlate mysticism and conversion with the dominant forms of radical religion in seventeenth-century England has failed to appreciate the dynamism of Milton's Messiah as a figure embodying a revolutionary form of religious consciousness. The psychological portraiture of Christ in *Paradise Regained* does not so much abide by the categories of Milton's day as resist and transcend them.

This chapter will argue that the vectors of mysticism and conversion in *Paradise Regained* converge on the problem of religious consciousness as dramatized in the figure of Christ. Whereas

[12] We may note the proximity of publication dates between the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (first published anonymously in 1670) and *Paradise Regained* (1671).
[13] Jeffrey Shoulson, *Fictions of Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Cultures of Change in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 154.

both Reisner and Shoulson maintain that these themes are explicable in terms of the religious radicalism that appeared so threateningly destabilizing to England in the 1660s and 1670s, I suggest that the poem actively resists this move. It resists such a reading by incarnating a Messiah who unites multiple concerns in a single consciousness: revelation, identity, and the experience of God. While these issues can indeed be mapped onto the cultural frameworks of late seventeenth-century England, this chapter maintains that *the kind of interest intended to be excited* (to use Coleridge's helpful phrase) by the poem is a mode of conscious reflection that refuses to be transcribed into the categories of religious and political change. For Milton, this subtly complex form of consciousness achieves two revolutionary insights. Firstly, *Paradise Regained* constitutes a remarkable Christological achievement in eschewing definitive categories pertaining to the ontological and divine status of Christ, thus providing a poetic statement more nuanced than even Milton's heretical stance in *De Doctrina Christiana*. Secondly and relatedly, in refusing to be converted into various ontological and political categories, the Messiah of *Paradise Regained* provides a paradigmatic case of mystical experience which achieves the immediacy of union with the divine through a refusal to claim solipsistic ownership of the self. It is through these two realizations that Milton is able to provide a fitting reclamation of Paradise that truly is, *pace* Johnson, an intricate union of "narrative and dramatic powers."

THE MYSTERY OF IDENTITY

It is a commonplace among scholars to note the complexity and mystery of the Messiah's identity as it is dramatized in the poem.[14] From these conventional readings, it emerges that the two most important preoccupations in the poem seemingly concern the prospects of divine subjectivity and indubitable revelation, and in the end the two appear inextricably linked for Milton. *Paradise Regained*

[14] See, for example, John Savoie, "The Point of the Pinnacle: Son and Scripture in *Paradise Regained*" *English Literary Renaissance* 34.1 (2004): 83-124.

dramatizes the impossibility of *mere* revelation, understood as fixed, evident, and perspicuous meaning. What is more, it depicts Satan as fallen precisely because he demands demonstrable revelations from Christ while hubristically presuming that his own consciousness (self-regard) is always transparent to itself, free to interpret and to master itself as well as reality by force. For Milton, revelation as well as divine identity admit no discrete and circumscribable significance. This last point was as important for the poet regarding the question of the Godhead as it was for the question of the individual person.[15] Many scholarly readings of the poem have correctly identified its participation in a form of apophatic theology, but the emphasis on unknowability and ineffability should be understood in relation to the poem's interrogation of human and divine consciousness. For a speculative poet like Milton, the apophatic approach was a useful though ultimately incomplete stratagem of scholastic theology. *Pace* Reisner, Milton understood that one's attempt to say what the Divine is *not* (i.e. the *via negativa*) depends almost entirely on how the Divine has communicated, repeatedly through his Word, what divinity truly *is*. This necessarily entailed more refined conceptions of consciousness and revelation than either negative theology or Protestant orthodoxy afforded by themselves.

The itinerary of the Son in *Paradise Regained* is at once ecstatic and interiorizing: his venture beyond his life of the Jordan River valley into the Judean desert constitutes both a journey outside his world as well as a descent into himself. This paradoxical directional orientation is, as will be made clear, consistent with the poem's destabilizing logic. Several scholars have attempted to read Milton's Messiah through the lens of seventeenth-century English enthusiasm, but the reading that follows charts a path beyond the radical Protestantism of Milton's day. The hermeneutical implications of *Paradise Regained* exceed such an attenuated time frame to suggest something much more universally

[15] Cf. Joan S. Bennett*, Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 161-202.

profound about the nature the self and its orientation toward apocalyptic apprehension.[16] In this, Milton even supersedes Augustine's revolutionary equation of ascent with interior reflection, and he achieves this through a poetic reformulation of divine exposition. The poetic depiction of the Messiah's experience in the desert wilderness represents a confrontation with the inherent problems of revelation and subsequent pretensions to possess such revelation in one's own self-understanding.

To understand how the poem establishes these concerns, we must venture beyond the hermeneutical temptation to posit either a literal or figurative understanding of the narrative action.[17] The apparently ecstatic journey outward into the desert corresponds to the Son's interior descent into his own mind, and the ensuing drama of successive refinements to his self-reflexivity culminate in the final epiphany to Satan. The resulting unfolding of this process to the reader via Milton's poetic expression constitutes the ultimate testament to speculative revelation: the "glorious Eremite" (I.8) receives the ineffable "testimony of Heaven" (I.78) by divesting himself of absolute consciousness and achieving a "fairer Paradise" (IV.613). *Paradise Regained* sets up this evolution through stages of psychology corresponding to a progression of specific temptations: the prospect of sensuous indulgence; the potential of exerting physical control over a domain (thus creating a violent disposition of the subjective mind over objective aspects of reality) through wealth and military power; the prospect of, seemingly, achieving some measure of deeper self-awareness

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[16] ἀποκάλυψις in Greek, as Milton well knew, means "revelation" (an uncovering, a disclosure of hidden truth). Cf. William Franke, *Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009): "…the self-reflexivity inherent in the divine as well as in human nature shows itself to be conducive to the human possibility of apprehending the divine, particularly to the aesthetic expression of divinity in the form of poetry" (102-103).

[17] On the question of allegory in *Paradise Regained*, see Barbara Lewalski, "Theme and Structure in *Paradise Regained*" *Studies in Philology* 57.2 (1960): 186-220, who suggests that the "quasi-allegory" of the poem "incorporates the whole Christian theology of redemption" (189). See also Merritt Hughes' introduction to the poem in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Selected Prose* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), "his [Jesus'] resistance of Satan in the wilderness is seen as symbolic of the potentially universal human experience of retrieving all that mankind had lost through Adam's disobedience" (473). All references to Milton's poetry are to this edition.

through the conceptual refinement of classical poetry and philosophy; and finally the temptation to degrade his own revelatory nature by declaring a priestly voice. None of these afford the genuine possibility of self-reflexive existence that the Messiah is called to embody through obedience. Milton portrays the Son as the mirror of the infinite and unknowable Father, and to achieve the poetic dramatization of this paradox he makes the Messiah a more radical enthusiast than even historicist critics maintain.

Still, the question of the Son's identity in *Paradise Regained* continues to be a challenging interpretative problem. Toward the end of *Paradise Lost*, we are told that while Moses would come to serve an important providential function in human history, the true restoration of humanity would be effected by a superior figure:

> But Joshua whom the Gentiles *Jesus* call,
> His Name and Office bearing, who shall quell
> The adversary Serpent, and bring back
> Through the world's wilderness long wander'd man
> Safe to eternal Paradise of rest. (XII.310-314)

The reference to "the world's wilderness" (313) suggests that Milton's first epic poem operates in a cosmic register beyond the localities of time and place, and moreover already betokens the salvific adventure of the Messiah in the desert wilderness. This mode of reading commends itself as well in the opening sequences of *Paradise Regained*, though perhaps along a different trajectory. Whereas in the first long poem Milton narrates the cosmic event that precipitates a fall into the vicissitudes of history, the latter poem locates Jesus in the particular context of first-century Judea before depicting his odyssey in the desert where all historical contingency fades into amorphous psychological experience. Book I proceeds according to the logic of identity and recognition, as evidenced in the narrative progression transpiring between the Father's recognition of the Son at the baptism and Son's recognition of Satan in disguise at the end of the book.

Milton promptly frames the question of identity and recognition as relative to the possibility of revelation: the narrator endeavors

> to tell of deeds
> Above heroic, though in secret done,
> And unrecorded left through many an age:
> Worthy to have not remained so long unsung (I.14-17).

The issue quickly emerges as to whether this poet (like Dante before him) is presuming that his poetry can function as revelation itself. In reality, these lines bespeak a desire to attest to something more profoundly revealing, which in this case is precisely the Son's unique epistemic orientation to the Divine. The Messiah emerges "obscure, / Unmarked, unknown" (I.24-25). When we read these references alongside the narrator's point that the story has "remained so long unsung," we are forced to consider the idea that the biblical account on which the poem is based is not self-interpreting. The text of Luke 4:1-11 (and its corresponding temptation sequence in Matthew 4) has been available to readers throughout the ages, and the yet there is a subtle suggestion in Book I that the full import of the Messiah's experiences in the wilderness has not been completely appreciated for its heroic, indeed cosmic, significance. The biblical account is, after all, rather opaque in its specific details of the wilderness experience, and Milton's poetic voice thus necessarily becomes revelatory in itself.

That the actual events of the Messiah's life can be misinterpreted is clear enough from the reaction of Satan. Satan views the Father's voice at the baptism somewhat accurately as a clear signal that the "Destined" (I.65) time has arrived when the freedom of the fallen angels will be diminished. Indeed, when narrating the events on the Jordan to his fellow spiritual rebels, Satan claims, "A perfect Dove descend (whate'er it meant); / And out of Heav'n the Sovran voice I heard" (I.83-84). Satan's understanding of the actual events that occur proves to be a mixture of pessimistic expectation and troubling misrecognition. He cannot discern the full meaning, if such a conception

is even possible, of the Dove descending upon the Son. This moment, which is understood by the faithful as conferring divine legitimacy to the Messiah's life, escapes the realization of demonic forces which view the proclamation as mystifying. Indeed, for Satan, the sign of divine revelation is simply an abstruse token of the "obscure, / Unmarked, unknown" Son.

The perplexity over the narrative's purpose reverberates even into modern criticism. According to Reisner, "Milton could have chosen any episode from the gospel accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as an appropriate theme for a brief epic about the regaining of Paradise."[18] This echoes a point made by Regina Schwartz: "Milton offers no active mission for his Savior, no positive definition of salvation. Only negations."[19] Both scholars go on to analyze the poem with the resources of negative theology and details from Milton's biography, but their dual intimation that there is something either indiscriminate or politically motivated in Milton's re-narration of the wilderness temptation almost repeats Satan's own incomprehension: "whate'er it meant." The life of the unknown Son appears woefully opaque and frustratingly impervious to deeper interpretation. What ultimately does it mean? Are we left only with negations?

We would do well to appreciate the fact that Milton was not the first to discern the reclaiming of Paradise in the wilderness scene. Indeed, the second-century theologian Irenaeus (130 – 202 C.E.) writes in his work *Adversus Haereses* (V.21.2):

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[18] Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable*, 237. He continues: "His choice to focus on the synoptic temptation narratives…allowed him…to rewrite the quintessential Christian narrative of a single individual's conflict with the satanic forces of the temporal world arrayed against his efforts to secure salvation. The choice of subject arguably reflects Milton's intellectual state of mind at the time of writing the poem." It will become evident why the latter point has limited interpretive value.

[19] Regina Schwartz, "Redemption and *Paradise Regained*" *Milton Studies* 42 (2003): 26-49, here at 44-45: "Private renunciation of the wrong options, more than the public activity of preaching and miracle working, more, perhaps, than even the suffering of Jesus, regains Paradise for mankind. And Milton expresses this, not coincidentally, at the end of his own public career, transvaluing what may look like political impotence during the restoration of a monarchy he fought to destroy into something far more heroic: refusal."

> For as at the beginning it was by means of food that the enemy persuaded man, although not suffering hunger, to transgress God's commandments, so in the end he did not succeed in persuading Him that was an hungered to take that food which proceeded from God. For, when tempting Him, he said, 'If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.' But the Lord repulsed him by the commandment of the law, saying, 'It is written, Man doth not live by bread alone.' As to those words [of His enemy,] "If thou be the Son of God," **the Lord made no remark**; **but by thus acknowledging His human nature He baffled His adversary**, and exhausted the force of his first attack by means of His Father's word. **The corruption of man, therefore, which occurred in paradise by both of our first parents eating, was done away with by the Lord's want of food in this world**.[20]

The point of citing this analogue at length is not to suggest that Irenaeus should be used as the great the master-key for unlocking the meaning of *Paradise Regained*, but rather to propose that both writers are clearly seeing something noteworthy in the biblical account that seems to have escaped the attention of modern literary critics.[21] Milton's brief epic does not refer to the conventional theories of atonement that involve crucifixion and resurrection, and many readers have failed to understand the reasoning behind Irenaeus' and Milton's fascination with the desert wilderness. I would suggest that the main concept that has been missed is the issue of identity. When Irenaeus writers, "the Lord made no remark; but by thus acknowledging His human nature He baffled His adversary," he underscores a point that is given dramatic expression by Milton. It is precisely the Son's consummate unwillingness to identify himself as anything other than who he is, a singularly worthy consciousness dispossessed of any power. In Book I the Father proclaims, "His weakness

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[20] A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., 'Irenaeus against Heresies', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1* (Peabody, M.A.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004). The Latin of the last quoted line, which is especially relevant for my purposes here, is: "Quæ ergo fuit in Paradiso repletio hominis per duplicem gustationem, dissoluta est per eam, quæ fuit in hoc mundo, indigentiam."

[21] I am not aware of any modern critical appraisal of *Paradise Regained* that draws attention to this passage from Irenaeus. Even Schwartz, *op. cit.*, misses this, even though she cites the second book of Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* throughout her article. In any case, when it comes to an idiosyncratic thinker like Milton a likeness in vocabulary or ideas is not proof of unanimity in doctrine. In *Areopagitica*, Milton writes, "Who finds not that Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Jerome, and others discover more heresies than they well confute, and that oft for heresy which is the truer opinion?" (Hughes, 729).

shall o'ercome Satanic strength" (161). Thus, it is not the case (as Reisner suggests) that any chapter of the biblical narrative would suffice to encapsulate the accomplishment of a regained Paradise, nor is it accurate, following Schwarz, to discern only negations and refusals in the Messiah's actions. The story itself is meant to defy comprehension precisely because it escapes the psychological categories of volition and assent (affirmation/negation; acceptance/refusal; activity/passivity).

Following the discourse between the Father and the angels, it is noted that "The Father knows the Son" (I.176). Here we begin to appreciate Milton's larger metaphysical and psychological concerns. It is the function of the Son throughout *Paradise Regained* to be a testimony (*testimonium*, i.e. witness) to the Absolute, but without claiming to do so through the totalizing force of what I am terming absolute consciousness. What distinguishes the latter is a pretension to absolute control and self-possessed individuality. The Son "frustrates" these "stratagems of Hell" (I.180) by abjuring such a pernicious individuality, and he accomplishes this through a heightened self-reflexivity that abstains from either affirmation or negation.[22] There is a profound, albeit subtly nuanced, distinction between refusal and abstention. In abstaining from godlike action he tacitly acknowledges his own humanity, which then creates the possibility of transcending it and, in the words of Irenaeus, baffling his Adversary.

The venture into the wilderness is synchronous with the Son's journey inward. "Meanwhile the Son of God":

> who yet some days
> Lodged in Bethabara, where John baptized,
> Musing and much revolving in his breast
> How best the mighty work he might begin
> Of Savior to mankind, and which way first
> Publish his godlike office now mature,
> One day forth walked alone, the Spirit leading
> And his deep thoughts, *the better to converse*

[22] Schwarz's suggestion that the Son's main mode is "refusal" (similar to Milton's later political orientation) still contains, I would argue, the residue of voluntarism: willing not to do something.

With solitude, till, far from track of men,
Thought following thought, and step by step led on,
He entered now the bordering Desert wild,
And, with dark shades and rocks environed round,
His holy meditations thus pursued:—
"O what a multitude of thoughts at once
Awakened in me swarm, while I consider
What from within I feel myself, and hear
What from without comes often to my ears,
Ill sorting with my present state compared!"
(I.183-200 [emphasis added])

In conversing with solitude the Messiah eschews the multitudinous thoughts and perspectives that threaten to misidentify him and which find later expression as "the dizzy multitude" (II.420) and "Cities of men, or headstrong multitudes" (II.470) of Satan's material temptations. Milton's Son has been primed, through careful study as we are told, to actualize his potential as the chosen revelation of the Absolute. In his youth he was still susceptible to deliberations about possibly delivering his people ("To rescue Israel from the Roman yoke" [I.217]) from bondage, but finds through his own reflections a means to "make persuasion do the work of fear" (I.223). His life becomes persuasive in effect because his own self-reflection, his own interiority, does not become Satanic in its presumptions to control and claims of independent authenticity. The importance of persuasion, as opposed to forceful coercion, will become apparent in what follows.

Milton's Messiah endeavors to reflect upon his inexpressible chosen nature in the desert away from the communal world of his formative years. In contradistinction to Satan, whose epiphany of his own distinctness (i.e. willful self-understanding) disturbs both heaven and Eden (cf. *Paradise Lost* V), the Jesus of *Paradise Regained* tranquilly recedes into himself which becomes no-absolute-self. The result is not a simplistic notion of ecstasy (going outside oneself), but sober interiority. It is a scholarly commonplace that Milton's savior dramatically renounces any form of messianic militancy. Less well elucidated is the Messiah's equally trenchant renunciation of indiscriminate inspiration. Conversing with solitude, while not making his divine mission manifest,

this Messiah overcomes his own obscurity (cf. I.287) precisely through his triumphant resistance to what Henry More called the "misconceit of being inspired": "to what intent / I learn not yet. Perhaps I need not know; / For what concerns my knowledge God reveals" (I.291-293). [23] Hiddenness here apparently functions to relinquish control, not to foster it as it does in the case of Satan's later personages.

While the surface setting of Milton's poem is the wilderness desert, the true landscape of the narrative is the mind. When the Son enters the "pathless desert" (I.296), the reader is told that whether such a location involves actual hills, vales, oaks, cedars, or caves "is not revealed" (cf. I.303-307). This subtle aside on the part of the narrator sets the scene for the arrival of Satan in disguise as "an aged man in rural weeds" (I.314). Like the very nature of Satan's first presentation, the reader is not to take literal descriptions as pellucid meanings. In this guise Satan tempts the Messiah first by enjoining him to transmute stones into bread, to which the Son responds: "Why dost thou, then, suggest to me to distrust / Knowing who I am, as I know who thou art?" (I.355-356). Importantly, the Messiah does not say that Satan recognizes the Son, for that full epiphanic moment is deferred until the climax of Book IV. Instead, he asks the old man (i.e. Satan) why he entertains the possibility that the Son does not know himself. The Son recognizes Satan ("the Arch-Fiend, now undisguised" [I.357]) but the latter continues his misprision from earlier by not understanding the true self-reflexivity of the Messiah.

As we saw in the passage above, Milton shares with Irenaeus a preoccupation with the wilderness experience (which is not necessarily to suggest that they agree on the meaning of the event), and explicitly with the temptation to turn stones into food. As Irenaeus remarks, "The corruption of man, therefore, which occurred in paradise by both of our first parents eating, was

[23] Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, or a Discourse of the Nature, Causes, Kinds, and Cure of Enthusiasme; written by Philophilus Parrasiastes, and prefixed to Alazonomastix his Observations and Reply* (London: 1656), 2.

done away with by the Lord's want of food in this world." The import of the Messiah's abstention remains difficult to understand, even when we attempt to locate Milton's poem within the more proximate boundaries of Reformed thought. John Calvin (1509-1564), in his *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, describes the mindset of Satan in the following manner: "Now, though he holds out the divine power of Christ to turn the stones into loaves, yet the single object which he has in view, is to persuade Christ to depart from the word of God, and to follow the dictates of infidelity." Additionally, Calvin paraphrases the thoughts of Christ in the following way: "You advise me to contrive some remedy, for obtaining relief in a different manner from what God permits. *This would be to distrust God*; and I have no reason to expect that he will support me in a different manner from what he has promised in his word."[24] *Prima facie*, Milton would seem to follow Calvin's interpretation, for in *Paradise Regained* Christ comments, "Why dost thou, then, suggest to me to distrust" (I.355), which is seemingly evocative of Calvin's theological gloss. However, whereas Calvin empathizes solely Christ's trust in God, Milton adds the equally complex phrase "Knowing who I am" (I.356) after the reference just cited to bring the issue to bear on the identity of the Messiah. Thus, Milton heightens the importance of the Messiah's consciousness as a prospective agent of control.

Book I makes clear that what is properly viewed as a mystery can easily be transformed into a mystification. Such a process runs parallel to the first temptation, which beckons the Son to express his nature by altering physical reality. This is tantamount, Milton makes clear, to a delusional psychology:

> "…what but dark,
> Ambiguous, and with double sense deluding,
> Which they who asked have seldom understood,
> And, not well understood, as good not known?" (I.434-437)

[24] John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), here at 213 and 214 with emphasis added.

The narrative proposes that the greater temptation is indeed to misrecognize what the "unknown" Son represents. The full scope of this insight in ultimately mental and spiritual, as the Messiah explains:

> "God hath now sent his living Oracle
> Into the world to teach his final will,
> And sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell
> In pious hearts, an inward oracle
> To all truth requisite for men to know." (I.460-464).

Book I ends by establishing the point that the problem and mystery of the Son's identity is inextricably tied to his own self-reflexivity, and it further suggests that all are susceptible to misreading the divine Logos and indeed the poem itself. More profound still is the point that the Son's own reflexivity will come to engender similar modes of self-reflexivity in "pious hearts." The Son's willful abstention from accepting the form and identification of God (i.e. using godlike powers), as we shall see, constitutes the antidote to Adam's false belief that he could become like God by eating the fruit. While some take the preternatural obedience of the Messiah as something puritanically cold,[25] aesthetically it forms a chiasmus with Satan's and Adam's disobedience and their pretensions to absolute consciousness.

THE CRITERIA OF RECOGNITION

The drama of genuine versus failed recognition which forms the narrative thrust of Book I assumes a new valence in Book II, which begins with the disciples and Mary reflecting on the absence of the Messiah in light of the revelatory experience in the Jordan. Milton's poem directs the reader to

[25] Alan Fisher, "Why is *Paradise Regained* So Cold?" *Milton Studies* 12 (1980): 195-217. Cf. Reisner, *op. cit.*: "The coldness of the poem serves a clear didactic purpose, but there is simply not enough inexpressible darkness in the *poetry* of *Paradise Regained* against which to appreciate the brilliance of Milton's art" (254-255).

consider another psychological force that can become a pernicious and self-destructive form of misrecognition: doubt.[26] The disciples lament:

> "Our eyes beheld
> Messiah certainly now come, so long
> Expected of our fathers; we have heard
> His words, his wisdom full of grace and truth. […]
> Thus we rejoiced, but soon our joy is turned
> Into perplexity and new amaze.
> For whither is he gone? what accident
> Hath rapt him from us? will he now retire
> After appearance, and again prolong
> Our expectation? God of Israel,
> Send thy Messiah forth; the time is come." (II.31-34; 37-43)

Such beseeching lines contain several noteworthy points that extend the theme of misrecognition and develop the poem's dramatization of revealed truth.

First, in asking "what accident / Hath rapt him from us?" the disciples use language that is immediately evocative of mystical rapture, especially the paradigmatic experience of Paul. Perhaps one of the most cryptic passages in the entire New Testament, the opening lines of 2 Corinthians 12 recount Paul's rapture to the third heaven and his divine revelation: "How that he *was caught up into paradise*, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthian 12:4 [emphasis added]). The full significance of this biblical passage's intertextual relationship with *Paradise Regained* will become clearer in what follows, but for now it is sufficient to note the clear conceptual relationship between absence, mystical rapture, revelation, and paradise. The disciples' comments make the reader more fully aware of a point that is easily overlooked: the New Testament is indeed full of reports of the Messiah experiencing mystical visions and revelations.[27] Furthermore, we should note that ecstatic rapture is inherently tied, at least in terms of the biblical analogue, with

[26] Barbara Lewalski, "Theme and Structure in *Paradise Regained*" (200), *op. cit.*, remains very helpful on this point.

[27] To take one example, it is indeed worth remembering at the final book of the New Testament ("Revelations," which is a translation of the Greek word *Apocalypse*), opens with the verse, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him…" (1:1, King James Version).

the question of imparting revelation that renders paradise accessible, and this last issue occupies the center of the poem's theological intervention. In any case, the lines above make clear that, for the disciples, the Messiah's heroic endeavor to reclaim Paradise on the battlefield of the mind appears as inexplicable absence. Like Satan, they misinterpret the Providential impulse that drives the Son into the wilderness as some random "accident."

Second, Milton suggests that the disciples assume a prerogative very close to that of Satan. Indeed, like the demonic force in the guise of the old man, they demand that God manifest his lordship: "God of Israel, / Send thy Messiah forth; the time is come" (II.42-43). The exhortation for a revelatory event becomes a repeated problem throughout *Paradise Regained*. Shifting the scene from Satan's exposure at the end of Book I to the "perplexity" (II.38) of the disciples at the beginning of Book II shows the ubiquity of this problematic issue. Demanding any presentation or appearance of the Absolute is the cardinal sin of the poem. What is more, Milton's description of the disciples allows him to present the problem of revelation in such a way that he can subsequently provide a proper interpretative framework with which the reader can begin to understand the relationship between self-reflexivity and apocalyptic consciousness.

The voice of Mary functions as the crucial expression that affords coherence to the Messiah's absence in the face of the disciples' impatience and uncertainty. She is the one, after all, who was deemed worthy "To have conceived of God" (II.67). The term "conceived" here can be taken objectively as the process of gestating the Son of God as well as subjectively in underscoring the proper conception of the Absolute that Milton makes the hallmark of authentic and holy subjectivity. Like the Son's riposte to Satan in Book I, Mary's voice serves as a fitting rejoinder to the perplexed disciples by explaining:

> "I will not argue that, nor will repine.
> But where delays he now? Some great intent
> Conceals him. When twelve years he scarce had seen,

> I lost him, but so found as well I saw
> He could not lose himself, but went about
> His Father's business. What he meant I mused—
> Since understand; much more his absence now
> Thus long to some great purpose he obscures." (II.94-101)

Mary confirms her worthiness a second time by refusing to demand a full explanation of her Son's absence or a verification of his chosen status. Noting that she has lost him before, she nonetheless declares that "He could not lose himself." This line seems almost by design to echo the Son's words to Satan: "Why dost thou, then, suggest to me to distrust / Knowing who I am[?]" (I.355-356). Mary's words reveal that one of the principal errors of the Satanic mindset is the belief that others can change the self-conception and self-reflection of the Son. In other words, varying conceptions of the Messiah, however metaphysically or historically nuanced, tacitly insist on approaching the Logos with inappropriate criteria derived from worldly meaning.

Milton was preoccupied with the criteria of recognition throughout his intellectual, political, and literary career. In his *De Doctrina Christiana*, he frequently notes this phenomenon as a perennial problem of theology and piety:

> Those who tear asunder the hypostatic union (as it is called)…are leaving no sincerity whatever to the speeches or replies of Christ: they are displaying to us ambiguities and uncertainties…not Christ but some vague proxy for Christ discoursing, now one person, now another—so the words of Horace well suit them, 'By what know am I to grasp this Proteus who keeps changing his face?'" (I.5)[28]

As Mary's meditation suggests, her Son is the One who never changes his face precisely because he never presumes to have any other visage than his Father's (cf. I.92-93: "In all his lineaments, though in his face / The glimpses of his Father's glory shine."). He cannot lose himself because he never claims any absolute identity. Elsewhere in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton writes (XIV.229): "After the hypostatical union of two natures in one person, it follows that whatever Christ says of himself, he says *not as the possessor* of either nature separately, but with reference to the whole of his character,

[28] Taken from Hughes' edition.

and in his entire person, except where he himself makes a distinction" (emphasis added). The disciples in *Paradise Regained*, through their false deliberations and expectations, form a synecdoche of the entire "orthodox" Christian tradition which attempted to define the "hypostatic union" and messianic function of Christ. As Milton declares in a different context: "God by his very nature transcends everything, including definition."[29]

Book II proceeds from this point by moving directly from the mind of Mary ("Thus Mary, pondering oft, and oft to mind / Recalling what remarkably had passed" [II.105-106]) to the mind of the Son:

> The while her Son, tracing the desert wild,
> Sole, but with holiest meditations fed,
> Into himself descended, and at once
> All his great work to come before him set (II.109-112).

As the reader traverses the mindscape of the poem, it becomes clear that Milton is fashioning an intersubjective network in the narrative (between the Father and Son, between the Son and Mary, possibly between the Son, the poet, and the reader). But startlingly, this comes back to the reality of the Son's own self-reflection ("Into himself descended"). Gordon Teskey has recently remarked that, "*Paradise Regained* shows renewed intellectual vigor, and the thinking, the *dianoia*, which is to say, the thought expressed by the characters, is more immediate, disclosing a reawakened engagement with the World. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton expresses thinking he had already done before beginning the poem, mostly in the prose works written over nearly two decades. In *Paradise Regained*, we feel the pressure of thinking as it is happening now."[30] Leaving aside for the moment the comparative aspect of this comment, we can still affirm with Teskey that *Paradise Regained* does dramatize mental vitality.

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[29] See *De Doctrina Christiana*, II. See also Milton's incisive remark: "It is better therefore to contemplate the Deity, and to conceive of him, not with reference to human passions, that is, after the manner of men, who are never weary of forming subtle imaginations respecting him, but after the manner of Scripture" (from Hughes, 906).

[30] Gordon Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 512.

There is both an urgency and an immensity to the psychological action that is playing out for the reader.[31] Indeed, Milton makes self-conscious cogitation the centerpiece of Book II, where the Son states:

> "…So it remain
> Without this body's wasting, I content me,
> And from the sting of famine fear no harm;
> Nor mind it, fed with better thoughts, that feed
> Me hungering more to do my Father's will." (II.255-256)

Punning on the dual senses of "mind" (255), Milton skillfully draws attention to the Messiah's heightened self-reflexivity as he contemplates his purpose. As Teskey helps us understand, *Paradise Regained* dramatizes the process of thinking, and the poem itself constitutes a truly unique form of contemplation of the figure of Christ.

There is a longstanding critical convention which sees a natural elision between the temptation to transform stones into bread in Book I and Satan's offer of an opulent feast in Book II. However, more is at stake than simple hunger and faithful trust in the Divine. As we learn from the final confrontation between Satan and the Messiah at the end of Book II, the dominant theme remains the criteria and categories of recognition. Therefore, the true symmetry between Books I and II lies not with the prospects of food, but rather with the mysteries of identity and its failed detection on the part of Satan and the disciples. When the Son refuses to partake of the Fiend's succulent offering, Satan notes:

> "By hunger, that each other creature tames,

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[31] Teskey's reading is noteworthy: "*Paradise Regained* asks us to read differently from how we read *Paradise Lost*: we are asked to be always vigilant, always aware of reading a text, instead of forgetting we are reading and enjoying the show. *Paradise Regained* opens up the allusive and ever-shifting textual system of the Bible, wherein the true meaning of anything is distributed around a vast circuit extending from Genesis to Revelation and returning again, in a *ricorso* of images *that are only partially inhabited by the more fluid currents of meaning*. We are always looking forward to the Apocalypse, back from thence into the prophets, and forward again from all the points we have looked back to, a maze of mirrors. We find ourselves in such a maze when we try to state flatly the meaning of the title of *Paradise Regained*" (520, emphasis added).

Thou art not to be harmed, therefore not moved;
Thy temperance, invincible besides,
For no allurement yields to appetite;
And all thy heart is set on high designs,
High actions. But wherewith to be achieved?
Great acts require great means of enterprise;
Thou art unknown, unfriended, low of birth,
A carpenter thy father known, thyself
Bred up in poverty and straits at home,
Lost in a desert here and hunger-bit." (II.406-416).

The Satanic prerogative here is one that stipulates that "great means of enterprise" are impossible without first occupying certain established roles in the world. Such rhetoric entails the more sinister insinuation that Satan presumes to be able to delimit the proper function of the Messiah's "high designs" (410). Satan's criticisms of the Son's actions are predicated upon specific categorizations: notability, human relationships, socio-economic status, displacement, and alienation. Like the disciples at the beginning of Book II, Satan here demands a specific form of verification and thus misrecognizes the nature and purpose of the Messiah.

In his rejoinder to Satan's critique, the Son makes it clear that such false criteria admit of only one true purpose: imperial control (cf. "those ancient empires of the earth" [II.435]). In place of asservation, the Messiah gives attestation. He will accomplish more than ancient empires could (cf. II.450-452) by attesting to the divine prerogative that is manifest only in the inner self divested of any external sovereignty:

"What if with like aversion I reject
Riches and realms! Yet not for that a crown […]
For therein stands the office of a king,
His honor, virtue, merit, and chief praise,
That for the public all this weight he bears.
Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules
Passions, desires, and fears, is more a king—
Which every wise and virtuous man attains;
And who attains not, ill aspires to rule
Cities of men, or headstrong multitudes,

Subject himself to anarchy within,
Or lawless passions in him, which he serves.
But to guide nations in the way of truth
By saving doctrine, and from error lead
To know, and, knowing, worship God aright,
Is yet more kingly. This attracts the soul,
Governs the inner man, the nobler part[.]" (II.456-477)

Much like Plato's *Republic*, Milton's *Paradise Regained* notes the analogy between the city and the self, but unlike the ancient philosopher the seventeenth-century poet evacuates any ultimate significance from the idea of civic kingship.[32] As will become clearer later in the poem, the Messiah is no philosopher king. In the Platonic metaphor, the latter is an epistemic monarch that must vigilantly thwart the internal strife of the human passions. However, this metaphor cannot be applied to the Messiah's self-awareness. The inversion of social categories (the "lowest" becoming the "highest") is also tantamount to a refusal to be transcribed into their relative meaning. This conclusion to Book II provides a fitting point of departure for the subsequent two books, since the Messiah will, through progressive stages, testify to the nature of Providence through the abandonment of categories.

TYPOLOGY OF THE UNKNOWN

It should be clear by now that Milton's poem, much like Dante's *Commedia*, operates on multiple levels of significance. Perhaps one of the most intricate examples of this is the way in which *Paradise Regained* blends biblical and historical time. Book III represents Satan's attempt to locate Christ within the continuum of prophetic and civilizational voices that range from Old Testament patriarchs to pagan exemplars of greatness. At stake here are the implications of historicity. The invitation to locate oneself in relation to the past naturally leads to questions about the present. The

[32] Here we see the rationale of many critics who discern a correlation of this theme with Milton's anxieties about monarchy, especially that of Charles II. I am suggesting that, while this interpretative move is understandable, Milton does in fact have a broader purview in the poem that is, indeed, political but also very much cosmic and epistemic.

intricacy of this mode of thinking is perhaps what has led many critics to read the poem's preoccupation with historical time as a reflection of Milton's uncertainties about his own age.[33] The deeper, more treacherous enticements offered by Satan in Book III have to do with the temptation to refract the past through the present and the present through the past. As the Messiah will ultimately declare, one cannot establish typologies which prefigure his identity since his identity is inscrutable to all but the Father. There is, in effect, no typology of the kind of consciousness he inculcates in the wilderness.

Palpably aware that he cannot exploit the Son's human weakness through hunger, Satan proceeds in Book III to compare him with glorious historical figures from the past and thus tempt his pride. Once again, Satan pivots on the point of recognition, insinuating that the Son's identity is compromised through his refusal to manifest his power: "These godlike virtues wherefore dost thou hide?" (III.21). Satan intones that glorious power, if indeed it is authentic, cannot conceal itself "In savage wilderness" (III.23). Thereupon Satan compares the diminutive status of Christ with the magisterial greatness of Alexander the Great, Scipio, Pompey, and Julius Caesar (cf. III.32-40). Such a comparison only confirms once more Satan's unreflective and incorrigible nature. Just as he did not learn from the Messiah's refusal to transform stones into bread (and subsequently offered food directly), so too does he compare the Son to great pagan rulers even after the Messiah dismissed "those ancient empires of the earth" in Book II (435). Underlying Satan's comparisons is the need, perpetual yet irredeemable as it is, to locate the messianic enterprise within established frameworks of authoritative meaning. The pagan typology of young, powerful leaders cannot, the poem reveals, eventuate in any greater understanding of the Son. Christ refuses "to seek wealth / For Empire's sake" (III.44-45), asking "what is glory but the blaze of fame[?]" (47). The narrative action of Book

[33] Cf. Laura Knoppers, "*Paradise Regained* and the Politics of Martyrdom" *Modern Philology* 90 (1992): 200-219.

III begins and ends with visions of empire, which, as we see, is the anti-type to the Kingdom of God within.[34]

After Satan's initial comparison of the Messiah with past pagan heroes and just before the comparison to Old Testament Hebrew figures, Christ gives his own counter-typology that is, I believe, central to the poem's message. The Son's riposte to Satan's examples of imperial power includes descriptions of two personae who triumphed over power via devotion of varying kinds: Job and Socrates.[35] Job is mentioned several times in *Paradise Regained* and is significant for numerous reasons, perhaps foremost because, as Christ notes, he encountered Satan directly in a test of his fidelity as recounted in the Book of Job.

> "…when God,
> Looking on the Earth, with approbation marks
> The just man, and divulges him through Heaven
> To all his Angels, who with true applause
> Recount his praises. Thus he did to Job,
> When, to extend his fame through Heaven and Earth,
> As thou to thy reproach may'st well remember,
> He asked thee, 'Hast thou seen my servant Job?'
> Famous he was in Heaven; on Earth less known,
> Where glory is false glory, attributed
> To things not glorious, men not worthy of fame" (III.60-70).

The reference to Job allows the Messiah to suggest that whereas the emperors and gods of pagan culture exist merely to "rob and spoil, burn, slaughter, and enslave" (III.75), the true God privileges the figure who through suffering proves his faithfulness to justice even in the face of injustice. This is a fateful reminder that Satan has been foiled before, though ultimately not vanquished. This comparison becomes even more complex when Socrates is invoked:

> Who names not now with honor patient Job?
> Poor Socrates, (who next more memorable?)

[34] Cf. Luke 17:21.

[35] It should be remembered that Job, while a famous figure in the Hebrew Bible, is not himself a Hebrew.

> By what he taught and suffered for so doing,
> For truth's sake suffering death unjust, lives now
> Equal in fame to proudest conquerors." (III.95-99)

What is the purpose of the Messiah's invocation of both Job and Socrates as a counter-typology to Satan's?

Paul Ricoeur very helpfully notes that both Job and Socrates are types of witnesses in their own unique ways. Job is a witness to divine justice in the face of suffering, while Socrates is a witness, in the words of the Messiah above, "For truth's sake" (III.98), even unto death. In the case of Job, Ricoeur is especially useful for my purposes. According to Ricoeur, the Book of Job typifies the kind of "revelation" that "is the intending of that horizon of meaning where a conception of the world and a conception of action merge into a new and active quality of suffering." He continues:

> The Eternal does not tell Job what order of reality justifies his suffering, nor what type of courage might vanquish it. The system of symbols wherein the revelation is conveyed is articulated *beyond* the point where models for a vision of the world and models for changing the world diverge.[36]

This insightful example of exegesis helps the modern reader of Milton's poem understand the significance of the Messiah's invocation of Job as a just man. Satan in effect offers the Son models for a vision of the world as well as models for changing the world. The Messiah's own condition of suffering in the wilderness does not predispose him to assume any power of control or dominance. If Job is a suffering servant, Socrates is a *martyr* (Greek term for witness) for truth. In both cases, neither figure allows himself to place his own circumstances of suffering and trial above the higher good to which he is committed.

But there is something more profound at play in Milton's verse. The juxtaposition of Job and Socrates allows the Messiah to combine several important aspects of his mission into a single reflection for the reader. As we have seen, Book III is preoccupied with historical memory and the

[36] Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation" *Harvard Theological Review* 70.1-2 (1977): 1-37, here at 12 with emphasis added.

typologies (pagan and Hebraic) that it can engender. Satan effectively demands that the Son orient himself within pagan historical frameworks. This rhetorical move subtly blends together the problems of volition and memory that, throughout the poem, remain operative questions. The paradigmatic case of the suffering servant (i.e. Job) is compared to Socrates, who brings the problems of volition and memory into a metaphysical sphere. It will be remembered that in Plato's *Philebus*, Socrates connects the power of desire and the will to the question of memory, but in this case Socrates is quick to stress that the memory has less to do with the trappings of the physical world in historical time and more to do with the world of eternity beyond time.[37] In embodying the "testimony of Heaven" (I.78), the Messiah is indeed a witness to the eternal. While the figure of Milton's Messiah is not simply an amalgam of Job and Socrates, these types allow the poet to bring to the fore the issue of the self's abdication.

We may supplement Ricoeur's astute point about figures of witness with Michel Despland's insightful study of desire in antiquity. Developing and extending Hannah Arendt's argument that first-century Christianity introduced an entirely novel conception of the will, Despland examines how the idea of the self evolved in the historical interval between Socrates and Christ, especially with regard to the notion of sacrifice. He states, "Self-sacrifice becomes a fundamental theme among figures of the will (self-sacrifice even unto death). Self-sacrifice is the most poignant of all boundary situations: in it an old self is destructed and a new one is presumably restructured."[38] With these remarks in mind, we may begin to understand the gravity of the Messiah's counter-typology. The dramas of Job's tests and Socrates' trial render the question of volitional control paramount for the pursuit of truth and goodness. In Job's story, he remains uncertain about the ultimate stratagems of

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[37] See *Philebus*, 35d-36e.

[38] Michael Despland, *The Education of Desire: Plato and the Philosophy of Religion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 284. Cf. his subsequent critique of Christian culture. See also Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* One Volume Edition (San Diego: Harcourt, 1978), especially the second section "Willing."

heaven, while Socrates remains finally unable to place his personal intellectual journey above the question of lawfulness among his people and the good of the polis. As Despland explains in his study, the absence of definitive knowledge often generates or necessitates the temptation to will something in lieu of certainty. Book I of *Paradise Regained* confirms the Son's acceptance of his own unknowing (cf. "Perhaps I need not know; / For what concerns my knowledge God reveals" [I.291-293]), and Book III continues the pattern of tempting him with the possibility of replacing knowledge with volition. The Son's counter-typology forms the conceptual foundation for understanding the kind of sacrifice and ultimate salvation his narrative offers.

For the Miltonic Messiah, to understand himself is to maintain a perpetual testimony to the Divine. The fundamental intuition of his existence is a kenotic (i.e. self-emptying) attestation, whereas for Satan, as we shall see, the primordial impetus is solipsistic asservation. *Paradise Regained* dramatizes Christ's counter to this, which involves, surprisingly enough, not the sacrifice on the cross of conventional atonement theology, but rather the suspension of "sovereign consciousness." Put another way, Milton's Messiah sacrifices his very self well before the actual crucifixion. Invoking Job and Socrates facilitates the awareness, for Satan and reader alike, that the "boundary situation" (to use Despland's phrase) of the Son's self-sacrifice lies beyond the rudiments of time and involves a supernal form of subjectivity. In the helpful words of Ricoeur, who describes this phenomenon in a different context: "A whole structure of self-understanding is declared here which enjoins us to renounce any idea of a self-constituting of consciousness within a purely immanent temporality."[39] The reality of the Absolute which perpetually confronts the Son requires the Son's own ongoing

[39] Ricoeur, 34. I borrow the phrase "sovereign consciousness" from this section of the essay as well. While this essay does not reference Milton at all, Ricoeur's fuller explanation is worth noting for my purposes: "This tragic destiny of truth outside of us in a wholly contingent history may accompany the letting go by means of which reflection abandons the illusions of a sovereign consciousness. Reflection does so by internalizing the dialectic of *testimony* from which it records the trace of the absolute in the contingency of history" (34, emphasis added).

confrontation with categories that would limit him. He must "die" to all such criteria. As we shall see, this matter remains pressing for the Messiah as he strives to witness to the Absolute even beyond the typologies of the Hebrew tradition. Following his invocation of Job and Socrates, he declares: "Shall I seek glory, then, as vain men seek, / Oft not deserved? I seek not mine, but / His Who sent me, and thereby *witness* whence I am" (III.105-107, emphasis added). In this respect, Milton develops a line of thinking he broached in *De Doctrina Christiana*, but stated here poetically in a much more revolutionary manner: the Son will not be overly hypostasized in finite categories.

As Book III progresses, we see that Satan is alive to the question of sacrifice, even if he remains unable to understand the phenomenal nature of the Son's true sacrifice. He answer's the Messiah's comments above by suggesting that God requires many things from the nations, but "Above all sacrifice" (116). Christ's response is quite unique for several reasons. First, in responding "since his word all things produced" (122), he does not himself, as several scholars have noted, even assume the identity of the Word but instead points to God's creative decree. Second, he makes it very clear that the Divine is "communicable to every soul" (125) with the proper understanding of grace: "Yet so much bounty is in God, such grace, / That who advances his glory, not their own, / Them he himself to glory will advance" (III.142-144). Such a statement implies that proper (divine) self-awareness, at least for the Messiah, entails acquiescent forfeiture: "not their own." By not offering any claim to grace, the Son sacrifices himself in a manner that is not yet completely understood by Satan.

Satan then turns to a more enticing temptation, namely the invitation to orient the Son's life to Old Testament figures. This frames the question of typology in terms of Jewish prophecy. In many respects, this constitutes the greatest example of how revelation and mystical experience converge on the issue of messianic identity. Even if Christ can dismiss the false glory of past imperial regimes, surely he cannot dismiss the providential destiny of his own people. The

complexity of this temptation is embedded in the very fabric of the poem, for the Son's 40-day excursion in the wilderness is meant, it would seem, directly to mirror the 40-year wandering of the Israelites in the desert and, potentially, to set up a reenactment of Joshua and Moses conquering the Promised Land by Christ leading his people to liberation. In encouraging the Son to think of himself within the royal lineage of King David, Satan draws attention to another issue that is as pressing for the poem as it is for the whole of Christian history: to what extent was Christ prefigured in the Hebrew scriptures? To the extent that the Son was prefigured, we are forced to consider the nature and function of such prophetic claims. "Prophecy," it is worth remembering, etymologically (*prophēteia*) entails speaking on behalf of someone (usually God). As we have seen, Christ has so far rejected any claim, on his part or on others, to speak on behalf of God and would likely reject any claims from the past to have done so. The more pressing reality that the poem enacts has to do with the messianic consciousness that enjoys immediacy with the Divine without assuming autonomy within that condition.

Still, all of this makes it very difficult for the modern critic to understand what Milton's poem accomplishes in having the Messiah react as he does. This problem begins to dissolve, however, as we continue to develop the supposition that a particular kind of consciousness is being cultivated in the figure of the Son. Satan would seem to be on solid ground when we compares the Messiah's venture with the plight of the ancient Israelites (III.150-158), but his dissimulation becomes clear as has also compares Christ to the ancient Jewish revolutionary, Maccabeus (*fl.* 167–160 B.C.E.) who "indeed / Retired unto the desert, but with arms" (III.165-166). The Son's response is striking:

> What if he [God] hath decreed that I shall first
> Be tried in humble state, and things adverse,
> By tribulations, injuries, insults,
> Contempts, and scorns, and snares, and violence,
> Suffering, *abstaining*, quietly expecting

> Without distrust or doubt, that He may know
> What I can suffer, how obey? Who best
> Can suffer best can do, best reign who first
> Well hath obeyed—just trial ere I merit
> My exaltation without change or end.
> But what concerns it thee when I begin
> My everlasting Kingdom[?] (III.188-199, emphasis added)

As with Satan's previous comparisons of Christ with pagan luminaries, the comparisons with Hebrew figures of the past become just another false ultimate. In other words, the Messiah cannot be understood within the horizon of Old Testament prophecy, but rather only through the actual intentions of the Father. Moreover, his comments here can be taken as referring specifically to the trials in the desert wilderness instead of the later crucifixion. The Son's seemingly preternatural obedience is first manifest in the psychological domain of quiet suffering and expectation.

Here Milton continues his radical detachment of the Son's consciousness from the constraints of historicity. Book III builds toward a literal and figurative crescendo when Satan takes Christ to the top of Mt. Niphates (where Adam had been taken by Michael in *Paradise Lost* XI.381-384) to view the prospective military powers that might aid in the liberation of Israel. This scene represents another crucial confrontation between temporal and spiritual authority. Indeed, it represents the temptation to harness the former for the sake of the latter. However, as we see in the passage above, the Messiah assumes his identity through abstention (cf. l. 192), and the "kingdom" he inaugurates is one of revised consciousness (cf. Luke 17:21, "for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you"). The poem not only disallows the Son to be prefigured in figures from the Old Testament; it also squashes any possibility for contemporary political revolt. Thus, we can agree in part with Northrop Frye's reading: "In rejecting this [military power], Christ rejects also the legal conception of Israel as a chosen people and is ready to usher in the new Christian conception of

Israel as the body of believers."[40] In Book III, the Messiah fundamentally rejects the grammar of empire, which as the last offering by Satan reveals, can include both pagan and Hebraic conceptions of the cosmos.

Messianic consciousness, as inscrutable to the world as it is, simply refuses to be figured in terms of typology and historical time in *Paradise Regained*. Book III concludes with Satan providing the chronicles of historical empire (III.267-309) and with the Son rejecting them all: "Of enemies, of aids, battles and leagues, / plausible to the world, to me worth naught" (III.392-393). The offers of Parthian forces to help conquer the world, even for Israel's sake, represent ultimately templates of historical power that the Messiah will not revitalize in his time. He will not be converted into the categories of strife that mark human civilizations through the ages.

More revolutionary in Milton's poem, as Frye intimates, is the fundamental recalibration of prophecy and historicity. The conventional exegetical model, common to most orthodox theology, positions the personae of the Old Testament in a providentially framed narrative prefiguring the ultimate fulfillment of the divine story in the person of the historical Jesus. The operative dynamic at work in this mode of reading Hebrew tradition manifests itself as an imagined continuum of time whose range encompasses all of human history. Moreover, this narrative sequence is revealed to be the theater wherein God dramatizes human salvation. As Erich Auerbach argued at length, the primordial past becomes, in this model, linked with the eschatological event of Christ's advent and promise of the future kingdom of God. Importantly, this construct of Hebrew past/Christian future both establishes the mode of universal history that medieval Europe would inherit (so Auerbach argues), and supposedly frees the imagination from the strictures of time by annulling the past. As

[40] Northrop Frye, *Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 131. I can only partly agree with Frye's conclusion, for he goes on to state, "But there seems also to be some personal reference, however indirect, to the great blighted hope of Milton's political life" (131). As is evident in my analysis, I think this risks falling into the very trap that the poem subverts: refracting the messianic function through specific historical circumstances.

Auerbach explains, this move still presents a dangerous temptation: "A change in our manner of viewing history will of necessity soon be transferred to our manner of viewing current conditions."[41] It is for this reason, I have argued, that the Messiah in *Paradise Regained* not only eschews typology, but also dissociates his sense of self from the passages of Hebraic prophecy. Following Frye, I maintain that the Son does indeed reject the legal conception of Israel and its history, but contrary to Frye (and the typical typological reading of Christian history) I suggest that Milton does not point toward a Christian future if such a future is necessarily understood in terms of some imagined "universal history." In *Paradise Regained*, Christ can neither be prefigured in previous civilizations nor can he signal the advent of a new polity. Divested of radical autonomy, the messianic consciousness refuses to be instantiated in any immanent temporality or grounding of history.

WHAT KIND OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE?

Paradise Regained seems to involve a distinct kind of religious experience, one that many critics wish to understand in terms of seventeenth-century history. As the foregoing analysis has shown, the poem is manifestly skeptical of the need to locate the meaning of the messianic experience (and by extension the meaning of the poem) within the coordinates of place and time. Nonetheless, there is a clear underlying sense that the temptation to read the Messiah's itinerary in relation to real institutional frameworks is a perennial one. In this sense, the first century was no different than the seventeenth. The poem is inter-woven with certain dominant themes that are progressively refined from book to book. In the fourth and final book, Milton brings back to the reader's attention the

[41] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 443. See also Auerbach's famous essay "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays*, ed. W. Godzich and J. Schulte-Sasse, trans. R. Manheim (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 11-78. For an elaborate consideration of these themes, see Hayden White's essay "Auerbach's Literary History: Figural Causation and Modernist Historicism," in *Literary History and the Challenge of Philology: The Legacy of Erich Auerbach*, 124-139, esp., 124, where White situates Auerbach in relation to Frederic Jameson's theories of reading history (e.g. in *The Political Unconscious*).

examples of pagan culture that were adumbrated in Book III through references to Socrates. With food and military might clearly rejected, Satan ("Perplexed and troubled at his bad success" [IV.1]), offers the urbane cultural forms of Greco-Roman mastery. Book IV brings to a critical point the problems of visionary experience and self-reflexivity. Here previous examples of imperial control become transformed into mechanisms of intellectual power: words, logic, art, sophistication. Few critics have sufficiently understood what Milton accomplishes in this final chapter of the Messiah's narrative. I will maintain that Satan offers the Son a parodic visionary experience and the opportunity to refine his own subjectivity in the categories of classical philosophy. In the end, Milton insinuates that the two are intricately linked, for the ego can be deluded into inhabiting the mental constructs it fashions for itself. The utility of language, even in the guise of classical culture, becomes merely another form of coercive power, this time over one's own subjectivity and the subjectivity of others. Messianic consciousness repudiates self-fashioned identity as well as the war of persuasion and thereby achieves its true revelatory function.

The new species of subjectivity that Satan offers the Messiah is one of extended perception, figured as visionary experience. "He brought our Savior to the western side / Of that high mountain, whence he might behold / Another plain, long, but in breadth not wide" (IV.25-27). Heretofore the Messiah has refused to be transcribed into the categories of pagan and Jewish history, but now he is presented with the possibility of assuming a prerogative from which he himself could categorize the whole world:

> Above the height of mountains interposed—
> By what strange parallax, or optic skill
> Of vision, multiplied through air, or glass
> Of telescope, were curious to inquire. (IV.39-40)

The implication becomes increasingly clear: if he will not be viewed within the horizon of established or prophetic history, he must, so Satan urges, encompass the horizon itself. Here Satan

will establish a parody of mystical visionary experience by using the rudiments of human intellectual power as a means of acquiring rarified knowledge.

Once more, the regime of imperial power is invoked, using the image of the Roman emperor as a template whereby the Son can measure himself. It is no longer the type that is important, but the nature of the role: "And with my help thou may'st; to me the power / Is given, and by that right I give it thee. / Aim, therefore, at no less than all the world" (IV.103-105). Here Milton moves from the examples of historical particularity (which were dominant in previous books) to the question of totality. Satan offers the Son a totalizing vision of reality. The rejection of such knowledge assumes a trenchantly precise quality: "Nor doth this grandeur and majestic shew / Of luxury, though called magnificence, / More than of arms before, allure mine eye, / Much less my mind" (IV.110-113). The Son speaks of military power ("arms") and increased apprehension with the same disdain, but the emphasis is clearly on his mind and his reflexive nature. The totalizing purview of discursive knowledge is no less insidious than the one offering instrumental power.

Noam Reisner, developing the interpretations of critics such as Michael Lieb and Regina Schwarz, has attempted to locate the Messiah's refusal of knowledge against a backdrop of apophatic theology. Scholarship has long attempted to understand how Milton viewed the speculative traditions of mystical theology that privilege the way of unknowing and negation.[42] Even though his prose works reveal skepticism toward much of these traditions, it is clear that Milton, as ever, developed his own idiosyncratic understanding of divine ineffability in his poetry. In the case of *Paradise Regained*, the matter is especially difficult to explicate. According to Reisner, "The coldness of the poem serves a clear didactic purpose, but there is simply not enough inexpressible

[42] See, for example, Michael Bryson, "A Poem to the Unknown God: *Samson Agonistes* and Negative Theology" *Milton Quarterly* 42.1 (2008): 22-43.

darkness in the *poetry* of *Paradise Regained* against which to appreciate the brilliance of Milton's art."[43] I maintain that, while Reisner's emphasis on inexpressible darkness comes close to a proper understanding of Milton's vision, this reading overlooks the importance of self-reflexivity in relation to the Messiah's experience of the divine.

Here we may note once more how *Paradise Regained* recapitulates, without conforming to, the story of Moses in the Sinai desert from Exodus 19 (cf. Book I.350-355). Interpreting that story in relation to the story of the poem reveals a deeper problem about exegesis and the quest for knowledge. As Mark Edwards has demonstrated, in both Jewish and Christian mystical readings, Moses' ascent up the mountain admitted of several deeper spiritual senses of meaning:

> In the foothills of exegesis, no distinction need be observed between the moral, the typological and the anagogic levels…but, as readers ascend with Moses, they are no longer seeking propaedeutics to virtue but the knowledge of God himself, which cannot be gained by the mere substitution of doctrines for symbols or even of archetypes for ectypes. As the journey of Moses culminates in darkness, so the end of exegesis is a nescience surpassing knowledge.[44]

Edwards' remarks prove helpful for understanding what is at stake in Milton's poem. Satan offers a distortion of the Mosaic ascent. Whereas Moses does scale a mountain to encounter the darkness of God and receive supernal wisdom ("nescience surpassing knowledge"), Christ is taken up the mountain to receive its inversion: prescience. But the reader is not then immediately to surmise that Milton prefers the path of mystical unknowing exemplified in the exegeses of Moses. As I have illustrated throughout this chapter, Milton will not have the Son be compared to any ancient figure, pagan or Hebraic. More importantly, Milton's wilderness is not a desert of radical apophaticism.

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[43] Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable*, *op. cit.*, 254-255. See also Noam Reisner, "Spiritual Architectonics: Destroying and Rebuilding the Temple in *Paradise Regained*" *Milton Quarterly* 43.3 (2009): 166-182.
[44] Mark Edwards, "Figurative Readings: Their Scope and Justification" in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to 600* eds. James Carleton Paget and Joachim Schafer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 714-733, here at 730.

Because the Messiah lives beyond the dialectic of affirmation and negation, the key to understanding his existence is the kind of consciousness he incarnates.

After Satan offers the imperial prerogative of the world, he enjoins the Son to think of how he could liberate the souls of Earth with such power. The Messiah responds: "What wise and valiant man would seek to free / These, thus degenerate, by themselves enslaved, / Or could of inward slaves make outward free?" (IV.143-145). Book IV increasingly underscores not radical mystical darkness but rather the very problem of interiority. The lines above signal the universal nature of this spiritual predicament. The poem begins with accounts of how the Messiah descends into himself, and as we move toward the final resolution we see that this is the poem's major preoccupation not only for the Son but for all individuals.

Milton consistently uses the misperception of the Son's identity to investigate the problem of identity. What one seems to be in the eyes of others bears a uniquely problematic relationship to what one seems to be to oneself. As the complexities of this problem unfold before Satan's own eyes, we witness him attempting to frame the Messiah's self-perception in terms of reflection.

> "Therefore let pass, as they are transitory,
> The kingdoms of this world; I shall no more
> Advise thee; gain them as thou canst, or not.
> And thou thyself seem'st otherwise inclined
> Than to a worldly crown, *addicted more*
> *To contemplation* and profound dispute[.]" (IV.209-214, emphasis added)

> "Be famous, then,
> By wisdom; as thy empire must extend,
> So *let extend thy mind o'er all the world*
> In knowledge; all things in it comprehend.
> All knowledge is not couched in Moses' law,
> The Pentateuch, or what the Prophets wrote;
> The Gentiles also know, and write, and teach
> To admiration, led by Nature's light.
> And with the Gentiles much thou must converse,
> Ruling them by persuasion[.]" (IV.221-230, emphasis added)

By suggesting that the Messiah is addicted to contemplation and dispute, Satan mockingly distorts the Son's resilience and self-reflexivity. In effect, he makes Christ appear like a Sophist, carefully able to dissemble through internal reflection and external influence. This moment is instructive, for like all the other temptations Satan's misprision contains fragments of the truth. Satan can clearly discern that the Son enjoys a higher order of reflection, but he continues to fail to understand that such a state has been cultivated through the patient abstention from egomaniacal control. Messianic consciousness is not a subjective ego that, like some pagan dialectician, would rule by persuasion. To the extent that he engenders any form of "rhetoric" at all the Son can only be the announcement (*evangel*) and reflection of the Father.

Satan's subsequent enticement would allow the Son to avail himself of the Athenian "Academe" and "Plato's retirement" (IV.244-245) and thence obtain some measure of deeper self-awareness through the conceptual refinement of classical poetry and philosophy. Satan's stratagem is actually quite malicious on a metaphysical level. In essence he is offering the Son the opportunity to convert the *Imago Dei* into the Greek νους (nous) or rational mind. The poem's second invocation of Socrates (Cf. IV.274) is not enough to blind the Messiah to the foolishness of this move:

> "Think not but that I know these things; or, think
> I know them not, not therefore am I short
> Of knowing what I ought. He who receives
> Light from above, from the Fountain of Light,
> No other doctrine needs, though granted true[.]" (IV.285-290).

The repetitive emphasis on knowing here draws together the themes of revelation, identity, and the experience of God. The Messiah's self-reflexivity supersedes the modes of contemplation and dialectical thinking emblematized in Greek culture. What is more, the Son's interiority even supersedes Mosaic ascent, for Christ's exodus is an infinite journey into and beyond himself. It is infinite because, in detaching himself from various forms of consciousness (historical, epistemic,

volitional), he is able to open himself to the inexhaustible disclosure of the Divine. And in receiving such "Light" he becomes the mirror of the Infinite.

LIGHT BEYOND HISTORY

If messianic consciousness refuses to be perpetually re-interpretable in political, historical, and conceptual categories, conventional historicist readings of *Paradise Regained* risk missing a fundamental dimension of the poem. In his recent book *Fictions of Conversion*, Jeffrey Shoulson has insightfully attempted to place Milton's poem in the context of a century bedeviled by the threats of religious change and radical enthusiasm. Shoulson's study is useful in how it traces the discourses of conversion through multiple cultural spheres in seventeenth-century England, and he suggests that "at the heart of these discourses of transformation is the potentially destabilizing question of authenticity," and these in turn "raise the matter of an interior, irreducible self."[45] For Shoulson, "Milton's notion of messianism is deeply historical, time-bound, material, even when it is figured in an inward-looking Jesus. Milton charts an incremental process of time-bound transformations, not an instantaneous rupture."[46] All of this relates to the problem of conversion in two specific ways. Shoulson reads Milton's Messiah in relation to the very public career of Sabbatai Sevi (1626-1676), the prospective Jewish messiah who, in his popularity among European Jewry, frustrated English millenarian hopes for the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. Sevi was himself forced to convert to Islam in 1666 under the Turkish sultan and thereafter became a prominent symbol of the urgencies and risks of conversion either way. Messianism was in the air that both the English intelligentsia and radical enthusiasts breathed. Thus, Shoulson feels justified in concluding that, given the widespread fear occasioned by millenarian sentiments, we should read "*Paradise Regained* in its entirety as Milton's ambivalent response to the expectations of many of his contemporaries, whether

[45] Shoulson, *Fictions of Conversion*, *op. cit.*, 152.
[46] Ibid., 170.

they were advocates of a politicized messianism or promoters of an inner salvation that implied retreat from material history and all its attendant struggles."[47]

While discrete aspects of Shoulson's reading are very helpful in understanding Milton's poem, there are many items with which we can take issue. Public concerns about religious change and spiritual authenticity were indeed prominent in the seventeenth century. However, it remains difficult to reduce the poem's meaning to these contextual circumstances given how radically the poem works to undermine the need to verify spiritual authenticity in the first place. As I have noted, historicist readings, of which Shoulson's is most recent and robust, almost point by point bring to the poem the same criteria Satan and the disciples bring to the Messiah in the actual narrative. In this respect, it is hard to imagine why Milton would write an "ambivalent" poem that so actively engages such perennial psychological topics. Milton was well aware that the problems of regime change and religious transformation were as pressing in the first century as in the seventeenth and indeed throughout Western culture. Milton's Messiah not only eschews all ontological categories; he is also a monumental figure who seemingly rises above the constraints of his own age going beyond history. There is a clear difference between a "retreat from material history" and a poetic transcendence of history geared toward a universal vision of reality.

More importantly, Shoulson's characterization of the Son's experience in the wilderness as an "incremental process of time-bound transformations" is, it seems to me, demonstrably wrong. The hallmark of his journey is resistance to change and refusal to claim ownership of himself. Much like Milton the poet, the Son is an anti-convert. However, whereas Milton's status is perhaps more accurately described as a concretization over time, the Messiah's desert experience is one of

[47] Ibid., 177. See also my extended review of Shoulson's book in *Milton Quarterly* 48.3 (2014): 190-193.

progressive self-emptying. His psyche involves "no shadow of turning," to borrow a phrase.[48] The mindscape of the wilderness presents various templates of time (imperial, prophetic, eschatological), but the experiences themselves transcend historicity. The self cannot undergo transformations if it never posited itself as the origin of meaning in the first place.

This leads us to the more obvious, cosmic dimension of Milton's poem. The most evident analogue for the Messiah's experience does not originate in a historical figure of the seventeenth century, but rather Satan himself from *Paradise Lost*. We will recall that in Book IV, Satan is described in the following manner:

> Now rolling boils in his tumultuous breast,
> And *like a devilish engine back recoils*
> *Upon himself*; horror and doubt distract
> His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir
> *The Hell within him*[.] (IV.16-20, emphasis added)

Later, when Satan traverses the wilderness of early creation, he laments: "But I in none of these / Find place or refuge; and the more I see / Pleasures about me, so much more I feel / Torment within me, as from the hateful siege / Of contraries" (IX.118-122). Just as Satan remains out of place in God's good creation, the Messiah remains ill-suited to the compromised categories of fallen human nature. To resist the "hateful siege / Of contraries" the Son abstains from diabolical oppositions and thereby allows his inner psyche to cultivate an infinite paradise. When the Messiah declines either to willfully fall from the pinnacle of the Temple or entreat God to save him, he defeats Satan conclusively by refusing to assume the autonomy of sovereign consciousness. Then the poem acknowledges him as "light of light / Conceiving" (IV.597-598).

If we must, as many critics feel compelled to do, derive some greater understanding of history from the poem it must be, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the notion that for Milton history is a chronicle of finitude that can never fully be called upon to witness to the infinite

[48] Cf. James 1:17.

Absolute. However, we must also acknowledge that Milton chose the medium of poetry to explore this reality and thereby achieved in his own right something quite revelatory. William Franke has recently argued that poetry serves an important function in the investigations of subjectivity:

> But even more than consciousness and self-consciousness, the medium of revelation, or 'epiphany,' becomes language. For consciousness is constituted in and by language. Just as consciousness is the medium in which revelation or the appearing of phenomena takes place, so its own medium is language, and consequently it is in language that revelation comes to be realized. Hence, the relentless search of modern poets for an ultimate disclosure via the fully sensual incarnation of thought and reality in language.[49]

If the Messiah's subjectivity is unknowable (i.e. unconvertible to the categories of human thought), his consciousness is revealed therefore to be truly infinite. Perhaps here we also finally understand why Milton does not straightforwardly accept any particular version of negative theology. His goal remains not simply to enshrine divinity and messianic consciousness in conceptual darkness, but rather to signal the advent of eternity in poetic reflection.

[49] William Franke, *Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language*, op. cit., 103.

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